

Behold, at this time tomorrow, I shall rain a very heavy hail... and now send, gather in your livestock... All the people and the animals that are found in the field... the hail shall descend upon them and they shall die ... Whoever feared Hashem chased his servants to the houses. And whoever did not take the word of G-d to heart he left his servants. (9:18,19,20,21)

Makas Barad, the plague of hail, begs elucidation. *Horav Baruch Dov Povarsky, Shlita*, presents us with a number of questions concerning this plague. *Moshe Rabbeinu* pinpointed to Pharaoh the exact time when the plague would commence by making a mark on the wall. He explained that when the sun would reach this mark, it would begin to hail. Afterwards, he told Pharaoh to have all his servants and possessions remanded indoors or else they would die or be destroyed. Why did Hashem warn them? The purpose of the plague was to punish the Egyptians. Why give them an exit strategy to save themselves? Furthermore, why did he tell them to immediately take in their slaves, if, in fact, he had told them that the plague would not begin until a specific time on the next day? What was their rush to seek shelter? The language of the *pesukim* is redundant. "Any man or animal who is in the field, who is not in the house." Obviously, if they were in the field, they were not in the house. The Torah refers to the Egyptian who protected his slaves and possessions as being G-d-fearing. What does protection have to do with the fear of G-d? It is common sense to remain indoors during a storm.

In order to respond to these questions and present a new understanding of this plague, the *Rosh Yeshivah* quotes a *chiddush*, novel idea, from the *Brisker Rav*, *zl*. Every other plague (except the smiting of the firstborn) lasted for one week. *Makas barad*, contends the *Brisker Rav*, fell every moment of the seven (allotted) days. Thus, whoever left the protection of his home/shelter was immediately "downed" by a hailstorm. Hail did not fall on the houses, only on people, animals and the open fields. Any protected edifice remained protected.

Having quoted this, *Rav Povarsky* advances this idea further, positing that the plague of hail had two distinct aspects to it. One aspect was identical with all the other plagues: it devastated the Egyptians. This is what it was meant to do, and it achieved its purpose. A second aspect to the plague was exclusive to *makas barad*: Hashem had given a command to the Egyptian people to remain in the shelter of their homes and to do likewise concerning their animals. The purpose of this component of the plague was to teach the Egyptians that whoever follows Hashem's command will not experience harm: *Shomer mitzvah lo yeida davar ra*, "He who obeys the commandment will know no evil" (*Koheles* 8:5). *Makas barad* had an educational component. The command to stay home and protect oneself and his possessions went into effect immediately. Although the hail would not begin until the morrow, today they were to stay home to demonstrate that they were obeying Hashem's command. The *yarei Shomayim*, G-d-fearing, Egyptian who

obeyed Hashem's command was spared from harm, as were his home and his possessions. The one who (was) *lo sam libo*, "who did not take the word of G-d to heart," and did not immediately follow Hashem's command paid dearly the next day when, even in the protection of his own home, he experienced the devastation that resulted from the hail, as the hail came crashing through his home. He did not follow instructions; he waited too long. Indeed, those who listened, and, by chance, their animal wandered out the next day, were not affected by the hail. They obeyed, and those who obey do not suffer harm.

The Torah's use of *asher lo sam libo* as the opposite of *yarei es dvar Hashem* is interesting. One would think that the adverse of G-d-fearing is not G-d-fearing. Why does the Torah alter the description of the individual who disobeys? *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, derives from here that *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, is a natural instinct that is part and parcel of the psyche of every human being. A human being fears G-d. The reason that his innate fear of G-d remains dormant is that he does not apply it to his heart. The average human being does not take the time to think that a Divine Supreme Being guides and maintains the world. He goes through life with nary a care in the world until something goes wrong, and then he suddenly realizes that he has been ignoring Hashem. Any deficiency in *yiraas Shomayim* is self-imposed due to his lack of recognizing and acknowledging the *metzius*, reality/essence, of Hashem.