

Shiur L'Yom Revi'i¹

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Va'era:*** **Exodus 7:25 - 8:19**
 Haftarah: **Ezekiel 29:6[b]-12**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Revelation 16:12-14**

Swamp creatures came up *[from the polluted marshes where water had turned to blood]*
and invaded/covered/filled the land.

[Exodus 8:6]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 18:27;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 12, *Sh'ma Koleinu* [*Hear our Cry*]

Vayimalei shiv'at yamim – *And seven days were fulfilled ...* ***acharei hakot Adonai et-ha-Ye'or*** – *after the Holy One struck the Nile.* **Exodus 7:25.**

Egypt is reeling. Not long ago *sticks were sticks, crocodiles were crocodiles, water was water, blood was blood, dirt was dirt, and lice were lice.* But now strange and paradigm-shifting things are happening all across the country. The critical lines between the elements of Creation have broken down here. First shepherds' rods and magician's staves shape-shifted into crocodiles and went cannibalistic in Pharaoh's courts. Then all the surface water in the entire nation mutated into blood. So what's next? How crazy will it get? Will creatures from the swamps abandon their assigned domains and scurry around urban areas like street rats? Will clods of topsoil become living mounds of crawling, biting, and blood-sucking lice? Will predatory beasts from nearby jungles trade their natural habitat for suburbia and start behaving like feral alley cats? Will the parasites and micro-organisms that the swamp creatures and jungle predators carry escape their immune hosts and generate an outbreak of some never-heard-of disease in species of domesticated livestock? Will totally incompatible elements like ice and fire rain down from the same cloud?

Hey! Who Is In Charge Here? Whose Ecosystem Is This, Anyway?

"Why is this happening", everyone is asking. Well, if they really wanted to know, they would be asking the latest wanna-be avatar-of-Horus to sit on Egypt's throne. Thinking himself smarter and stronger than the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth, Who sustains the ecosystems of the world by keeping their components in their place, Pharaoh has mocked the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. As a result, the Holy One took away the protection of the dividing lines He had spoken into being during Creation week - just for a little while. He is showing

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Pharaoh and everyone else exactly *Who is wise* and *who is foolish*, and *Who is mighty* and *who is powerless*. How far is the Holy One prepared to let this little demonstration of what happens when there is a slight ‘slippage of boundary lines’ go? Just how many unravelings of the Created Order’s strategic barriers will it take to get Pharaoh to fess up to his folly and cooperate with the Grand Plan?

***Pharaoh Controls the Water the Hebrews Drink;
But Who Controls the Water Pharaoh Drinks?***

This is getting serious! An entire nation/ethnicity/culture has denied the existence of the One Who gave the Earth its light – is it any wonder that nation/ethnicity/culture is reaping a harvest of *tohu v’vohu*. and all the fresh water in Egypt immediately turned to blood. The Hebrews are calling the seven-day adventure in primordial chaos *Ot Ha-Dahm* – i.e. the *sign of blood*. The magicians in Pharaoh’s palace are blaming it on ‘Climate Change’. Some Hebrew greybeards are relating it to an old story their elders used to tell them once a year about a man named Hevel, who got murdered in a field by a jealous, suspicious, offended brother. Hevel’s innocent blood had quite a testimony to give, it is said. And, to hear the *Chaims* and *Mordechais* around the campfire tell it, so does the blood of all those helpless male babies Pharaoh ordered drowned in the Nile! The Egyptian ‘wise men’, of course, insist that it is nothing of the sort - just some man-induced phenomenon, resulting directly from human industriousness, on the one hand, and from the proliferation of domesticated cows, sheep, goats, horses, camels, and donkeys on the other. Which theory do you think requires more blind faith?

Some have said that Moshe’s God warned Pharaoh that this kind of thing would happen if he refused to let the Hebrews go - see **Exodus 7:17**. But Pharaoh has never been much of one for listening. So Someone, somewhere said *Yehi dahm* – let there be *blood* - and lo, blood *was*. It would have been impressive enough if the waters had merely undergone a change in color such that they looked like blood; but that is not what happened at all. Egypt’s waters did not just *look like* blood. They did not just take on a bright red hue. They really *became* blood in substance. The molecules of H₂O took on erythrocytes, thrombocytes, platelets, plasma, and living mammalian proteins. It started with the Nile, where Moshe dipped the tip of his rod – but it quickly expanded to every drop of exposed water.

Never has anything like this happened before. Never have Egyptians felt so vulnerable, so helpless, and ... so ... THIRSTY! But what does it all mean?

The Boys Are Back In Town!

After visiting and conversing at length with the Creator, Moshe and Aharon are acting inspired and energized again. Moshe has shaken off his gloom and depression. Both have overcome any hint of rejection complex. Moshe has arisen from his pile of ashes, and Aharon has exchanged his sackcloth for a prophet's mantle. Just look at those two – they have their prophetic fire back! They are not advocating social justice anymore; they are representing a Kingdom of perfect Divine justice. They are not debating principles of fairness, morality, or expediency anymore; they are bringing what has been decreed in the Heavens to pass upon the earth. The words the pair are using aren't human words, aimed at the human mind or conscience anymore; they are *devarim* straight from the Creator of the Universe. They are no longer expressing human outrage over politics, ideology, or religion; they are speaking on behalf of Someone else – and that Someone Else is punctuating every word they speak with impressive action. You know ... there just might be hope for the boys – and for us all - yet! The 'boys' are back, big time – with the afterglow of the burning thorn bush shining on their countenances. As a result there is a bright red toxic soup occupying the space where the Nile used to run. It is starting to turn black – and smell – and emit noxious fumes. It has gotten so bad that the slime pits and brick factories along the Nile, and consequently the store city construction projects that depend upon those slime pits and brick factories, have completely shut down. Pharaoh's decree doubling our workload notwithstanding, we are getting our three days off – and probably a whole lot more – after all! All Africa, Europe, and Asia are buzzing about it. This is the kind of event that might just wind up being whispered about at dinner tables for who knows how many generations!

Some are being inspired and empowered by the changes that are taking place; others are downright furious about the disturbance to the '*status quo*'. For the latter group the return of Moshe and Aharon has stirred up dark, swirling waves of primeval hatred and bloodlust. It is going to be interesting to see how this all unfolds.

It is All Part of a Grand Eternal Plan;

And Don't Tell Pharaoh, but It is a Long Way From Being Over!

The God of Avraham, of Yitzchak, and Ya'akov is the only One Who knows exactly how this is going to play out. He has had this season planned, and the entire game-changing sequence of redemptive events that is about to play out choreographed, since before the beginning of the world. The elite, powerful, and highly-educated men of science and religion who the common man thinks are *in the know* are, as always, absolutely clueless as to what is really going on – or even Who is really behind it. Without Divine inspiration and empowerment mere humans – whatever their IQs, degrees, or pedigrees - never have any grid through

which to filter or interpret what is really happening around them. They just like to pretend – and talk - like they do.

What was so different about Moshe this time around? This time he did not think, speak or behave like the rest of the people in the culture into which he was sent. He did not admire what they admired, lust after what they lusted after, celebrate what they celebrated, eat what they ate, or fear what they feared. He saw things no one else saw. He heard voices no one else heard. And he carried on a running conversation - out loud at times - with an invisible friend. But suddenly everyone was talking about this guy. And somehow he strolled un-accosted into and out of the halls of the most powerful government of the world carrying nothing but a shepherd's rod. Even Pharaoh had begun to take seriously what he has to say.

Now everyone in Egypt is watching to see what Moshe – and his brother, and his God - will say and do next. Pharaoh and his advisors have been rocked back onto their heels. Suddenly a son of slaves, once accused of murder, has become the *hottest ticket in the commonwealth*. “*What planet did this guy come from?*” people asked each other. “*I wonder what else he has up his sleeve!*” is being whispered around tables in both palaces and slave quarters.

Each of us is designed to develop that exact kind of effect on each of our assigned spheres of influence. Each of us is called, commissioned, and empowered to speak words and perform works that carry the weight of the Holy One's glory. So, the question on the table is: *what is holding you back?* Put another way, the question is *what aspect[s] of mind- and soul-numbing Egyptian-style bondage are you allowing to hinder and suppress the new-kid-in-town anointing the Holy One has written in His Book concerning your life?*

***The Messenger is Scary-Looking –
But the Message He Has Come to Bring is Much Scarier!***

Not long ago Moshe touched his shepherd's rod to the surface of the Nile and *the river immediately turned into blood*. Thank goodness it wasn't permanent. Torah tells us the blood flow lasted *only 7 days*. It stopped just as quickly as it began. Though it was shockingly *macabre*, it wasn't deadly - to humans at least². It was just a 'sign'. The message however was unmistakable:

“Dear Egypt, Dear Sons and Daughters of the Avrahamic Covenant, and Dear World:

SomeOne unseen and wonderful – yet potentially terrifying - is in your midst. This SomeOne is far greater than Moshe or Aharon or this or any

² Exodus 7:21 tells us, however, that *‘the fish-life that was in the River died, and the River became foul.’*

other King or Pharaoh. This Someone could bless you in ways beyond your wildest imagination, and could lead you in the greatest, most glorious mission of redemption the world has ever known – or He could destroy you in an instant. Any time He wants, your land, your property, your income-stream, your children, your kingdom – indeed even your very life-breath - are His.

Will you gladly surrender what you cannot keep in the world as you know it for that which you can never lose in the Glorious Kingdom He is bringing forth? It is all up to you. So what is it going to be?

Meanwhile ... How Goes it With the Hebrews?

Keep in mind that the ten *otot* [signs] the Holy One performs beginning with *ot dahm* [the sign of blood] are *acts of courtship* intended by the Holy One to have an effect upon the Hebrew people as much as they are acts of judgments against Pharaoh. Without making any direct approach to the Hebrews whatsoever, the Holy One is using these *otot* to reveal Himself to, call forth, and woo *the great, great grandchildren of the Avrahamic Covenant*. He intends to use these evidences of His ‘Mighty Hand’ to inspire His Chosen Group of World-Changers, to capture their hearts, and to gently but inexorably draw them to Himself.

How are the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov supposed to respond to this season of overtures by their ancestors’ God? Though these folks had heard stories as they were growing up about the Holy One’s interactions with heir ancestors, they themselves had never *personally* heard the Holy One’s Beautiful Voice. They had never *personally* seen a single manifestation of His Presence. Their focus had been on getting along with their Egyptian neighbors, on building Pharaoh’s storehouses, and on surviving if not prospering in the land of pleasant distractions in which they lived and worked. None of the Hebrews of that day had ever *personally* experienced the power - and *surgeon’s precision* - of the movement of the Holy One’s strong right Hand.

Well, until *ot dahm* [*the sign of blood*], that is. Seldom considered in the literature is the effect of *ot dahm* on the Hebrew slave population. This is understandable, of course, since the narrative Torah does not specifically tell us what the Hebrew population thought about *ot dahm*. But let’s think this through, shall we?

So ... What Exactly Did Ot Dahm Mean To the Hebrews?

First of all, since the Hebrew slave population was dependent upon Pharaoh and his nation’s economy for daily bread, the Hebrews were just as dependent upon the Nile River as were the Egyptians. And since the Holy One had not yet set Israel apart from the Egyptians, the Hebrews were still toiling away in the work camps

assigned to them by Pharaoh's taskmasters. What did *ot dahm* mean to them? Well, what would a *complete water outage* [remember, there was no water source in ancient Egypt but the Nile] accompanied by an *environmental disaster* - not just untold volumes of blood, but dead fish, aquatic creatures, and waterfowl everywhere - mean at any workplace *you know*? In most places it means *work completely shuts down*. No water³, you see, means *no mortar* - and *no bricks*. Production of Pharaoh's store cities - and everything else - *screeches to a halt*. Slaves sit idle while taskmasters assess the situation and mull over what can be done.

With the environmental impact of trillions of cubic meters of blood polluting every above-ground water source, work would probably be shut down for *weeks* - a whole-lot more than the 3-day period Moshe had requested that the Hebrews be allowed to take off work to hold a *chag* [festive celebration] to the Holy One. Hebrews - and all other slaves, for that matter - get time off ... *whether Pharaoh likes it or not*. He is *powerless to stop it*.

Secondly, consider what the specific use of *blood* said to the Hebrews. The Holy One would begin and end His series of ten *otot* [signs] with blood. From *blood flowing in the Nile* to *blood splashed on the doorposts*, the Holy One was making a point. He was sealing His beautiful *promise of betrothal* [Exodus 6:6-8] - *with blood*. And what is more, He was saying to the descendants of Avraham, of Yitzchak, and of Ya'akov [if you will forgive a literary paraphrase⁴],

*I remember, and keep full account of,
every single drop of blood Pharaoh has ever extracted from you -
from the blood of the male babies he ordered thrown in the Nile
to the smallest bubble of blood brought forth by the taskmaster's whip -
I remember! Oh yes, My Beloved, I remember -
and I will recompense blood for blood!*

While this is clearly the message being communicated by the Holy One to Avraham's descendants through *ot dahm*, most of those to whom the message is being communicated simply do not yet have ears to hear - or faith to receive - this message. Hence the Holy One has plans to restate the message in slightly different terms *nine more times* - each restatement accompanied by its own set of stunning special effects. Behold - it is time for another *ot* [sign].

³ The text of Torah indicates that '*all of the Egyptians dug next to the river for water to drink*' - Exodus 7:24. The text does not say that sufficient quantities of usable water were found to carry on commerce. At most, they found enough water to drink to keep them all alive during the seven days of the *ot dahm*.

⁴ The words in italics are merely a literary paraphrase. The author is not claiming them to be part of or equal to Scripture. These words merely assist the author in communicating what the author perceives as the essence of the message to Yisrael implicit in the *ot dahm* [blood plague].

Ot ha-Tz'farde'im ***[The Sign of the Swamp Creatures]***

At the end of the narrative regarding *ot dahm* Torah tells us that the Holy One sent Moshe back to Pharaoh with the same message: ***Shalach et-ami*** – i.e. *Send My People out ... veyav'duni* - so they can serve Me. Exodus 7:26. The Holy One then specifically told Moshe to inform Pharaoh that if he refused the Holy One was going to bring a *second strange phenomenon* to bear upon his nation – an invasion of amphibious creatures from the marshes around the Nile.

V'im-ma'en atah l'shale'ach
And If you refuse to let them leave,

hineh anochi nogef et-kol-gevuleicha b'tzfarde'im
Behold, I will strike all your territories with swamp creatures.

And thus we discover that Phase II of the Holy One's courtship plan relative to the people He covenanted with Avraham to make His *am segulah* involves something the Hebrew text of Torah calls *tz'farde'im*. English translations of the Bible have traditionally rendered this as 'frogs'. The Hebrew term *tz'farde'im*⁵, however, is a generic term that includes not only frogs, but all kinds of swamp creatures. Some Hebrew commentators believe the term as used in the Exodus account refers to not just to frogs but also to every other kind of African-continent 'swamp creature' - most notably *crocodiles, hippos, monitor lizards, water snakes, and snapping turtles*⁶.

The Holy One wanted Pharaoh to know exactly what would happen if /when he refused to let the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov go. Hence He had Moshe and Aharon explain in frightening, gory detail what was about to transpire:

V'sharatz ha-Ye'or tzfarde'im v'alu
The Nile will swarm with swamp creatures, and when they emerge,

⁵ *Tz'farde'im* is *tzade, peh/feh, resh, dalet, ayin, yod, mem sofit*. Strong's Hebrew word # 6854, it is pronounced *tze-far-day'-eem*.

⁶ The author's point is not to argue that the creatures were – or were not – something more than just frogs. The issue is not what the creatures were – because no one alive today really knows or can know. The 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. The author has chosen to give the Hebrew word used to describe the creatures – *tz'farde'im* – a broad, inclusive interpretation for two reasons. First, because *tz'farde'im* is a generic rather than a specific term, a compound term the first part of which means early rising [i.e. nocturnal] and the latter part of which means of/from the swamp; secondly, because in the Book of Revelation, a corresponding 'book-end' plague of swamp creatures will re-occur, and the author of that book makes it plain that the creatures involved in the book-end 'plague' are not ordinary frogs at all, but are instead *evil spirits that looked like frogs*, that *come out of the mouth of the Beast* and his false prophet, perform miraculous signs, and gather the kings of the earth for battle at Armageddon. **Revelation 16:12-16.**

uva'u b'veiteicha uv'chadar mish'kavcha v'al-mitateicha
they will be in your palace, in your bedroom, and [even] in the bed in which you sleep.

Uv'veit avadeicha uv'ameicha
[They will be in] the homes of your officials and people,

uvetanureicha uvemish'arotecha
even in your ovens and in your kneading bowls.

Uveicha uv'ameicha uv'chol-avadeicha
And you, your people, and your officials

ya'alu ha-tzfardei'im
will be overcome with swamp creatures.

It definitely sounds messy and unpleasant, and unsanitary. But Pharaoh is *not impressed*. The Holy One *suspected as much*. So, with the officials of Pharaoh's court still looking on and with Pharaoh's face still in mid-sneer, the Holy One tells Moshe and Aharon that it is time to let the second 'plague' begin:

Vayomer Adonai el-Moshe emor el-Aharon
The Holy One said to Moshe, 'Tell Aharon

neteh et-yadcha b'mateicha
to point the rod/staff he holds in his hand

al ha-neharot al ha-ye'orim v'al ha-agamim
at the rivers, canals and reservoirs,

v'ha'al et ha-tz'farde'im al-eretz Mitzrayim
and swamp creatures will emerge upon Egypt.'

What, you may ask, was up with the *rod/staff* 'cue' instruction? Why did the Holy One's instructions involve starting the swamp creature invasion by having Aharon point the rod/staff at Egypt's rivers, canals, and reservoirs? Please understand that the Holy One did not need Aharon's pointing of the rod toward the rivers, canals and reservoirs of Egypt to call forth the *tz'farde'im*. The rod was not a 'magic wand'. It had no power of its own. The power, as always, was in the *Words* of the Holy One. The pointing of the rod was simply a *dramatic gesture* designed for its effect upon Pharaoh and his court.

Pharaoh and his officials knew the tricks of 'magic'. Ancient Egypt was *fascinated* by the 'occult arts'. When they saw swamp creatures emerge from the Nile, the irrigation canals, and the reservoirs around them as if on cue when Aharon raised the rod that had turned into a crocodile, the Holy One knew they would be *intrigued*. And when they later received reports from all over Egypt that the same thing occurred everywhere at the same time – the very instant Aharon raised that *crocodile rod* – He knew that they would be *impressed*. The point that could not have been lost on them was that the God on whose behalf Moshe and Aharon were

speaking *was real*; that He *meant business*; that He was *true to His Word*; and that He was *100% responsible for this strange occurrence*. The fact that the creatures began coming into the cities of Egypt at the very instant of the pointing of the rod meant that no one could later argue with a straight face that the frogs, crocodiles, etc. were merely fleeing the pollution of the Nile riverbed where they normally lived, or were behaving so strangely simply because the death of all the fish in the Nile had reduced them to the point of starvation.

With the following words Torah tells a stunning story of how lower levels of Creation respond to the voice and direction of the Creator when mankind refuses.

V'yet Aharon et-yado al meymeit Mitzrayim

Aharon held his hand out over the waters of Egypt,

vata'al ha-tz'fardea vateichas et-eret Mitzrayim

and the swamp creatures emerged, covering Egypt.

Swamp creatures. Unclean beasts that crawl upon the earth. Leapers. Crawlers. Slitherers. *En masse*. Here they come, Egypt - as they have been commanded by the Creator. What, they must have wondered, did *this* mean? Generally, swamp creatures *avoid humans*. They do not usually come into human population centers and wreak havoc. Even the most aggressive species ordinarily will not attack a human unless disturbed or frightened. On a summer evening as the sun goes down, from a canoe on a bayou or swamp, for instance, you can hear them coming to life and going about their business. Shine a flashlight toward the water and you will see their eyes staring at you. Clap your hands or throw a rock in their direction and perhaps you will see some of them jump – or run. It is all very entertaining. It is surely nothing to be afraid of. As long as there are *only a few of them*, I mean. And as long as they *stay where they belong*.

But Now, Add the Supernatural Element!

But now imagine if you can swamp creatures *everywhere* – millions and millions of hippos, monitor lizards, crocodiles, frogs, snapping turtles, water moccasins – *responding on cue to a command*. Imagine seeing hundreds of them crawling, or hopping, up *your sidewalk*, looking in *your windows*. Imagine them somehow managing to get inside *your house*, going from room to room. Imagine swamp creatures climbing on *your furniture and walls*, and rummaging through *your kitchen*. Imagine snakes and frogs all over *your bathroom fixtures*. Imagine hippos and monitor lizards trampling your garden and eating your shrubbery. Imagine crocodiles slithering around *your bed*. Imagine every kind of slithering, crawling, leaping creature from the swamp ... *in your house, and in your bedchamber, and on your bed*.

Imagine slithering reptiles and amphibians ... *in your ovens, and in your kneading-*

troughs. Imagine all these creatures crawling, hopping, and climbing ... *on you, and on your people, and on all your servants*. Imagine swamp creatures *everywhere*. Imagine swamp creatures of all kinds, *croaking and screeching and grunting* simultaneously and aggressively in great numbers, forming a dull roar. Imagine swamp creatures *taking over your world – on Divine command!* Imagine swamp creatures staring at you *as if you just ate their mother*.

How do you deal with such a thing? How does life as we know it continue? Dare you try *to eat*? Dare you try *to sleep*? Dare you even try to *sit*? Dare you go *outside*? Dare you *stay inside*? Seriously – think about it! How are human beings supposed to cope with such an atmosphere-shifting challenge? How are they supposed to hold on to their sanity? Will there be *riots? Trampling deaths? Suicides? Murders? Looting? Fires* raging out of control? How long can this nightmare go on? Can't somebody – anybody - *do something*?

But ... What Can Be Done – and Who can Do it?

The truth of the matter is that there is a man who can stop this terrifying invasion. His name is Pharaoh. It is really a simple fix - all Pharaoh has to do to stop the swamp creature invasion is *to agree to let the people of Moshe's God go*. And at this stage all we are really talking about is letting them go for a three-day festival in the wilderness. Unfortunately, Pharaoh has *other priorities - and other plans*. When he calls in his wise men and court magicians it is not to solve the problem – but to actually make matters worse by *making more swamp creatures!* It seems like *sheer lunacy*. But Pharaoh's wish is the court magicians' command.:

Vaya'asu-chen ha-chartumim b'lateihem

And so the master symbolists used their hidden arts

vaya'alu et ha-tzfarde'im al-eretz Mitzrayim

And they made more swamp creatures emerge on Egyptian land.

[Exodus 8:3]

More swamp creatures? Seriously? “*Thanks for the help, Pharaoh!*”, the Egyptian people must have thought! With friends like these Any other bright ideas?

One More Night With the Unclean Creatures From the Swamp!

With *tz'farde'im* wreaking havoc throughout his land and with all his officials can do being to make the problem worse Pharaoh appears to give in. He verbally agrees to let the people go and worship the Holy One as Moshe and Aharon had requested - if only Moshe will ask the Holy One to take away the *tz'farde'im*. Here is the way Torah tells the story:

Hatiru el-Adonai veyaser ha-tzfarde'im mimeini ume'ami

Entreat the Holy One, that he take away the frogs from me, and from my people;

v'ashaleichah et ha-am v'yizbeichu l'Adonai

and I will let the people go, that they may make approach to the Holy One.

[Exodus 8:4]

It sounds like progress is being made. But then one of the most interesting and revealing dialogues of the Exodus narrative takes place. Moshe tests Pharaoh's will by actually offering to give him the honor of designating exactly *when* Moshe will pray for the *ot ha-tz'farde'im* to be lifted. That way when relief comes Pharaoh will know beyond question that just as the plague was begun on the Holy One's order with the raising of Aharon's rod, the plague was ended by the Holy One *in direct response to Moshe's prayer*.

If it were me that had been offered this honor I think I would say "*Pray right now, Moshe!*" Please Moshe - pray that the Holy One take away the *tz'farde'im* this very instant! Please do not make my people endure *one more minute* of frogs, snakes, lizards, turtles, or crocodiles! Neither I, nor my wife and children, nor my people, nor anyone in the world, should have to endure one more second of this nightmare! Right? But that is not the way Pharaoh responded. Instead the stubbornness of Pharaoh's will and the callousness of Pharaoh's heart toward his people – including his own wife and children – were both fully revealed. In Pharaoh's pride and arrogance he determined that they should all spend *one more long night with the swamp creatures!* Read it for yourself:

Vayomer l'machar

He [Pharaoh] said, "L'machar [i.e. "Tomorrow."]

vayomer kid'vareicha l'ma'an teida

As you say,' replied [Moshe]. 'You will then know

ki-eyn k'Adonai Eloheinu

that there is none like the Holy One our God

[Exodus 8:6]

Pharaoh chose the time. And if his people – even his own family - had to spend one more night with the swamp creatures ... so be it. This man was simply unwilling to give up *the illusion of being in control*. The lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life owned his soul.

The Holy One was not one bit surprised. The Holy One knew the king of Egypt very well. And the Holy One also knew what the result of the removal of the swamp creatures from the palace of this man would be. He knew that the moment the *tz'farde'im* were gone from his palace Pharaoh would break his word. He would, once again, refuse to let the Holy One's Beloved go. And the Holy One also knew exactly what He was going to do about that. Lice, anyone? *So let it be written, so let it be done*.

Ot Ha-Chinim [the Sign of Lice]

Even with the stench of decomposing swamp creatures everywhere the Holy One continued to make His Presence and His Power felt in Mitzrayim by imposing a third judgment upon Pharaoh and his land a ‘plague’ of *chinim*⁷, traditionally translated into English as ‘lice’. Here is how Torah records it:

Aharon et-yado v'mateihu vayach et-afar ha-aretz

Aharon held out his hand with his staff, and struck the dust of the earth.

vatehi ha-kinam ba'adam uv'behemah

The lice appeared, attacking man and beast.

kol-afar ha-aretz hayah chinim b'chol-eretz Mitzrayim

Throughout all Egypt the dust turned into lice.

[Exodus 8:13]

Lice are parasitic insects that live on the bodies of animals – or humans. They *bite*. They *attach themselves*. They *cause sores*. They *lay eggs and reproduce*. They *make you itch*. They *cause infections*. They *spread diseases*. And what do they do once they imbed themselves in your flesh? They suck your *blood*.

I think we are seeing the development of a theme, Dear Reader. Blood seems to be playing a prominent role in the Exodus story.

Lice are, to say the least, nasty little critters. But Torah considers them something else. In the words of Pharaoh’s magicians, they represent not nasty little critters, but *etzba Elohim* – *i.e.* ‘the finger of God’.

Etzba Elohim Hu! [It is the ‘Finger of God’]

Pharaoh was so maniacal at this point that he called his magicians – not to somehow do away with the lice but actually *to produce more of them*. He just wanted to prove he was still in control. Like an obstinate child who stares up at the teacher who just administered a paddling and says “*That didn’t hurt me!*”, so Pharaoh puts on a show of toughness for Moshe. He calls his magicians and orders them to produce lice.

Hey, it had worked with the rods that turned into crocodiles. It had worked with the water that turned to blood. And it even worked with the swamp creatures. But it simply will not work anymore. The Holy One will not allow it.

V'yomeiru ha-chartumim el-Pharaoh

Them the master symbolists said to Pharaoh:

Eitzba Elohim hu

'It/he is the finger of God'.

[Exodus 8:15]

⁷ Chinim is the plural form of Strong’s Hebrew word #3654, *kaf, nun sofit*, pronounced *kane*.

What is *etzba Elohim* - the ‘finger of God’? The term is found only one other time in Torah – i.e. in Exodus 31:18⁸, where we are told:

*And when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai,
he gave to Moshe, two tables of testimony, tables of stone,
written with ... etzba Elohim - the finger of God.*

Does the Holy One really have ‘fingers’? I suspect based upon an analysis of the two usages that when used in Torah the anthropomorphic term “the finger of God’ is a kind of *Hebrew idiom* referring to the fine motor activities of the *Ruach HaQodesh* or ‘Holy Spirit’.

We have to this point spoken very little in these studies about the *Ruach*. What has Torah taught us about the *Ruach* thus far? Merely that the *Ruach* appears to be the aspect of the Holy One’s essence which most closely corresponds to a human being’s *life’s-breath* or *soul*. The *Ruach* is that aspect of the Divine Persona which, as originally described in Genesis 1:2, *disturbs the ‘deep’* and brings forth the Sound of the Divine Voice in order to *speak forth His Will*.

The *Ruach* is not shown by Torah as being *separate* or *separable* from the Holy One. In creation week it was the *Ruach* that gave fullness to Creation by separating/dividing things – for instance, by separating/dividing the heavens from the earth, separating/dividing darkness from light, separating/dividing day from night, separating/dividing the firmament above from the firmament below, and separating/dividing dry land from the waters of earth.

In today’s aliyah the *Ruach* – idiomatically referred to as the ‘finger of God’ – enters the narrative of Torah to perform the separating/dividing function of Divine Creation again. This time He is going to *separate/divide the Holy One’s Beloved people* – i.e. the seed of Yisrael/Ya’akov - from the people and other slave populations of Egypt with whom they have intermixed and intermingled.

Everyone in Egypt is now busy scratching - and miserable because of – thousands upon thousands of *lice bites*. Work in the various store city projects of Pharaoh has ground to an *unplanned halt*. *Productivity*-mode has given way to *survival*-mode. From this point forward, the plagues will affect only the people of Egypt, but not the Chosen Ones of the Holy One.

Consider the season of Divine Courtship to now be in *full swing*.

Questions For Today’s Study

⁸ See also Deuteronomy 9:10, where this event is recalled by Moshe to the generation who will enter and possess Kena’an under Y’hoshua.

1. In today's aliyah the judgments of the Holy One on Mitzrayim begin to occur with increasing frequency. After 7 days of Egypt's water becoming blood (see Tuesday's aliyah for details), the Holy One tells Moshe to return to Pharaoh and demand again that he let the Hebrew slaves go. If he refuses, Moshe is to threaten a second plague – swamp creatures.

[A] For what reason or purpose did Moshe request that Pharaoh let the descendants of Yaakov/Yisrael go this time?

[B] Why do you think the Holy One's demand was not to let the people be freed from their slavery, or to have their burdens reduced? What was at stake?

[C] What was the second "plague" threatened by Moshe?

[D] Why do you think the Holy One chose *tzefardea* as the instrumentality of the second "plague"?

[E] Were the descendants of Ya'akov spared this plague, or did they suffer it along with the residents of Egypt?

2. List the places Moshe tells Pharaoh the *tz'fardea* will go after leaving the River.

3. What do Pharaoh's magicians do after the *tz'fardea* plague begins? Is this helpful or harmful to Egypt? Explain.

4. After his land is filled with *tz'fardea*, Pharaoh appears to give in. He agrees to let the people go and worship the Holy One if Moshe will only ask the Holy One to take away the *tz'fardea*. Then one of the most interesting and revealing dialogues of the Exodus narrative takes place. Moshe gives Pharaoh the honor of designating exactly *when* Moshe will pray for the *tz'fardea* plague to be lifted - so that when relief comes Pharaoh will know beyond question that it was lifted by the Holy One in direct response to Moshe's prayer.

[A] What is Pharaoh's response?

[B] Why do you think Pharaoh did not ask Moshe to pray *right away* (what does that answer tell you about Pharaoh)?

[C] After the Holy One responded to Moshe's prayer and destroyed the *tzefardea* that were in the houses, fields, courtyards, and villages, who hardened Pharaoh's heart at this point – *Pharaoh* or *the Holy One*?

5. Even with the stench of decomposing swamp creatures everywhere the Holy One continues to make His Presence and His Power felt in Mitzrayim by imposing a third judgment upon Pharaoh and his land – a 'plague' of something which in Hebrew is called *chanim* [from Strong's Hebrew word #654, pronounced *kane-eem*].

[A] What third judgment/plague does the Holy One release upon Mitzrayim in today's aliyah?

[B] With regard to this third judgment/plague, where were the infesting

creatures to come from?

[C] In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the word translated as "dust" in verses 16 and 17. Write the Hebrew word and describe the Hebraic word picture it presents.

[D] In Strong's and Gesenius, look up Strong's Hebrew word #3654 (*ken*). Write the word in Hebrew consonants with vowel sounds. What do you think this "plague" consisted of – lice? Gnats? Something else?

[E] Why do you think Pharaoh's magicians tried to duplicate this third judgment/plague? What purpose would that have served?

[F] What was it that the infesting creatures of this third judgment/plague attacked?

[G] By what words did the magicians of Pharaoh describe this third judgment/plague - that made it unique?

[H] What was Pharaoh's response to this third judgment/plague?

[I] Did this plague affect the descendants of Ya'akov as well as the Egyptians?

6. In today's haftarah *Va'era* the Holy One sits as Judge of the Nations. He first reads the "indictment" or list of charges against Pharaoh of Egypt. Then He describes the punishment He intends to inflict.

*All the inhabitants ... have been a staff of reed to the house of Yisra'el.
When they took hold of you by your hand, you did break,
and did tear all their shoulders;
and when they leaned on you, you broke, and made all their loins to be at a stand.*

*Therefore thus says the Holy One Adonai:
Behold, I will bring a sword on you, and I will cut off from you man and animal.
The land of Mitzrayim will become a desolation and a waste;
and they will know that I am the Holy One.*

*Because he has said, "The river is mine, and I have made it;
therefore, behold, I am against you, and against your rivers,
and I will make the land of Mitzrayim an utter waste and desolation,
from Migdol to Seven even to the border of Kush.*

*No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of animal shall pass through it,
neither shall it be inhabited forty years.
I will make the land of Mitzrayim a desolation
in the midst of the countries that are desolate;
and her cities among the cities that are laid waste shall be a desolation forty years;
and I will scatter the Mitzrim among the nations,
and will disperse them through the countries."*

[A] Of what does the Holy One accuse Egypt as a nation?

[B] How does the Holy One describe the punishment He is going to inflict upon Egypt for this sin?

[C] Of what does the Holy One accuse Pharaoh personally?

[D] How does the Holy One describe the punishment He is going to inflict upon Pharaoh (and Egypt) for this?

7. For today's B'rit Chadasha reading I have chosen the narrative of the sixth bowl wonder of the Book of Revelation. The end times will, according to the B'rit Chadasha, witness plagues similar to, but in far greater magnitude than, the plagues which were inflicted on Egypt. These plagues parallel the Egyptian plagues. Thus one could say that the horror of the Exodus is not "over" - but is just beginning. Here is the vision seen by Yochanan:

The sixth [angel] poured out his bowl on the great river, the Perat. Its water was dried up, that the way might be made ready for the kings that come from the sunrise.

*I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon,
and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet,
three unclean spirits, something like frogs;
for they are spirits of demons, performing signs;
which go forth to the kings of the whole inhabited eretz,
to gather them together for the war of that great day of God, Shaddai.*

[A] Who poured out the "bowl" that set in motion the plague we read about in today's B'rit Chadasha reading?

[B] Who gave this "bowl-pourer" his instructions [See Revelation 15:6 - 16:1].

[C] What was the first effect the pouring out of the sixth bowl had on the earth?

[D] The second consequence of the pouring out of the sixth bowl was that 3 frog-like creatures came upon the earth. From whence did each frog-like creature come?

[E] What function did the frog-like creatures perform?

[F] As what does our reading characterize the frog-like creatures?

[G] To whom are the frog-like creatures sent?

[H] For what purpose are the frog-like creatures sent?

[I] How, if at all, is this "frog" plague like that of our Torah aliyah for today? How is it different?

*May you never be so foolish
as to choose another night with unclean creatures
over the glory of God.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 18:27

*For you will save the afflicted people,
But the haughty eyes you will bring down.*