

Parshas Voera – Gershon Hepner

כ"ו טבת תשע"ה – 16 January 2015 – שבת פ' וארא

The following is taken from the sefer 'Nachalas Eliezer' – based on the droshos of Rav Eliezer Kahan – Menahel of Gateshead Yeshiva during the time my father learnt there.

The last of the makkos in this week's sedra is *borod* – the ice-bomb hailstones. As with so many of the other makkos, this punishment was heralded by a timely warning to Pharaoh, that it could be averted by simply allowing the Jews to leave Egypt.

Even if Pharaoh were to risk punishment rather than release his slave population, this warning was accompanied by sound advice. Moshe gave Pharaoh a simple let-out clause, which would ameliorate the effects of the plague. Moshe informed Pharaoh that he merely had to ensure that no possessions should be left outdoors; rather everything should be brought indoors to escape the *borod* (9:19). Moshe counselled Pharaoh to bring in all animals and people who would normally "be found in the field", as anything left outdoors would fall victim to the *borod* and die. Bringing livestock and servants indoors would serve as damage limitation, as then only the unharvested produce would be destroyed by the plague.

In Shemos Rabboh (12:2) the Midrash waxes lyrical how even when HaShem metes out retribution to a Rosho, he does so with mercy. The *borod* could destroy everything in its path, so the Egyptians were recommended to leave nothing outdoors.

Did the Egyptians heed this advice?

The possuk tells us that those who feared the word of G-d brought their servants and cattle indoors, while those who paid no attention to the word of G-d left their servants and cattle outdoors (9:20-21).

The Midrash identifies these people who 'feared the word of G-d' and who brought their possessions indoors, as none other than Iyov (and his followers – see the commentary Etz Yosef). Clearly then, Pharaoh and the general populace took a risk, left their livestock and servants outdoors, and paid heavily for the privilege.

Reb Eliezer Kahan explains that we cannot help but marvel at this ridiculous situation. Admittedly, bringing the animals indoors would cause an inconvenience and some additional expense, as they would need to be provided with food, to replace their free diet of ready pasture. However, these additional expenses are as nought when compared to the risk of total annihilation of the livestock. Anyone in their right mind would not hesitate to bring in their cattle and flock!

This is especially true when considering that Moshe and Aharon had a 100% track record in 'predicting' Egypt's disasters. Why did Pharaoh and his people not err on the side of caution and bring in their possessions from the fields?

This question becomes all the more compelling when contemplating the following hypothetical question. Supposing Pharaoh had received a weather report forecasting deadly hail, would he then have brought his livestock and servants indoors? The answer is an emphatic, "Of course!" Well then, why didn't he when Moshe warned him of the impending makkoh?

The answer surely lies in the psychology of sin. Reish Lokish tells us that a person only sins when a fit of mad stupidity overtakes him (Sotah 3a). When an individual is in the grip of his yetzer horah, all logical thought and sensible action go by the wayside. We cannot question the rationality of Pharaoh's obduracy, when his behaviour is driven by his desire to be evil. An awareness of this rule of Reish Lokish can assist us in our daily skirmishes with the yetzer horah – to apply sense and logic to a situation by weighing up the profits and losses of an aveiroh – can only help to dispel the madness of sin.

Dedicated in honour of my wonderful parents' 57th Wedding Anniversary – may they be blessed with continued nachas and health - ad me'oh ve'esrim shonoh.