

Shiur L'Yom Chamishi¹

[Thursday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Va'era:*** **Exodus 8:20 - 9:7**
 Haftarah: **Ezekiel 29:13-16**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Revelation 9:13-21**

I will put a mark of distinction between My people and your people.

[Exodus 8:23]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 18:28-29;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 11, *Et-Tzemach David* [Sprout/outgrowth of David]

Vayomer Adonai el-Moshe – Then the Holy One said to Moshe ... *hash'kem baboker* – rise up early in the morning ... *v'hityatzev lifnei Far'oh hineh yotze ha-maymah* ... and position yourself in front of Pharaoh as he goes forth to the water **Exodus 8:20** [Hebrew Bible, Exodus 8:16].

The land of Pharaohs and pyramids is finally reaping a little bit of what it's arrogant leaders have sown. Three environmental disasters have rocked Egypt thus far. The first calamity began when all the H₂O molecules in the Nile River and its tributary system transformed into blood. With their usual habitat too polluted by blood, and with the fish and aquatic life they had previously eaten all first dying and then decomposing, the amphibious creatures of the wetlands had to search for new homes and new consumables. Frogs and snapping turtles; salamanders and snakes; crawfish, crabs, and crocodiles - and who knows what other displaced species – were forced to seek out new homes. Then, on Moshe's command these creatures mobilized. They invaded cities. They terrorized villages. They took over peoples' homes = even Pharaoh's! That proved to be just the beginning of sorrows for Egypt though. After the swamp creatures died off, the fertile topsoil throughout Egypt morphed into parasitic lice, which also invade the cities, and latched onto every Egyptian they could find. Pharaoh's inner circle had no answer. They declared: "*This is etzbah Elohim – i.e. the finger of the gods!*"

The Holy One is nowhere close to 'done'. He has seven more finesse-strikes planned and ready to go if needed. What happens next is up to Pharaoh. All he has to do is say the word, set the Hebrews free, and the nightmare he and his people face will end. So what do you say, Pharaoh? Will you you're your eyes and read the handwriting on the wall? Will you do what is best for his people of Egypt - for whose welfare you are responsible? Will you acknowledge that you and your people are just reaping a whirlwind that you yourselves have been sowing for centuries? Will you beg the Holy One for mercy - though you and your nation have

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offered His people none? Will you release the Hebrew as they have requested before your country is thrown into complete disorder and utter chaos? Your exalted coven of master sorcerers threw in the proverbial towel after the lice incident – will you follow suit?

***Take the Deal, Pharaoh –
Save Yourself, Your Family, and Your Nation - While You Still Can!***

Moshe is presently on his way to the palace in which he grew up with his fourth ***Shelach et-Ami*** ultimatum². Slipping past the sleepy guard, he heads straight for Pharaoh's favorite spot by the Nile. He will be waiting at the River's edge, shepherd's rod in hand, when Pharaoh emerges from his private chambers. *Hmmmnnn* - the last time Moshe visited Pharaoh this early in the morning, Egypt's water supply turned to blood. So, Pharaoh, you might want to take a deep breath and think pleasant thoughts while you have the chance; because in just a moment, you are going to start feeling a little pressure. Your day is about to take a sharp turn in a southerly direction. The message the Holy One wants you to hear and take to heart is not *'Have a Good Day'*. As the most notorious human trafficker on earth, Pharaoh, you have been pushing the limits of human cruelty and oppression to their limits and beyond - especially in regard to the Hebrews – for some time. So the message the Holy One wants you to hear this morning is something like: *A superior strategist is now sitting on the other side of the chessboard from you, sir! In just a little while your reign of terror is going to end – one way or another. Exactly how it ends – and how much trauma that ends up inflicting upon you and your country - is all up to you!*

Meanwhile, Back in the Hebrew's Slave Quarters

While Moshe is playing early morning games of intrigue with Pharaoh at the palace, a very different kind of drama is playing its way out in the Hebrew tenements. An epic season of Divine Romance is unfolding. The Holy One is playing the part of the Dashing Courtier/Bridegroom Candidate; the part of the Friend-of-the-Bridegroom is being played by Moshe; the part of the faithful Friend-of-the-Bride is being played by Aharon; and the part of the blushing Bride Candidate is being played by B'nei Yisrael. And, of course, the part of the hard-to-please, *human trafficker masquerading as a stepfather* character is being played by Pharaoh. Lights! Camera! ACTION!

Thus far we have only seen a small hint of what the Bridegroom Candidate can do. But that is about to change. In faithfulness to a Plan He designed before the foundation of the world and a covenant He announced to Avraham several

² The three previous *'Shelach ami'* requests are recorded for posterity at Exodus 5:1, Exodus 7:16, and Exodus 8:1.

generations ago, the Holy One is full-on engaged in a campaign to activate the grand destiny of Avraham's descendants. What act of Covenant faithfulness is the Holy One in the process of performing right now? He is patiently wresting the affections and devotion of Avraham's descendants away from the powerful mystique of Pharaoh's dynamic persona and from the seductive sensuality of Egypt's culture.

In phase I of the Holy One's Great Campaign of Redemption the Holy One proved He could take His chosen people out of Egypt by either stealth or force any time He wished. He holds all the cards. When the Nile ran red with blood, Egypt – and all its slaves – were shown to be His anytime He wanted. Pharaoh could do nothing to stop the blood plague – and but for the mercy of the Holy One, Egypt had no way of surviving it. But the Holy One was not out to destroy Egypt. He was not in a hurry. He accomplished, with the blood plague, exactly what He intended. He brought the hard labor of the Hebrews to a screeching halt. He proved He could destroy Egypt's economy – and indeed all life there – at will. If He wanted to, that is – and He clearly does not.

What is the next step on the Holy One's agenda? The Creator of the Heavens and the Earth is out to prove that in addition to being an Awesome Warrior, He is also: an *Eminently Trustworthy Shepherd*, a *Gentle and Patient Suitor*, a *Wise and Honorable King*, and a *Kind and Compassionate Bridegroom*. The Holy One does not just want to expose Pharaoh for the fraud he is; nor merely free the overworked Hebrew slave population. He is out *to win the heart and devotion of a Bride-People*. Hence He is out to prove that He is every bit as merciful and slow to anger as He is skilled in the arts of war. He is out to prove that He does not ever need – or have any dark desire to resort to - excessive force. That is the kind of thing a Bride-People need to know.

For that reason the Holy One has been measuring – and will continue to measure - His releases of power very, very carefully. He has been – and will keep on - *behaving as a perfect gentleman*. The Holy One is not playing with Pharaoh, of course; but He is not exactly coming in like a wrecking ball either.

Pharaoh, on the other hand, has been behaving *like a prototype for the beast-like end-times character the book of Revelation describes as 'coming out of the sea'*. See **Revelation 13:1 ff**. Pharaoh has been making it clear that he is not a statesman, not honest man, and not in any wise noble. He is showing himself to be the anti-thesis of everything the Holy One is. The Holy One is full of *shalom*; *Pharaoh* is full of rage. The Holy One seeks – indeed needs – nothing for Himself; Pharaoh is all about justifying his own megalomaniac delusions. The Holy One exudes

inspiration and freely gives revelation to all who seek Him; Pharaoh prides himself on his ability to manipulate others with intimidation. The Holy One only wants the best outcome for all Creation and all mankind; Pharaoh is obsessed with his own power and public image. The Holy One is all about life; Pharaoh is all about death.

Which Will You Choose As Your King?

In this Corner: The Master Craftsman of Life and Peace!

And in that Corner: the Dark-Eyed Doctor of Suffering and Death

The Holy One has stepped out of eternity and invisibility at such a time as this to show the world that it is He – not Pharaoh or one of his pantheon of capricious ‘gods’ - Who controls the life-giving waters of earth. The Holy One has tossed Pharaoh’s convenient dark mythology on its ear by turning the waters Nile to blood for seven days. In so doing, He has shown that He could totally devastate the country of Egypt – which is totally dependent upon the Nile as its only source of fresh water - any time He wanted. Then, after making His point – without killing a single human being – the Holy One let the freshwater flow again.

In response what did Pharaoh do? He *hardened his heart*. And this hardening of heart was not just toward the Holy One or toward the Hebrew slaves under his command. He hardened his heart *toward his own people as well*. It was the people of Egypt, after all, not Pharaoh, who would suffer most if Pharaoh gave the Holy One reason to stretch forth His Hand again.

Pharaoh – like all men obsessed with his own image and bent on manipulation - viewed the Holy One’s penchant for goodness, and His eagerness to relent out of mercy, as a weakness that he could exploit for his own gain. So Pharaoh basically dared the Holy One to inflict another plague. He was fully willing to use his population - even the members of his own court and family – as *human shields*. He could see that the Holy One was reluctant to strike a fatal blow. He sought to use the Holy One’s willingness to respond to cries for mercy – from any human being He had created, whatever their nationality or their past misdeeds - as an opportunity to allow him to make a claim of a measure victory even in the throes of a crushing defeat. When the Holy One mercifully relented, Pharaoh would claim that he had won the confrontation. This is always part of the strategy of *the beast that arises from the waters*. Still the Holy One would not strike Pharaoh with the punishment he deserved. He measured His responses to Pharaoh’s mockery, manipulations, and increasing hardness of heart very carefully. After the *ot dahm* [sign of the blood] His next move was just to send an invasion of swamp creatures to overtake Egypt’s cities and villages. Once again not a single human life was lost. No one died. No one even got sick or hurt. It was messy, and it was unnerving, and if it had gone on for any longer than it did it would have been emotionally

devastating. So Pharaoh tested the Holy One's attribute of mercy. "*No mas!*" Pharaoh cried out [writer's paraphrase]. *Entreat ADONAI that He may take away the swamp creatures from me and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice to the Holy One.* Exodus 8:8.

The Holy One was just waiting for someone to ask for it to stop. As Pharaoh requested, the swamp creature invasion was halted. As soon as the plague subsided, however, Pharaoh reneged on his promise - and hardened his stance against the Covenant people even further. To a dark-eyed doctor of death, a cease-fire is always just a strategic opportunity to reload and reposition.

The Holy One knows Pharaoh better than Pharaoh knows himself. But the Holy One is extremely patient and long-suffering. Despite being lied to and seemingly 'played' with the *Hudna*³ ploy the Holy One still did not lose His Shalom. He resisted the invitation to inflict the level of judgment that Pharaoh's attitude and actions deserved. That is just not His Way. He is all about giving time, opportunity, and incentive to repent. The Holy One's next move therefore consisted merely of another lower-level strategic strike. He caused all the dust in the land of Egypt to swarm with parasitic blood-sucking insect-like creatures. Some interpreters say these creatures crawled like lice. Others say they flew like gnats. Whatever they looked like, Pharaoh's heart became harder still. Pharaoh had no way of knowing it, but the Holy One was actually beating him at his own game. Pharaoh's stubbornness, his blatant lies, and his despicable behavior are all going to serve a very important Divine purpose. Let me explain.

Something Big is Going On In Goshen

Even though not a single person in Egypt has died⁴, the three *otot* [signs] the Holy One has sent thus far have brought the mighty economy of Egypt to a virtual standstill. All commerce has stopped and all business – including of course the great store-city building program in which Pharaoh has the Hebrew slaves engaged – has been brought to an abrupt halt. That means there is suddenly nothing for any of Egypt's slaves – including the Hebrews whom Pharaoh distrusts and despises - to do. And since all the fish are dead and all the irrigated fields around the Nile are all polluted, there is nothing in the work camps for any of Pharaoh's slaves to eat.

³ The meaning of the Arabic term 'hudna' was established by Mohammed in the seventh century CE. At a time when he was powerless to take Mecca by force, he famously negotiated a *hudna* with the opposing Arabic tribe that claimed Mecca as its capital. The *hudna* was supposed to last for ten years. Over the following two years, however, Mohammad rearmed and waited for an opportunity to strike. When the other side committed a minor infraction of the agreement, he took advantage of the situation to launch a full-scale campaign to conquer Mecca and destroy the opposing tribe.

⁴ The Holy One's Hand is powerful, but He is proving that His way is to move that Hand with surgical precision, inflicting no more damage than absolutely necessary to accomplish His will.

Pharaoh's taskmasters are busy just trying to cope with what has happened so far and stay alive themselves. Suddenly Pharaoh's building projects have become the last thing on everybody's priority list. All slaves of Pharaoh – whether of Hebrew descent and those of the mixed multitude of nations – were suddenly off the public dole. They had to fend for themselves. Having no more work to do and nothing to eat, more and more of the Hebrews had little choice but to flee from the various cities and villages of Egypt to which they had migrated and/or been assigned by Pharaoh's taskmasters and regather in Goshen – which the Holy One had made sure was the only place in Egypt there was plenty of food. This kind of regathering was of course an absolutely essential part of the Holy One's Divine Plan. The Holy One intended, you see, to “make a distinction” between His People and the people of Egypt. Before the next plague therefore the Holy One therefore directed Moshe to tell Pharaoh:

V'santi pedut beyn ami uvein ameicha

I will make a distinction between My people and your people.

[Exodus 8:23]

The word our English Bibles translate as ‘distinction’ [KJV, ‘division’] in this Divine utterance is the Hebrew noun *pedut*⁵. This Hebrew noun is derived from the verb root *padah*⁶, which is usually translated into English as to *redeem*, to *rescue*, or to *deliver*. The change of the last letter from a *hey* to a *tav* [i.e. changing the word from the verb root *padah* to the noun *pedut*] introduces to the deliverance/rescue/redemption word picture the idea of *covenant fulfillment* [tav].

As usual the Hebraic picture associated with this word is most informative. The first letter of the word *pedut* is a *peh*. This is a Hebraic pictograph of the outer portion of a person's mouth – the visible structure of lips, tongue, and teeth from which words issue forth. The second letter of the word *pedut* is a *dalet*, a Hebraic pictograph of a doorway or portal. The third and final letter, as discussed above, is a *tav*, a Hebraic pictograph of a covenant sign. Put all these together and you see a Hebraic mural, testifying that “the outer structure [i.e. *peh* (mouth)] of the door [*dalet*] is a covenant sign [tav]”.

How prophetic of the blood on the doorposts which will mark off and *distinguish* the homes of responsive, believing Hebrews from the homes of unresponsive unbelievers. Now perhaps you can understand why the Holy One told us to *write the Torah on the doorposts of our homes and on our gates, to bind them on our hands and to make them frontlets before our eyes*. The point is that *all the outer structures of our lives – indeed every place we intersect with the world - is to*

⁵ *Pedut* is *peh, dalet, tav*. Strong's Hebrew word #6304, it is pronounced *peh-doot*'.

⁶ *Padah* is *peh, dalet, hey*. Strong's Hebrew word #6299, it is pronounced *paw-daw*'.

constitute a visible sign of the covenant we have with the Holy One that distinguishes us from the Egyptians of this world. Our *doorposts* – where people approach or enter our homes - should proclaim that we are different, and *have been, are being, and will be* redeemed. Our *gates* – the places at which people approach, enter or pass by the land on which we live- should proclaim that we are different, and *have been, are being, and will be* redeemed.

The way we *educate our children* should proclaim that we are different, and have been, are being, and will be redeemed. The *deeds of our hands* should proclaim that we are different, and have been, are being, and will be redeemed. The *focus of our eyes* should proclaim that we are different, and have been, are being, and will be redeemed. And finally, in addition to all this, the *words of our mouths* should proclaim that we are different, and have been, are being, and will be redeemed.

The First “Hebrew Roots” Movement

It stands to reason that as each *ot* [sign] of the Holy One hit Egypt more and more Hebrews fled the cities and villages (which were the hardest hit areas), and “regathered” at their ancestral homes in Goshen. The camp at Goshen thus gradually grew, family members were thus gradually reunited, and a sense of community – even nationhood – thus gradually began to redevelop. The talk of the town necessarily shifted from what one did for a living (which all of a sudden no longer seemed very important) to *Who the Holy One was and what He might do next*. The maiden Israel was beginning to get to know [Hebrew *yada*] – and trust - her Divine Suitor better every day. Simultaneously loyalty to Pharaoh and satisfaction with the direction of Egyptian culture was looking less and less attractive by the minute. The combination of all these factors meant that the Divine courtship was now ready to move into its next phase.

And Back at the Palace ...

Pharaoh’s first response to Moshe and Aharon’s announcement of their mission was to declare that he did not know [*yada*] the Holy One. His position has not changed. He refuses to acknowledge Him even now. He has shut his ears and his heart to the words spoken to him by Moshe and Aharon. After not only the “plague” of blood, but also the plagues of swamp creatures and lice/gnats our text told us in no uncertain terms that Pharaoh “*didn't sh'ma* [listen to] *them*”.

As we have discussed, the Holy One was not “playing” with Pharaoh. But He was 100% sure before He ever started that the end result would be that Pharaoh would of his own free will - under *duress*, but by no means under compulsion - reverse his position at least temporarily and let the people go. The Holy One has a timetable for this to happen. Pharaoh does not know the time or the season. So let’s see what is in store for Pharaoh and Egypt today. If you are keeping score, what

awaits us will be *otot* [signs] numbers four and five.

Behold - A New Twist

In today's aliyah however we will see a new "twist". The Holy One is going to do something a little different in regard to the *otot* that follow the lice invasion. The Holy One is, from this point forward, going to make what our English Bibles call a "division" or "distinction" between the Egyptian people and the Hebrews. The Holy One is going to take very visible steps to miraculously protect His people from the harmful effects of the remaining plagues that Pharaoh's megalomania requires the Holy One to unleash upon Egypt.

The Holy One is going to put a mark of protection on His people and on their dwellings. He is going to place all who *sh'ma* Him – and are awakening to His overtures of love - in a protective 'bubble' behind an unseen Spiritual 'force-field'. This is relatively easy to do now because the first three plagues have caused all work on Pharaoh's store-city building projects to grind to a halt. Having nothing to work with and nothing else to do, the Hebrew inhabitants of the slave colonies have therefore begun to leave their work camps in the various store cities and regather in Goshen. It is there that they are going to be "preserved from wrath". There is always such a place for the people of the Covenant.

Not one of the remaining plagues will touch the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov *or* their cattle *or* their homes – *as long as* they will just quit listening to Pharaoh, cling instead to the Holy One, *and* follow the Holy One's instructions for living.

The Holy One is, you see, beginning the process of *molding the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov into a people*. And to be a people unto the Holy One the first thing they need to know is that for them the Holy One is *life*, and that Egypt is *death*. We would do well to learn the same lesson, Dear Reader.

Ot #4: Ha-Arov [The Sign of the Swarm]

The Holy One has promised to bring His people out from Egyptian bondage. He has prophesied to Moshe that He would do it with 'a mighty hand', with an 'outstretched arm', and with great *signs* and *wonders*. He has heretofore turned the waters of the Nile into blood, caused swamp creatures to leave the waterways and invade the cities and houses of Egypt, and has caused the very soil of Egypt to turn into lice that attacked the Egyptians. But those were just the first three 'rounds', and this is a scheduled ten round 'bout'. The bell is ringing on round four.

V'yavo arov kaved

And a huge swarm of creatures came

beitah Pharaoh uveit avadav uv'chol-eretz Mitzrayim
and attacked the palaces of Pharaoh and his officials.

T'zhachet ha-aretz m'penei he'arov

Throughout all Egypt, the land was devastated by the swarm.

[Exodus 8:24]

English speakers have traditionally interpreted the Hebrew word *arov*⁷, as used in this verse to refer to flies – *i.e.* those pesky six-legged winged creatures that seem to love to gather at the garbage dump and the latrine. But the Hebrew word *arov* is a generic term merely meaning ‘swarm’, or ‘throng’. The sages of Israel have therefore not bought into the ‘fly’ theory. Talmud suggests that the *arovot* [throng/swarms] were *roving herds of predators* – lions, tigers, bears, [Oh my!], wolves, etc.⁸.

Whatever the *arovot* [swarms] were however, they got Pharaoh’s attention and put him in a negotiating mood very quickly. Torah tells us:

Vayikra Far'oh el-Moshe ul'Aharon vayomer

Pharaoh called for Moshe and for Aharon, and said,

lechu ziveichu l'Eloheichem b'aretz

"Go, sacrifice to your God in the land!"

Please notice that Pharaoh has put a condition on the release of the Holy One’s people to worship the Holy One – they can hold a worship event but ... they have to do it *b'aretz* - *i.e.* in the land of Egypt. None of this ‘3-days’ journey’ stuff Moshe had been asking for. Pharaoh wanted to keep a close eye on – and probably a few hundred Egyptian chariots and a few thousand Egyptian archers and foot soldiers surrounding – the Hebrew slaves.

There is a place and a time and a circumstance in the realm of human interaction for ‘negotiation’ and ‘compromise’. But the Holy One does not – will not - negotiate or compromise with men He knows to have either contempt for Him or evil intentions toward His people. May we, like Moshe, learn to be like Him in this regard as well.

Vayomer Moshe lo nachon la'asot ken

Moshe said, "It isn't appropriate to do so;

ki to'avat Mitzrayim nizbach l'Adonai Eloheinu

for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Mitzrim to the Holy One our God.

⁷ Arov is *ayin, resh, beit*, Strong’s Hebrew word #6157, it is pronounced *aw-rove*’.

⁸ The author’s point is not to argue the creatures were – or were not – something more than just flies. The real issue is not, of course, what the creatures were – because no one alive today really knows or can know. The real issue is, instead, what the presence of the creatures, whatever they were, in such numbers, and under such circumstances, meant to Pharaoh, to Egypt, and to the slave population.

hen nitzbach et-to'avat Mitzrayim l'eyneihem

Behold, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Mitzrim before their eyes,

V'lo yiskeilunu

and won't they stone us?

Derech shloshet yamim neileich b'midbar

We will go three days' journey into the wilderness,

V'zavachnu l'Adonai Eloheinu ka'asher yomar eleinu

and sacrifice to the Holy One our God, as he shall direct us."

Moshe was not, of course, entirely up front with Pharaoh. He did not actually lie – for he did indeed intend to take the people three days' journey into the wilderness to hold a worship event. It is, you see, approximately 3 days' journey from the border of Egypt to Mount Sinai. But Moshe neglected to mention that the Holy One had no intention whatever of sending the Hebrews back to Pharaoh after the worship event, but instead intended to take them away forever and give them the land of Kena'an to possess as an inheritance.

Moshe played it 'close to the vest'. He knew Pharaoh *couldn't handle the truth*. After all, Pharaoh's *entire life was a lie*. He believed – and insisted everyone else believe – he was a *god*. He believed the world was *his*. He believed all people existed only for *his pleasure*. To him all people were merely objects to be manipulated, used, and then thrown away.

Do not mistake Pharaoh's sudden willingness to engage Moshe in conversation and even compromise a little with 'coming to his senses' or 'repenting' for the evil he and his ancestors had wrought. Do not confuse Pharaoh's sudden change in demeanor as even a 'softening'. All he was doing was *looking for an angle* - another way to manipulate the situation. Pharaoh still has lots of weapons of manipulation and deception left to employ. Hence the next thing we read in Torah is the revelation of the wily Anti-Messiah prototype's subtle plan to turn defeat into victory. Like the serpent, Pharaoh always has a counterproposal to the stated will of the Holy One. So he says:

Anochi ashalach etchem

I will let you go,

uzevachtem l'Adonai Eloheichem b'midbar

that you may sacrifice to the Holy One your God in the wilderness,

rak harchek lo-tarchiku lalechet hatiru ba'adi

but you must not go very far away. And you must pray for me."

[Exodus 8:24]

Let's analyze the archetypical counterproposal of the monarch of the unclean

realm. According to this ‘peace plan’ he will as a gesture of ‘good will’ let the Hebrews take a journey outside the borders of Egypt. He only attaches two little conditions - nothing much, really. He just insists that:

- [1] he gets to dictate *the location of the people’s worship event* - which must be within the geographical boundaries of sovereign authority; and
- [2] he – not the Holy One - must *be the focus of attention at that event*.

Torah records the precise words of this interaction for more than historical reasons. The Holy One wants us to be intimately familiar with the Anti-Messiah’s *tricks* and to learn from Moshe how to *overcome his deceptions and manipulations*.

What are the lessons the Holy One wants us to learn? First of all, He wants us to learn that *He and He alone has the right to determine where He is worshipped*. Anyone who tries to tell you have to worship with or near him or her is just as deceived by self-importance as was Pharaoh.

Secondly, the Holy One wants us to grasp the truth that *He is the only One who can be the center and focus of attention at any true worship event*. Anyone who uses a worship event to try to direct your attention to, or cause you to focus on, him or his ‘ministry’ – or, for that matter, someone else’s ‘ministry’ – or what is going on in government or society - is following in the controlling, manipulative, abusive, and dangerous footsteps of the archetypical villain Pharaoh.

Torah does not merely tell us how Pharaoh tried – and hence how the Anti-Messiah will try - to manipulate the situation arising from the display of the miracle workings of the Holy One to his advantage. Torah goes on to describe how the Holy One overcame Pharaoh’s subtle attempts at damage and mind control. He not only did not allow Pharaoh to prevail – He allowed Pharaoh to reap what he had sowed. As and with the same measure Pharaoh had tried manipulating the Holy One’s people, the Holy One allowed Pharaoh’s heart to be manipulated by uncleanness, by vile passions, and by the operation of a debased mind⁹. Hence we read:

*When Moshe went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the Holy One,
the Holy One did according to the word of Moshe,
and removed the swarms from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people.
There remained not one.
But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he didn't let the people go.*

Pharaoh is a master manipulator. But he is about to discover that he is *out of his league* this time. Ring the bell. It’s time for round 5.

⁹ See Romans 1:18-32 for how this process works its way out in real time in every generation.

Ot #5: Ha-Dever Kaved Me'od [The Sign of the Very Heavy Pestilence]

The fish of the Nile all died previously in connection with the plague of blood, so the premier food source of Egypt has ceased to exist. Pharaoh still, however, has abundant meat available - on the hoof, in vast herds and flocks of domestic animals.

Pharaoh's land is a land of plenty. He is confident that he will continue to eat like a king. He still does not understand Who he is dealing with – or Who is dealing with him. But he *will*, very, very soon.

After Pharaoh reneges a second time on a promise to let the Hebrews worship the Holy One sends Moshe back to Pharaoh with yet another message – and another *ot*. If you're counting, this will be *ot* #5, and it will consist of an epidemic which will devastate Egypt's horses, camels, cattle, donkeys and sheep – his beasts of burden and his 'alternative' sources of meat.

Here is how Moshe informs Pharaoh of *ot ha-dever* [the sign of the livestock epidemic]:

Hineh yad Adonai hoyah b'mikneicha asher b'sadeh

Behold, the Holy One's Hand will be directed against your livestock in the field.

b'susim b'chamorim b'gmalim b'bakar uv'tzon

The horses, donkeys, camels, oxen and sheep

dever kaved me'od

[will die from] a very serious epidemic.

V'hiflah Adonai beyn mikneh Yisra'el uveyn mikneh Mitzrayim

The Holy One will make a distinction between Israel's livestock and that of Egypt.

V'lo yamut mikol-livnei Yisra'el davar

Not a single [animal] belonging to the Israelites will die.

We are not told exactly with what disease the Holy One struck the livestock of Egypt. We are told however that it struck several species – namely horses [Hebrew, *susim*, primarily utilized by Pharaoh for his chariots and other military applications], donkeys [Hebrew, *chamorim*, primarily used as beasts of burden], camels [Hebrew, *g'malim*, also used as beasts of burden], oxen [Hebrew *bakar*, beasts primarily used for pulling loads, but also valuable for their milk, their skins/coats, and the meat of their flesh], and sheep.

The 'land of plenty' is slowly beginning to look a little bit puny. One food source at a time, it is getting leaner and meaner. For as Torah tells us:

*So the Holy One did according to His Word on the next day,
and all the livestock of Egypt died;
of the livestock of the children of Israel, however, not one died
And Pharaoh sent [messengers to investigate] and indeed,*

not even one of the livestock of the Israelites was dead.

But the heart of Pharaoh was still very stubborn. And he still will not let the people go. *Stay tuned – I have a feeling it might not be over just yet!*

Questions For Today's Study

1. Today's aliyah begins with Moshe conversing with the Holy One regarding the fourth wave of judgment/plague - the plague of flies (some interpreters say it was beetles).

[A] Where did the infesting creatures that brought about this fourth judgment congregate and attack?

[B] What was Pharaoh's initial response to the fourth judgment?

[C] What reason did Moshe give for refusing to obey Pharaoh's command about worshipping the Holy One?

[D] After Moshe rejected Pharaoh's command about how, when, and where to worship the Holy One, what was Pharaoh's reply?

[E] Reread verse 27, then compare it with verse 25. Should the timing, location, or manner of the worship of the Holy One ever be subject to the commands or the convenience or the conventions [including traditions] of men? Explain your thoughts on this matter, including what you think must be the guiding principle in connection with the timing, manner, and location of worshipping the Holy One.

[F] How did the fourth judgment/plague end?

[G] What did Pharaoh do after the end of the fourth plague?

2. When Pharaoh still refuses to let the people go on the Holy One's terms he sets in motion the fifth plague. Moshe is instructed to tell Pharaoh that if he continues to refuse to let the Hebrew slaves go, the Hand of the Holy One will "*bring a terrible plague on your livestock in the field ...*"

[A] What kinds of animals does the Holy One say will be affected by the fifth plague?

[B] What does the Holy One say will happen to the same animals kept in Goshen?

[C] What percentage of Egypt's livestock industry was affected by the fifth plague?

[D] What percentage of the livestock in Goshen died?

[E] In Exodus 9:4, the Holy One says He is making a "distinction" [KJV] between Egypt and the Hebrews in Goshen. Do a study on the word translated as "distinction", as follows:

[i] In Strong's look up the Hebrew word our text translates as "distinction";

[ii] Write the Hebrew word, in Hebrew letters, with vowel points.

[iii] Write the transliteration and pronunciation of the word.

[iv] Write the primary definition of the word.

[v] Look for at least two other usages of this word in the Torah, two in the Psalms, and two in the prophetic writings, and discuss the meaning of the word in each of those passages.

[vi] After reviewing the other notes of Gesenius regarding this word, write a paragraph (at least three sentences) describing what you think the Holy One was saying He was going to do, considering what this Hebrew word really means.

[F] What was the response of Pharaoh to this plague?

[G] Who hardened Pharaoh's heart at this time - The Holy One or Pharaoh?

3. In today's verses from Haftarah *Va'era* the Holy One indicates that the Egyptian peoples who have been scattered across the earth by the Holy One's judgments on Pharaoh will be regathered, and returned to Upper Egypt - but this time as the "lowliest of kingdoms" instead of the most powerful nation on earth.

*At the end of forty years will I gather the Mitzrim
from the peoples where they were scattered;
and I will bring back the captivity of Mitzrayim,
and will cause them to return into the land of Patros, into the land of their birth;
and they will be there a base kingdom.*

*It will be the base of the kingdoms;
neither shall it any more lift itself up above the nations:
and I will diminish them that they shall no longer rule over the nations.*

*It shall be no more the confidence of the house of Yisra'el,
bringing iniquity to memory, when they turn to look after them:
and they shall know that I am the Holy One Adon.*

[A] In the day the Holy One re-gathers and re-established Egypt, what does the Holy One say Egypt will never again be to the people of Israel?

[B] Instead, what will Egypt become to Israel?

[C] How will the lowly end time status of Egypt cause Israel to acknowledge and honor the Holy One?

[D] What sin was at the heart of the problem of Israel's relationship with Egypt throughout the centuries? Explain what part in this sin the leaders of Egypt had, and what part the leaders of Israel had. Relate each of these to one or more of the "ten commandments", and the *shema* [Deuteronomy 6:4-9].

4. For today's B'rit Chadasha reading I have chosen the narrative of the sixth trumpet judgment of the Book of Revelation. As we discussed yesterday, the end times will witness plagues similar to, but in far greater magnitude than, the plagues which were inflicted on Egypt. These plagues parallel the Egyptian plagues. The sixth trumpet judgment was foreseen by Yochanan as follows:

*The sixth angel sounded.
I heard a voice from the horns of the golden altar that is before God,
saying to the sixth angel who had one shofar,
"Free the four angels who are bound at the great river Perat!"*

*The four angels were freed who had been prepared for that hour and day and month and year,
so that they might kill one third of mankind.
The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million. I heard the number of them.
Thus I saw the horses in the vision, and those who sat on them,
having breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of lions.*

*Out of their mouths proceed fire, smoke, and sulfur.
By these three plagues were one third of mankind killed:
by the fire, the smoke, and the sulfur, which proceeded out of their mouths.
For the power of the horses is in their mouths, and in their tails.
For their tails are like serpents, and have heads, and with them they harm.*

*The rest of mankind, who were not killed with these plagues,
didn't repent of the works of their hands, that they wouldn't worship demons,
and the idols of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of stone, and of wood;
which can neither see, nor hear, nor walk.
They didn't repent of their murders, nor of their sorceries,
nor of their sexual immorality, nor of their thefts.*

[A] What did Yochanan see released upon the earth at the sounding of the sixth trumpet?

[B] Who released these destructive agents - *Ha-Satan* [*i.e.* the adversary] or the Holy One?

[C] Does the text indicate there was a prescribed time for the release of these destructive agents? If so, how specifically was the time prescribed?

[D] How many troops did Yochanan [John] see in this vision?

[E] What were these troops sent to do?

[F] What three "plagues" did these troops release on the earth?

[G] After the horror and destruction wrought by the destructive agents loosed by the sixth trumpet, what did the rest of mankind do?

[H] Why do you think the rest of mankind did not repent [make *shuv*, or *turn* to the Holy One] even in the face of such awesome judgment?

*May you run into His Shelter, and realize that He is your Life,
and that for you the ways of Egypt and Babylon and Rome are death.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 18:28-29

*For you will light my lamp, O Holy One.
My God will light up my darkness.*

*For by you, I advance through a troop.
By my God, I leap over a wall.*