

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Rosh Chodesh Shevat – anniversary of the original plague of hail

The 7th plague, the plague of hail, began on Rosh Chodesh Shevat. Rav Moshe Wolfson In his shlur on Vaera describes why Pharaoh came running for Moshe to stop the plague saying that Hashem is good and he is evil. The plague involved two aspects of nature, the ice made of water and the fire inside. Because of this, the hail brought tremendous awareness of the kingdom of Hashem and His Omnipotence. Had all the hail that had been created fallen, the malchus shemayim in the world would have been complete and Moshlach would have emerged. Instead, Pharaoh asked Moshe to stop the plague and in keeping with the purposes of Hashem to take us out of Mitzrayim, Moshe goes outside the city to daven to Hashem. Rav Wolfson explains that there was too much idol worship in the city for Moshe to daven the full prayer he wished to. Part of what Moshe davened for was in awareness of the challenges in emunah that would face our people before Moshlach arrives and on behalf of that generation, Moshe beseeches Hashem to suspend the hail rather than bring it up to shemayim, so that it could be brought to bring malchus shemayim at the end of days.

The water in the form of ice, a hard cold rock, contained a fire that destroyed everything in the crops and livestock outside. The elements of water and fire in the Torah correspond as water for Torah or chesed and fire as galva, arrogance, fear, misdirected passion for Torah that because it is misdirected destroys everything in sight. Fire can be the light of Torah that shines over to the world. The Patriarch Avraham who represents chesed, likened to water and the Patriarch Yitzchok who represents gevurah, likened to awe of Hashem and passion for Torah were together at the akeda. The merging of their chesed and gevurah through the akeda formed a molecule of emunah that permits us to experience both love and fear of Hashem at the same time. Fire in water.

The two kelpas we struggle to overcome are the kelpas of talva and galva. Talva are our desires, our self-indulgences, our attempts to give kindnesses to ourselves without limit. Water, or in this case, ice. Galva is our self-interest at any cost, our arrogance and fears, our passion directed to reach our goals that have ourselves at the center without regard or empathy for another and which easily rationalize violating one of the commandments if "that is what it takes." Exploitation. Fire.

The hail of the plagues seems metaphorically in our daily lives today. Perhaps we are being bombarded with a plague of thought hail. Looking at the destruction that is going on in terms of families, off the derech kids, divorces, agunas, and in general defensiveness and divisiveness within our people, it sure feels like a plague of hail. But it can rain down malchus shemayim if we understand that we can improve our vessel and receive the light even when being bombarded by the plague of this thought hail. We can use the passion to warm the ice and remember that the source of all vitality is Hashem, that what we think we desire to take for ourselves is a lesser pleasure than the pleasure the source of vitality, Hashem can give us. As the ice melts with trusting in Hashem, the water cools the raging destruction so that the passion can once again rise for Torah and rebuild co-existence of love and fear of Hashem, that emunah, that the akeda set forth for us for all time.

The Northeast is experiencing a blizzard with exceptionally cold temperatures. Ice. May the warmth of our passion for Torah and love and fear of Hashem rise up in service that shines into the world malchus shemayim and may the light we create through love and fear of Hashem help us emit true chesed and

gevurah that will serve as a protection to all as we weather the storm.