



An Unfavorable Decree Descends from World to World to Allow Us to Perform Teshuvah

In this week's parsha, parshas Vaeira, we will focus on the admonition HKB"H gives Pharaoh in association with the plague of "dever" (Shemos 9, 3):

”הנה יד ה' הויה במקנך אשר בשדה בסוסים בחמורים בגמלים בבקר ובצאן דבר כבד מאד, והפלה ה' בין מקנה ישראל ובין מקנה מצרים ולא ימות מכל לבני ישראל דבר. וישם ה' מועד לאמר מחר יעשה ה' הדבר הזה בארץ, ויעש ה' את הדבר הזה ממחרת וימת כל מקנה מצרים וממקנה בני ישראל לא מת אחד.”

Behold, the hand of Hashem is on your livestock that are in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the cattle, and on the sheep—a very severe epidemic. And Hashem shall distinguish between the livestock of Yisrael and the livestock of Mitzrayim, and not a thing that belongs to Bnei Yisrael will die. Hashem has set an appointed time, saying, “Tomorrow, Hashem shall carry out this word in the land.” Hashem carried out this word the next day; all the livestock of Mitzrayim died, and of the livestock of Yisrael not even one died.

I would like to focus on the statement: **“Behold, the hand of Hashem is on your livestock.”** Rashi notes that this statement is in the present tense. That would seem to imply that it would happen immediately. Yet, afterwards, the text says: **“Hashem has set an appointed time, saying, “Tomorrow, Hashem shall carry out this word in the land.”** According to this passuk, the decree did not take effect immediately but was postponed until the following day. If so, why is the previous passuk stated in the present tense? It should have said: **“Behold, the hand of Hashem will be on your livestock.”**

To shed some light on the subject, we will begin with an explanation based on the methodology of “remez”—allusion. Here is how the Alshich hakadosh, zy”a, interprets these pesukim. We know that when the letters of the name Havaya appears in their proper order, the name represents the midah of “rachamim.” On the contrary, when the letters are not arranged in their proper order, they indicate that the opposite midah is in effect—“din.” If we scrutinize this passuk, we find that two different permutations of the holy name are juxtaposed: **”הנה יד ה' הויה במקנך”**. Initially, the name appears in its proper order—**yud-hei-vav-hei**—and then the very next word is spelled **hei-vav-yud-hei**—an alternate arrangement of the same letters.

Thus, we can deduce that both midos were in effect here. On the one hand, HKB"H treated Yisrael with “rachamim”; on the other hand, he treated the Egyptians with “din.” Hence, the subsequent narrative states: **“And Hashem shall distinguish between the livestock of Yisrael and the livestock of Mitzrayim, and not a thing that belongs to Bnei Yisrael will die.”** Here the name **Havaya** appears in its proper order indicating that the livestock of Yisrael were set apart due to divine mercy—“rachamim”; consequently, none of them perished.

It is now clear why HKB"H begins His admonition to Pharaoh with the words: **”הנה יד ה' הויה במקנך”**. He was hinting to Pharaoh that if he refused to release Yisrael, both aspects of the name Havaya would be activated—“rachamim” toward Yisrael and “din” toward the Egyptians. Then, HKB"H announced that this would occur on the following day.

Pharaoh's Heart Was Hardened with Each of the First Five Makot

Let us add a vital point to this explanation. Why were these two aspects of the divine name alluded to specifically in association with the plague of “dever”? The Alshich hakadosh himself explains why the Torah mentions the **“hand of Hashem”** in relation to the plague of “dever”: **“הנה יד ה' הויה במקנר”**. Curiously, it is not mentioned in relation to the other makot. Yet, in relation to the plague of “kinim”—lice—Pharaoh’s sorcerers proclaim (ibid. 8, 15): **“It is the finger of G-d!”** Now, seeing as “dever” was the fifth plague, all five fingers were accounted for; thus, the hand of Hashem was complete.

Additionally, HKB”H assures Moshe (ibid. 7, 3): **“ואני אקשה”**—**and I shall harden Pharaoh’s heart and I shall multiply My signs and My wondrous feats in the land of Mitzrayim.** Rashi comments: **Now that he has behaved wickedly and has brazenly opposed Me, and it is apparent to Me that there is no goodness of spirit among the nations of idolaters to resolve to repent, it is fitting in My eyes that he should harden his heart, so that I may increase My miraculous signs against him and that you (Yisrael) will recognize My might . . . Nevertheless, during the first five plagues the narrative does not say: “And Hashem hardened Pharaoh’s heart” but merely: “And Pharaoh’s heart became hardened.”**

Thus, we learn an important fact. During the first five plagues, HKB”H offered Pharaoh the opportunity to release Yisrael of his own good will. However, after he stubbornly hardened his heart, HKB”H added five more plague in which Pharaoh was not given this option. In other words, HKB”H hardened Pharaoh’s heart in order to subject him and his people to more plagues.

This enlightens us as to why HKB”H mentions both the aspects of “rachamim” and “din” specifically in association with the fifth plague, the plague of “dever.” HKB”H wanted Pharaoh to know that with this plague, he still had the opportunity to release Yisrael of his own free will. If he chose to do so, he would be dealt with with “rachamim”; however, if he stubbornly refused to do so even this time, he would be dealt with with “midas hadin,” as indicated by the permutation

הויה. As a consequence, he would be subjected to five more plagues and would be deprived of his free will.

Why HKB”H Waited until the Following Day to Deliver the Plague

Since it is the nature of Torah to be elucidated in seventy different ways, I would like to propose a novel explanation. We will explain why HKB”H warns Pharaoh of the last of the first five plagues in the present tense even though, in actuality, He planned to carry out the decree only on the following day, as per the narrative: **“Hashem has set an appointed time, saying, ‘Tomorrow, Hashem shall carry out this word in the land.’”**

We will begin by introducing a wonderful insight from the Arvei Nachal (Bereishis). There, he discusses the requirement to extend the kedushah of Shabbas from the weekdays. He relies on a principle discussed in the Zohar hakadosh and other kabbalistic sources that beyond this world, there are many other worlds, each one on a higher level than the preceding one. The higher the world, the more spiritual it is; conversely, the lower the world, the more material it is. Hence, this world inhabited by human beings is the lowest of the worlds and is the most material and least spiritual.

Furthermore, all of creation came into existence as a result of the word of HKB”H, as it is written (Tehillim 33, 6): **“בדבר ה' שמים נעשו”**—**with the word of Hashem the heavens were made.** This applies equally to all the positive, good things that HKB”H created in the world with the attribute of “rachamim” and all the negative, unfavorable things that HKB”H created with the attribute of “din.” Everything was created by the word of HKB”H.

There is a fundamental difference, however, between the good things that HKB”H created with the midah of “chesed” and “rachamim” and the adverse things that he created with the midah of “din” and “gevurah.” The former came into existence in Olam HaZeh immediately with His divine utterance; whereas the latter became a reality only in the heavens but did not descend to this world immediately with His utterance. In fact, the negative, adverse creations descend from the upper worlds to the lower worlds gradually, one world at a time, until they eventually become a reality in Olam HaZeh.

Now, the Torah attests to the fact that HKB”H rested on the seventh day and did not create anything on the day of Shabbas. Perforce, He did not create anything with the attribute of “din” and “gevurah” right before Shabbas. For, had HKB”H done so, they would not have come into existence in this world until Shabbas, since there is a time lapse between HKB”H’s utterance and their becoming a reality in this world. That would have meant that the work of creation was completed on the Shabbas day. Hence, we are forced to conclude that HKB”H stopped creating some time prior to the onset of Shabbas. Thus, HKB”H began resting on the weekday, adding from the mundane to the holy. Therefore, we, Yisrael, are required to do the same; we extend the sanctity of Shabbas to the surrounding weekdays. This is the gist of his sacred remarks.

In this manner, we can resolve the apparent contradiction of our pesukim. Seeing as the plague of “dever” was imposed on the Egyptians from the aspect of “din” and “gevurah,” there was a time delay between HKB”H’s utterance and its effect becoming a reality in this world; it took time for it to descend from world to world. Therefore, Moshe Rabeinu said to Pharaoh: **“Behold, the hand of Hashem is on your livestock that are in the field”**—the decree had been issued immediately in the heavenly realms; however, there would be a time delay until it would take effect down on earth: **“Hashem has set an appointed time, saying, ‘Tomorrow, Hashem shall carry out this word in the land.’”** He specifies **“in the land,”** meaning down on earth, since HKB”H had calculated precisely when it would take effect in the land of Mitzrayim: **“Hashem carried out this word the next day.”**

The Reason a Decree Descends Gradually from World to World

Let us continue on this holy pilgrimage. We will now endeavor to explain the wondrous ways of Hashem. Why are functions related to “chesed” and “rachamim” carried out immediately after they are spoken by HKB”H, whereas functions related to “midas hadin” are delayed? Why must the latter travel downwards from world to world until they reach this world? The simple answer is that this reflects Hashem’s infinite kindness. This process allows the sinner time to reflect and mend his evil ways. If, indeed, he does so, the negative decree will be annulled before reaching this world.

To better comprehend this concept, let us refer to the words of Chazal (Megillah 3a): **“אף על גב דאינהו לא חזו מזלייהו חזו”**—**even though they did not see it, their guardian angels did see it.** In other words, a person’s heavenly, guardian angel is aware of unfavorable decrees before the person himself is. So, if an unfavorable decree is issued above on an individual or on a group, chas v’shalom, it is initiated above and works its way downward gradually to this world. During this process, the guardian angels are able to arouse a person to perform teshuvah and mend his ways, knowingly or unknowingly. As a result, the adverse decree will never be enforced in this world. This is not the case for matters involving divine “chesed.” They are implemented immediately, so that they will not be postponed or aborted due to human iniquities, chas v’shalom.

In truth, I believe that there is a more profound rationale for this dual process. Let us introduce a fascinating idea from the great Rabbi Yaakov of Narol, zy”a, a disciple of the Chozeh of Lublin, zy”a. He comments on the passuk (Bereishis 18, 20): **“ויאמר ה' זעקת סדום ועמורה כי רבה וחטאתם כי כבדה מאד, ארדה נא”**. **So Hashem said, “Because the outcry concerning Sodom and Amorah has become so great, and because their sin has been very grave, I will descend and see if their outcry that has come to Me is indicative of their conduct, and they deserve annihilation. And if not, I will know.”**

The commentaries are puzzled by this depiction. Is it necessary for HKB”H to descend to verify man’s actions? In fact, we have an explicit passuk that states otherwise (Tehillim 33, 13): **“משמים הביט ה' ראה את כל בני האדם, ממכון שבתו השגיח אל כל”**—**from heaven Hashem looks down, He sees all mankind; from His place of dwelling, He oversees all the inhabitants of earth.** Rabbi Yaakov of Narol addresses this difficulty. The following explanation is brought down in his name in Eizor Eliyahu (Beha’aloscha):

I heard (the following) in the name of the holy Rav of Narol, our teacher Rabbi Yaakov, zlh”h, regarding the passuk: “I will descend and see if their outcry that has come to Me is indicative of their conduct.” The term “I will descend” requires further explanation. He, of blessed memory, provides a reason. It is the accepted minhag throughout the world to make a yearzeit for the passing

of one's father and mother, G-d help us, because it is said that a person is judged annually above.

This is seemingly difficult to comprehend. Since the person has already been judged once, why must they be judged annually? He, of blessed memory, explains that the neshamah ascends to a higher level every year. Therefore, it must be judged anew, because there are aveiros that are not considered to be sins in the lower world, but are considered to be sins in the upper world . . . Therefore, it is necessary to pray for the individual each and every year.

He, of blessed memory, asserts that this is the interpretation of the passuk under discussion: "Because the outcry concerning Sedom and Amorah has become so great"—perhaps these sins are only in the upper world, but they are not considered sins at all down below. If that is the case, they do not deserve to be punished in this world but only in the upper world. Therefore, the text says: "I will descend and see." In other words, it was as if HKB"H said to the heavenly court, "I will descend and see if they truly deserve annihilation"—that is, if their conduct is considered sinful even in the world of action, then they will be exterminated.

The Upper Worlds Were Created with Thought

To achieve a better understanding of his profound explanation, we will introduce the commentary of the Arvei Nachal (Bereishis). He focuses on the statement of Chazal cited by Rashi at the beginning of parshas Bereishis. They note that the opening passuk of the Torah employs the name Elokim rather than Havaya; this indicates that the Creator initially intended to create the world based on the midah of "din." He foresaw, however, that the world could not survive based on this strict standard. Therefore, He preferentially partnered the midah of "rachamim" with the midah of "din." This partnership and preference for "midas harachamim" are evident in the passuk (Bereishis 2, 4): "ביום עשות ה' אלקים ארץ ושמים." Note that in this passuk both divine names are employed, but the name of rachamim precedes the name of "din." Rashi is teaching us that the world cannot survive based solely on the midah of "din"; it must be joined by the midah of "chesed."

The commentaries raise an obvious question. HKB"H is omniscient; He foresees everything. So, how is it possible to assert that He initially intended to create the world based on a standard of "din," but altered His plans when He foresaw that that was not feasible?

The Arvei Nachal explains: We find that the HKB"H created the world with ten utterances. This is attested to by the passuk (Tehillim 33, 6): "בדבר ה' שמים נעשו וכרוח פיו כל צבאם"—with the word of Hashem the heavens were made and by the breath of His mouth all their legions. Just as the spoken word of HKB"H, which is more tangible, created the material and physical Olam HaZeh; so, too, as it were, the upper worlds were created with His divine thought. After all, His thought is much more spiritual than His speech, and those worlds are inhabited by spiritual creatures, such as malachim, seraphim and holy ophanim.

Now, the yetzer hara has no power in the upper, spiritual worlds that were created with the blessed One's thoughts. Since the spiritual kedushah is so great up there, it is impossible for evil to gain a foothold there. Therefore, those worlds are conducted by the standard of "din" without any collaboration with "rachamim." "Rachamim" is not necessary in those worlds; they are able to exist and endure totally based on "midas hadin." This is not true of our physical, material world, which was created with divine speech. Here, the yetzer hara and its evil forces are able to exist and prevail. Consequently, this world cannot continue to exist based solely on the strict standard of "din"; the collaboration of "midas harachamim" is required.

This explains Chazal's statement very nicely: **He initially thought to create it with "midas hadin."** In other words, those spiritual worlds that HKB"H created initially with His thought, were, indeed, created with "midas hadin." That was totally feasible, since it is impossible for evil to prevail there; hence, the collaboration with "midas harachamim" is unnecessary. That was not the case when HKB"H created this, material, physical world: **He foresaw that the world could not endure.** In other words, this world cannot survive and continue to exist if it is based solely on "midas hadin." Therefore, **He prioritized "midas harachamim" and partnered it with "midas hadin."** Thus, we see that HKB"H did not reconsider or abandon His original plan. The spiritual

worlds which were initially conceived with His thought were, indeed, created based on “midas hadin.” This material world, however, which cannot endure based exclusively on “midas hadin,” was created based on the collaboration of “midas harachamim” with “midas hadin.”

The Higher the World the Greater the Scrutiny

The Arvei Nachal applies this concept to explain various stringencies expressed in the teachings of Chazal. For example (Sotah 4b): **“אמר רבי יוחנן משום רשב”י, כל אדם שיש בו גסות הרוח כאילו: “עובד עבודת כוכבים—Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rashbi: Any person who possesses a haughtiness of spirit is regarded as though he worships idols.** It seems obvious that it is not really as if he worshipped idols and is considered to be a complete heretic. So, why do Chazal make such an emphatic pronouncement: **As though he worships idols?**

We will endeavor to explain. In essence, the heavenly kingdom mirrors the earthly kingdom. Clearly, human kings impose laws delineating what is permitted and what is prohibited. Nevertheless, the farther away one is from the king’s palace, the laws are enforced less stringently. Conversely, the closer one is to the king’s palace, the laws are enforced more stringently. Within the palace itself, one must abide by the laws scrupulously; improper, unlawful behavior is simply not tolerated.

The same applies to the kingdom of heaven. While it is true that HKB”H gave us the “taryag mitzvos” of the Torah and seven Rabbinically-ordained mitzvos to observe down on earth; nevertheless, there are several matters that are not considered sins or transgressions in this material world. Yet, the closer one is to HKB”H in the upper, spiritual worlds, the more stringently a person is treated. Therefore, haughtiness in this world is not truly equivalent to idolatry. In fact, it is much easier to perform teshuvah for this shortcoming than it is for actual idol-worship. Nevertheless, after a person passes away, the higher he ascends in the spiritual worlds, haughtiness is considered to be a serious transgression, truly analogous to idolatry. Hence, he will be held accountable for having worshipped idols.

Accordingly, the Arvei Nachal clarifies the familiar expression employed by Chazal: **“מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו”**—

from the perspective of Torah-law, it is viewed as if etc. This means that even though a particular deed or thought is not considered to be a serious transgression in this world; nevertheless, **“מעלה עליו הכתוב”**—when HKB”H elevates (**“מעלה”**) his neshamah to a higher, spiritual world, it is viewed there as if he actually committed a serious transgression. Similarly, wherever Chazal employ the term **“כאילו”**, it implies that in this world, a particular deed is not really a serious transgression; however, when that person ascends to a higher, spiritual world after passing away, that deed will be considered a significant, consequential transgression.

This clarifies the insight of the great Rabbi Yaakov of Narol magnificently. His comments related to the passuk: **“So Hashem said, ‘Because the outcry concerning Sedom and Amorah has become so great, and because their sin has been very grave.’** It is plausible that the conduct of the people of Sedom and Amorah was only considered a grave sin in the higher realms. In that case, they wouldn’t have deserved to be punished by HKB”H in this world but only after their deaths, when they reached the upper world where their actions were considered grave. Therefore, HKB”H said: **“I will descend.”** In other words, I will evaluate the significance and degree of their transgressions in the physical, material world. **“And I will see if their outcry that has come to Me is indicative of their conduct”**—I will determine whether or not their conduct is considered a serious transgression even in this world. If so, **“they deserve annihilation”**—I will exterminate them in Olam HaZeh. **“And if not”**—if their actions are only considered transgressions in the upper world; then, **“I will know”**—I will remember to punish them for their actions after they die, when they ascend to the upper, spiritual world, but I will not punish them in Olam HaZeh.

All His Ways Reflect Justice

With this understanding, we can now explain why an unfavorable decree is not executed immediately. As explained, it gradually descends from a higher world to each progressively lower world until it eventually reaches this material world. For, it is possible that a person’s deed was only considered a transgression in the upper, more spiritual world; whereas, in a lower world, it was not considered a transgression at all. Similarly, even if it is still considered

wrong in that lower world, it is possible that in an even lower world, it is not considered a wrongdoing. Therefore, the unfavorable decree descends from world to world, and in each world, it is judged and reevaluated anew to see if it is considered a sin and wrongdoing according to that world's standards. Thus, the adverse decree descends from world to world; it is reevaluated in each world; ultimately, it reaches this world, chas v'shalom.

This then is the profound message of the passuk (Devarim 32, 4): "הצור תמים פעלו כי כל דרכיו משפט א"ל אמונה ואין עוול צדיק: וישר הוא—**the Rock, perfect is His work, for all His ways are justice; a G-d of faithfulness, without iniquity; He is righteous and proper.** This passuk teaches us that G-d's justice differs from a human king's justice. If a human king issues an adverse decree, the king's agents proceed to execute the decree immediately. This is not the way of HKB"H, since **"all His ways are justice."** Throughout its descent from the uppermost world, the decree is judged anew, reassessing whether or not punishment is warranted based on the standards of that world. For, **"He is a G-d of faithfulness, without iniquity; He is righteous and proper."**

Now, we know that the divine name "א"ל" is associated with the attribute of "chesed," in keeping with the passuk

(Tehillim 52, 3): "חסד א"ל כל היום"—**the "chesed" (kindness) of G-d (א"ל) is all day long.** That being the case, how are we to interpret the passuk: **"For all His ways are justice; a G-d (א"ל) of faithfulness"**? After all, justice implies "din," the opposite of "chesed." In light of what we have learned, this can be reconciled very nicely. The very fact that HKB"H's justice is reevaluated in each world, on every level, is the greatest "chesed" of all. This gradual process allows man the time to correct his ways and perform teshuvah.

This is also the message conveyed by the passuk (ibid. 103, 17): "וחסד ה' מעולם ועד עולם"—**but the "chesed" of Hashem is forever and ever** (literally, "from world to world"). In other words, even when an unfavorable decree is issued, the "chesed" of Hashem is at work, since the decree is judged anew in each world. Similarly, we have another passuk (ibid. 90, 2): "ומעולם ועד עולם אתה א"ל": **from world (the remotest past) to world (the most distant future), You are א"ל.** Once again, we can interpret this passuk as stating that HKB"H's "chesed" is demonstrated by the fact that He reevaluates His decrees in each and every world. As a result (ibid. 3): **"תשב אנוש עד דכא ותאמר שובו בני אדם"—You reduce man to pulp and You say, "Repent, O sons of man"**—He affords man the opportunity to perform teshuvah, so that He may annul the unfavorable decree.

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