

Parshat Vaeira 5781

Parshas Vaeira contains the first seven of the ten makkos which Hashem brought against the Egyptians. Abarbanel (15th Century Portuguese commentator) raises an interesting question regarding an apparent inconsistency in what Moshe said to Paro before certain makkos began but not others; namely:

- Blood – *“By this you will know that I am Hashem”*
- Frogs and Lice – (nothing is said in this regard)
- Wild animals – *“In order that you will know that I am Hashem in the midst of the land”*
- Pestilence, Boils – (nothing is said in this regard)
- Fiery Hailstones – *“In order that you will know that there is none like Me in all of the land”*
- Locusts, Darkness, Killing of the Firstborns – (nothing is said in this regard)

Shouldn't a phrase relating to knowledge of Hashem have really been used in respect of each of the ten plagues, since it is applicable to all of them?

To answer this, Abarbanel explains that Paro disagreed with Moshe on three basic tenets:

- 1) Moshe believed in the existence of Hashem, whereas Paro denied His existence – Paro believed that the world runs according to nature.
- 2) Moshe believed that Hashem oversees each person individually and gives to them accordingly, whereas Paro denied this.
- 3) Moshe believed that Hashem is able to change the nature of things, and renews them in their general makeup and minutiae according to His will. Paro denied that Hashem had any such ability and thus Paro felt he need not submit before Hashem and listen to Him.

Hence the makkos came to verify these three tenets and hence disprove Paro's standpoint, as follows:

1) The first set of three makkos – Blood, Frogs and Lice – came to verify the first tenet, namely the existence of Hashem. Therefore the first of these three is introduced by the phrase *“By this you will know that I am Hashem”*. There is no need to repeat this explanation for the remaining two makkos in this group, since the explanation is the same.

2) The second set of three makkos – Wild animals, Pestilence and Boils – came to verify the second tenet that Hashem oversees and runs the world, paying attention to each person. Therefore the first of these three, Wild animals, is introduced by the phrase *“In order that you will know that I am Hashem in the midst of the land”* (i.e. overseeing and directing the world). There is no need to repeat this explanation for the remaining two makkos in this group, since the explanation is the same.

3) The third set of three makkos – Fiery Hailstones, Locusts and Darkness – came to verify the third tenet, namely that Hashem has the ability to change the nature of things as He desires. Therefore the first of these three, Fiery Hailstones, is introduced by the phrase *“In order that you will know that there is none like Me in all of the land”* (i.e. there is no one apart from Hashem who can act in the world as they wish). There is no need to repeat this explanation for the remaining two makkos in this group, since the explanation is the same.

Meanwhile, the tenth makka, Killing of the Firstborns, was to avenge the deaths of the Jewish infants killed by the Egyptians. Abarbanel points out that this division of the makkos into three groups also appears in the acronym *“Detzach Adash Be'achav”* – the way in which Rabbi Yehudah groups the makkos in the haggadah. According to Abarbanel, Rabbi Yehudah grouped the makkos this way to allude to the same idea – that each group of makkos was intended to prove a different point to Paro and the Egyptians.