

The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
 with Reb Yoel Kahn

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THE HAIL'S DOWNFALL

At the end of Parshas Va'eira, the Torah relates that after Moshe davened to Hashem to stop the plague of hail, "the sounds and the hail ceased, and the rain *lo nitach* to the ground."

What is the meaning of the words *lo nitach*? Rashi offers two explanations. According to the first explanation, it means that the hail *did not reach* the ground. In fact, even the hail that had begun falling remained in midair and did not reach the ground.

According to the second explanation (cited in the name of Menachem ben Seruk), it means that the hail *did not pour* to the ground. Rashi concludes that he prefers Menachem's explanation, because the translation of *pour* in Aramaic is the same root word as *nitach*.

ANALYZING RASHI

There is a well-known rule that when Rashi brings down two explanations, the first one he cites is the primary explanation. If there is some type of difficulty with this explanation, Rashi continues to cite a second explanation as well; however, the first one remains the preferred way of understanding.

Keeping this in mind, there seems to be a difficulty with Rashi's comments on this verse. Rashi himself concludes that he prefers *pour over reach*. If so, why did he quote it as second?

Furthermore, why does Rashi quote the words *lo nitach* and explain them to mean *did not reach*? Seemingly, it would have been sufficient for him to quote and translate just the word *nitach*, without *lo*?

DID THE HAIL REMAIN OR DISSOLVE?

The Rebbe explains that Rashi's intent is not merely to translate the word *nitach*. Rather, he is coming to explain the content of the words *lo nitach*: what happened to the pellets of hail (or drops of rain) that were in the process of falling?

"As far as Heavenly 'nature' is concerned, to take back the hail would constitute a greater feat than to let in remain."

Rashi offers two explanations. According to the first explanation, *lo nitach* means *did not reach*; in other words, the falling hail remained airborne (as Rashi continues to say). According to Menachem, however, *lo nitach* means *did not pour*. In other words, the hail lost its liquefied, "pourable" status—it reverted to nothingness.

When comparing these two explanations, there are two factors to consider. One is the actual *translation* of the word. When dealing

with this aspect, Menachem's translation is indeed preferable (as Rashi concludes). However, when taking the *content* of the story into consideration, the first explanation is more logical, and is therefore cited first.

HEAVENLY NATURE

At first glance, it would be more sensible to say that the hail reverted to nothingness than to say that it remained in midair. For the hail to dissolve would indeed be a miracle, but it would be a one-time event. If it remained, however, the wonder would extend for many years (until the hail finally continued falling in the days of Yehoshua, as the Gemara says). Following the

principle that Hashem does not perform miracles for no reason, it would appear more logical to minimize the extent of the miracle as much as possible, and to say that it lasted for just a minute and not for years on end.

However, Rashi adopts the first explanation as being the favored one. What makes this interpretation more logical?

The reason is because there is another principle: "Heaven gives but does not take back." Hence, for the hail to be retracted would be against the "nature" of Heaven.

When viewed under the lens of *human* nature, a short-term miracle is indeed smaller than a long-lasting one. However, as far as *Heavenly* "nature"—which is by far more powerful than human nature—is concerned, to take back the hail would constitute a greater feat than to let it remain. Accordingly, it is more acceptable to say that the hail remained in its place, so that the miracle will be consistent with the "nature" of Heaven.

PAROH'S TESHUVAH

There is a deeper reason why it is more logical to say that the hail did not disappear.

The hail served as a punishment to Paroh for refusing to release the Yidden from Mitzrayim. As a result of this plague, Paroh did teshuvah (temporarily): he regretted his past actions—"I have sinned this time; Hashem is the righteous One and I and my nation are wicked"; and he resolved to improve his ways—"I will release you, and you will not continue to remain."

There are two types of teshuvah—teshuvah due to fear of punishment, and teshuvah out of love of Hashem. These two types of teshuvah have different effects on a person's sin. If a

person performs teshuvah due to fear, the teshuvah will prevent him from receiving punishment, but the sin itself remains. However, if one performs teshuvah out of love, the sin itself is removed.

Similarly, the fate of the hail—the punishment for Paroh's sin—depends on the type of teshuvah Paroh performed. If the teshuvah was due to fear, the hail would cease to fall and harm the Egyptians, but the hail itself would remain. But if the teshuvah was out of love, the hail would disappear entirely.

We can now understand why Rashi chose as his first explanation the translation *did not reach*. Paroh's teshuvah was obviously not out of love of Hashem, rather due to fear of punishment; hence, it is more rational to say that the hail remained in its place.

"Teshuvah due to fear prevents one from receiving punishment, but the sin itself remains. However, if it is performed out of love, the sin itself is removed."

For further study, see *Lekutei Sichos*, Vol. 6, pp. 46ff

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