

Shiur L'Yom Sh'lishi¹

[Tuesday's Study]

READINGS: **Torah Bo:** **Exodus 10:21-29**
 Haftarah: **Jeremiah 46:13-14**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Romans 12:2**

Total darkness covered all Egypt for three days.

[Exodus 10:22]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 18:43-45;

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

Vayomer Adonai el-Moshe – Then the Holy One said to Moshe ... *Neteh yadeicha al-ha-shamayim* – Stretch out your hand toward the Heavens ... *v'hi choshech al-eretz Mitzrayim* - and there will be darkness throughout the land of Egypt. Exodus 10:21a.

We are so used to the energizing power of light that we tend to take the Divine gift of 'ohr' for granted. But what if it were taken away from us? Without light photosynthesis cannot happen - which means no crops would grow. We would have to live without the produce of orchards, vineyards, gardens, pastures, and fields. Without light beauty cannot be seen – no color, no spectrum, no rainbow. Without light there can be no depth perception, no dimensional comprehension, no visualized understanding. Without light the human body does not incorporate Vitamin D. Without light there would be no sense of time, no circadian rhythm, and no order to either our sleep or wake cycle. Without light nocturnes would be ever present – slinking and slithering unseen. Without light the evaporation, precipitation, condensation cycle would collapse on itself. Without light winter temperatures would be unbearable. Without light we would have no use for signage, roadways, or traffic lights. I dare say, we would not be alive for long if light was permanently removed from our environment. All we would have then would be ... DARKNESS!

The Darkness Phenomenon

Are you afraid of the dark? I am not talking about whether you shudder at the thought of a monster hiding in your closet. I am asking if you have darkness anxiety – *i.e.* if you are intimidated by darkness itself? Does the inability to see what is in front of, beside, or behind you – in the *unseen realm* – terrify you? Do you tend to lose enthusiasm for life – or sink into depression - if the sun doesn't break through the clouds for more than a couple of days? Do you feel closer to the Holy One – or at least more in control of your own destiny – in a brightly lit

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environment? Does darkness bring out the best in you – or the worst? Imagine how a three-day period of complete black-out would feel – and how it would affect your self-talk, your relationships, and your sense of well-being. Imagine 72 straight hours of total eclipse involving all luminaries in the cosmos simultaneously. Imagine a time when no lamp will light, and no fire will burn. And, of course, imagine no electricity, no battery back-ups no cell phones, no television, no radio, no internet, no telephones or social media - not so much as the flicker of a match or candle. Talk about going back to the ‘dark ages’!

Hello Darkness, My Old Friend ...

We have seen some amazing things in the first two weeks of our *Great Nation Birthing Saga*. We have seen the Holy One step out of eternity into time and out of the realm of stale, silent historicity into the realm of vibrant interaction and open conversation. First, He appeared in a humble thorn bush and called Moshe, son of Amram, to serve as His spokesman. Since then He has made His Presence known to the world through multiple *otot* – *i.e.* evidences of the nearness and life-changing power of the unseen realm. Each *ot* has been designed to shake the sons and daughters of Avraham out of the hypnotic trance that Western Culture has cast on them and inaugurate their return to true identity, mission, and purpose. He kicked this campaign off by bringing all work in the slime pits and store cities to a screeching halt. He accomplished this in one week - by *causing every drop of exposed H₂O in Egypt to turn to blood*. Then He called forth *creatures from the marshlands* to invade the cities and houses of the people who were oppressing His Covenant nation; transformed every square centimeter of Egyptian-controlled topsoil into *crawling, biting, blood-sucking insects*; caused *swarms of fearsome predators* to leave their natural habitats and start prowling the villages, towns, and cities; caused the domestic livestock of the Egyptians to fall ill and die where they stood; and released a mixture of hail and fire from the skies that destroyed Egypt’s entire barley and flax crops, both of which were ‘in the head’ at that time. When Pharaoh still refused to let the Hebrews go, the Holy One kicked the pressure level up another carefully measured notch, calling forth a supernatural invasion of locusts that devastated whatever crops the supernatural hail had spared. Pharaoh just dug in his heels even further. He still adamantly refuses to let go of his death grip on the Hebrew population.

Pharaoh thinks He has found the weakness of the God of the Hebrews – *i.e.* that He refuses to maim and kill indiscriminately the way Pharaoh and his minions delight in doing. They are butchers, who revel in bludgeoning innocent victims into bloody pulp just because they can; the Holy One is not like them at all. He is a skillful surgeon who only cuts away what is absolutely necessary in order to stop a deadly disease from spreading and facilitate healing.

Who Goes There – Friend or Foe? Tyrant or Benefactor? Warrior or Suitor of Men?

Humankind is on notice. The Creator of the Heavens and the Earth has demonstrated that He can do whatever He wishes, whenever He wishes. Neither false gods, nor powerful Pharaohs, nor mighty armies, nor vast treasuries of wealth can even slow Him down, much less stop Him. He has revealed that He can fill and empty the breadbasket of the world, and exalt or humble, any nation at will.

Fortunately, however, the Creator is not out to destroy. He is not like men; He is not a crusader or a vigilante. He does not overreact to situations that do not go the way He likes, nor does He get offended at people who indulge in beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors outside His perfect Will. He does not judge people or situations anything like human kings judge them. Unlike men, He does not get disgusted, or succumb to moral indignation, or yield to ideological outrage. He always thinks long term. He always thinks about generations. And His thoughts and emotions are all centered on redemption. He therefore does not fly off the handle and maim, kill, or torture His most precious creation, or even its flawed institutions of government, in a fit of ill temper.

The Holy One is not attacking Egypt in a vengeful rage. He is doing only what is necessary to effectuate the release of His Covenant People from both the physical and emotional aspects of their bondage. He is not punishing or bludgeoning Egypt's citizenry – He is operating on a society's open wounds with the precision a skilled surgeon, determined to cause the least amount of collateral damage that the situation allows. He has no desire to drive Egypt into the sea, bomb it back into the Stone Age, execute its Pharaoh, or create mayhem. He is staying very calm. He is always leaving a very visible way of escape. He is always making plenty of room for mercy. What He is out to do, you see, is not condemn or wreak vengeance upon nations – even the most perverse and oppressive nation of them all, Egypt. What He is out to do is *redeem* individuals and families from all nations, tribes, clans, tongues, ethnic groups, and bloodlines of the earth. In order to do that, His Plan is to birth *His Own Nation* to walk among those nations, tribes, clans, etc., and to serve as His Emissaries, His Kingdom Ambassadors, and His Royal Priesthood to all the peoples and nations of the world. Just as He has promised the patriarchs, the model nation He intends to birth, and call *B'nei Yisrael* [the children of Israel], will be made up of the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov. He intends for B'nei Yisrael to walk in His Ways; He knows they will often fail to do so – but that will not stop His Plan. He intends for B'nei Yisrael to model His wisdom and His kindness to the world; He knows they will do so imperfectly at best, but He knows He can even use their fledgling

attempts to bring forth good in the world. He intends for B'nei Yisrael to delight in telling the world of, and showing them, His Goodness; He knows He can cover for them, and raise up other witnesses, when they falter in this mission. He intends for B'nei Yisrael – with all its/their faults - to prepare the way for the Messiah, Who will surely come. The Holy One has ordained, you see, that the Grand Plan of Redemption and Restoration begin and end with Avrahamic Seed, walking out the Avrahamic Covenant.

Time to Boil Water – And Exchange Recipes for Matzah!

We are thus, reading about a very important prophetic season in the Grand Redemptive Plan - a season in which *otot*, *i.e.* miraculous signs representing down payments by the Holy One on the essential promises of the Avrahamic Covenant, have been coming in waves. Each *ot* has proven more Covenant affirming and awe-inspiring than the last. In the aftermath of what the theologians will later call the plague of hail, therefore, *tension in Egypt is very, very high*. Everyone's nerves are on edge, as all of Egypt waits for the next shoe to drop. As always happens when a culture is under Divine Judgment, most people are in a state of denial. They have to come up with an explanation that does not involve their own toxicity. They have to come up with some form of narrative that takes the blame for the crisis off of their own societal complicity with the shedding of – and pollution of their land with - innocent blood. They seek to put the blame instead on some ethnic or economic or political group within their nation that they can label as evil, cast as 'the source of the problem', and target as a convenient scapegoat. I call it the '*take to the streets, grab a bullhorn, start a riot, and blame someone else*' defense mechanism. Alas, the problem almost always lies not with the man on the other end of the pointed finger, but with the man staring back at you from the mirror.

As always happens in troubled times, knee-jerk reactions are the order of the day. Agitators are agitating like crazy. So-called 'progressives' are pushing the envelope of anarchy in the name of 'freedom', 'tolerance', and 'diversity'. So-called 'Patriots' are advocating government crackdowns in the name of 'law and order' and 'morality'. Some are stockpiling weapons, food, and cryptocurrency, and forming militias; others are demanding that the populace – except for them – be forcibly disarmed, and that the government take away from the others, and redistribute to them, all the food and wealth the first group has accumulated. Haters absolutely love to hate on others, it seems - and there is nothing like a good crisis to stir the toxic cauldron of racial, economic, and ideological biases and real or imagined offenses that are always present in any people group and nation.

Dissimulation, disinformation, misinformation, and vain imagination are all running rampant. Panic and rage, fatalism and fury, simmer just below the surface of every conversation. Demagogues of every stripe are pontificating like mad. Ideologues on all sides are doubling down on their diatribes of emotionally charged rhetoric, trying to use the latest crisis as a flash point to win converts to their cause. Everyone with an agenda to push is in the street or square pointing fingers and shouting at either Pharaoh or the Hebrews – or whoever else they happen not to like or trust. Homes are divided. Neighborhoods are ready to erupt in violence. Riots are likely to erupt at any moment.

The damage to the greatest world superpower's infrastructure, political power grid, religious system, and economy has been incalculable. The threat of *sedition in the halls of government*, of *rebellion in the ranks of the military*, and of *riots in the streets* has become more and more real. There are fewer and fewer reasons each day for anyone – slave or free - to want to stay around the land of the Pyramids. More and more reasons are presenting themselves each day to make people want to leave. Those in denial can blame whoever their not-so-hidden prejudices want to be to blame – but the problem is always rebellion against the Creator of Heaven and Earth. And turning back to Him – and to His Ways person by person, household by household – is the only solution. Alas, the people of Egypt – from Pharaoh to his taskmasters to the women who work at the mill – want nothing to do with a real solution. They are fully content with just having someone – or some group of people - they have never liked to blame for the downfall of their nation.

As a result, in the cities along the Nile food becomes both more expensive and harder to find by the day. To bring the concept to modern times, think of finding nothing but empty shelves in your local supermarkets. Think of watching restaurants and cafés and coffee shops shut their doors. Think of hearing children, with swollen bellies, crying out with real, gnawing hunger pangs - in your neighborhood, and then even in your own home. Think of seeing what looks like Scarlet O'Hara of '*Gone With the Wind*' scrounging in the dirt of the abandoned garden next door in desperate quest of a misshapen onion or turnip – and realizing it is your wife or daughter. This is the inevitable fruit of a nation resorting to moralizing, sermonizing, pontificating and dissimulating, and blaming others instead of returning to the Creator of the Universe, making *teshuvah*, and being restored by His Mighty Hand.

What is going on in Egypt is in stark contrast to what is happening in the ancient Hebrew camps of Goshen. In those camps it is boom time. Fruits, vegetables, grain, meat are plentiful. Out of all Egypt only the Hebrews who began to

regather in their ancestral camp after the plagues began in the areas they had been assigned to work now have stores of food to eat. Why do they have plenty of food? It is not because they have prepped and stockpiled, Dear Reader. The reason they have plenty is because *as they are returning to the Most High and realigning their thoughts, words, and actions to the Avrahamic Covenant, they are being blessed from on High exactly as the Holy One promised.*

The Penultimate Contraction

The appointed time has come for the Holy One's ninth carefully measured strategic blow to be inflicted upon the land of the pyramids. The Holy One is about to strike that land with a terrifying form of supernatural darkness that will render everyone in it *totally immobile*. A strange, impenetrable darkness will settle in. The sun will not shine upon Egypt by day. The heavenly bodies will not cast a single ray of light upon Egypt at night. It will be *as if time stands still*. The streets will empty. The frightened Egyptians will have to huddle wherever they can find shelter.

All Egypt will be *frozen in place by fear*. They will be not only be *unable to see*, they will also be *unable to move*. No candles, no lamps will burn in their dwellings. All the wealth in the world will become useless. Food will become *irrelevant*. Sports, media, entertainment, philosophy, human government and institutionalized religion will all be clearly seen as the laughable absurdity they really are. Even commerce will fail.

Ot Ha-Choshech [the Sign of the Darkness]

What kind of darkness will this be that Torah says the Holy One is about to bring upon Egypt? It would not like the darkness of a normal night. The ancient text describes this special form of darkness both as *a thick darkness* and as *a darkness you could feel*². Really? A darkness you could FEEL? What does that mean, exactly? A *darkness you could feel* had to be more awesome than a total solar eclipse. It had to be more disabling than a Divinely enhanced and extended *khamsin* (Arabic for “wind of the desert”, a phrase describing a dust storm of such immense proportions that the world appears almost totally dark, even at mid-day). It had to be suffocating – with no fires burning because oxygen was being diluted by carbon dioxide.

We do not, of course, know exactly *how the Holy One did it*. The *mechanics* of the Holy One's ninth ot are not given by the Torah. But the result was:

² The Hebrew verb our English Bibles use to describe this is *y'mash, yod, mem, shin*, a form of the verb root *mashash, mem, shin, shin*, Strong's Hebrew word #4959, pronounced *maw-shawsh*'. *Mashash* means *to feel, or to grope*. It is first used in Genesis 27:12, to describe how Ya'akov was afraid his father Yitzchak would detect he was pretending to be Esav. Ya'akov asked his mother, “*What if my father feels [mashash] me, and recognizes me as a deceiver?*”

... *Vayehi choshech-af'lah b'chol-eretz Mitzrayim*

[T]here was thick³ darkness in all the land of Egypt

sh'loshet yamim lo-ra'u ish et-achiv

for three days they did not see one another,

v'lo-kamu ish mitachtav sh'loshet yamim

nor did anyone rise from his place ... for ... three ... days!

[Exodus 10:22-23(a)]

The Egyptians did not see one another *for three whole days*. Not a single person was able to “*rise from his place*” for three invisible evenings and three invisible mornings. Every single Egyptian man, woman, and child sat stunned and blind in his or her home, *totally incapacitated* for *72 long hours*. It was a darkness so *immense*, so *terrifying*, so *disabling*, that in Egypt no human interaction, nor even any human movement, was possible for 3 straight sunrise-sunset sequences. No one could go out of his or her home – or for that matter even leave the room he or she was in when the plague began. All *commerce completely stopped*.

They *could not see any other human being*. Did you *catch that part*? They *could not see any other human being*. Administrative Seclusion [*AdSec*] they call it in prisons today - but without any light whatsoever. If you want to experience what total helplessness feels like think about *total darkness* in *total seclusion*.

The Egyptians *could not even see their own faces in the mirror*. Nor could they *see their hands in front of their face*. Husbands could not see their wives. Mothers could not see their children. Children could not see their parents. No one knew if they ever would see or move again. What meaneth this?

A Taste of Primordial Darkness

The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as “darkness” in this passage is *choshech*⁴. It is the same thing that Torah tells us “*was upon the face of the waters*” of Creation before the *Ruach HaQodesh* moved to bring forth Divine Light. See Genesis 1:2, where Torah tells us:

*And the earth was without form, and void;
and darkness [i.e. choshech] was upon the face of the deep.
And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*

³ The Hebrew adjective our English Bibles translate as ‘thick’ in this passage is *af'lah*, *alef, feh, lamed, hey*, Strong’s Hebrew word #653, pronounced *aw-flaw*. It does not mean ‘thick’ in any other context. It really means ‘very dark’. It is derived from the Hebrew verb root *afel* (*alef, peh, lamed*), Strong’s Hebrew word #651, pronounced *aw-fawl*, which is believed to mean ‘to set as the sun’, or ‘to eclipse’.

⁴ *Choshech* is *chet, shin kaf sofit*. Strong’s Hebrew word # 2822, it is transliterated as *choshech*, and pronounced *kho-shek*.

The darkness with which the Holy One struck Egypt for 3 days was like unto this first, primordial darkness. In this kind of darkness, disorder leads to confusion, which leads to chaos.

A Darkness Pregnant with Hope

Choshech – the primordial kind of darkness – is oppressive, and fearful, and debilitating – but it is also, bless His Holy Name, *pregnant with hope*. Because *where there is deep darkness the Holy One can most dramatically reveal Himself*. The *Ruach HaQodesh* broods – moves with great emotion – over thick darkness, and, at the moment of deepest *choshech*, proclaims “*Light, be!*” And it is out of *choshech* that the Voice of the Holy One – and His redemption – come forth.

Psalm 18, which has been our meditation Psalm for the past few weeks, tells us that the Holy One *made darkness [choshech] his secret place, and that His sukkah round about Him was dark waters [and] thick clouds of the skies*. **Psalm 18:11**. And remember, *choshech* is that out of which in a few short days the Holy One will speak forth the Torah in the hearing of all Israel. **Deuteronomy 4:11, 5:23**. But now let’s look even deeper. There is *an even more amazing truth we need to see*.

Out of the Darkness Comes ...

The *choshech* form of darkness – the thick, debilitating type of darkness we see in the primeval deep and in the Holy One’s ninth “plague” upon Egypt – is also *always a precursor for the revelation of Messiah*. What do I mean by that statement? Let’s examine the evidence.

In Genesis 1 out of *choshech* Messiah was revealed as the Light of the World, the outgrowth of the Holy One’s Word. **Genesis 1:3**. In the parsha we are reading this week, out of *choshech* Messiah is going to be revealed as *the Lamb by Whose Blood covenant with the Holy One is cut* - and the One through whom the doors to redemption and salvation and deliverance are thrown open to man. Just a few chapters down the road in Torah, in parsha Yitro, out of *choshech* Messiah will be revealed on Mt. Sinai as *the Torah, the Way of truth and life, for those in covenant with the Holy One, who have experienced redemption, salvation, and deliverance*. And then of Messiah it will truly be said by the prophets “*The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light ...*”

From Whence Cometh B’nei Yisrael’s Light?

With that in mind let us turn our attention away from what is going on with the Egyptians and focus on something fascinating that is going on with the Hebrews. According to verse 23 of today’s aliyah, for the three-day period that *choshech* completely immobilized Egypt:

ul'chol-b'nei Yisra'el hayah ohr b'moshevetam
But all the children of Yisra'el had light in their dwellings.

In the ancestral camps of Goshen, you see, the process of responding to the Holy One's Divine Courtship was in full swing notwithstanding *ot ha-choshech*. From tent to tent the Hebrews were returning, by virtue of the Holy One's Divine drawing, to their *Hebrew roots* and to *the ancient paths of Avraham's covenantal relationship with the Creator* of Heaven and Earth. No taskmasters barked out assignments for them. No straw was left for them to gather. No kilns blazed. Not a single brick was made. Instead of bricks being produced by slaves, *living stones were being fitly joined together by the Ruach HaQodesh - stone upon stone*. Out of stones quarried far from Mount Moriyah there was being built *a habitation for the Living God – a holy nation, a kingdom of priests, a people set apart to the Holy One as His peculiar treasure*.

The Light in which the called-out ones of God walked during these precious hours was not the light of the sun⁵. No, there was no more natural light in Goshen than there was in the rest of Egypt. Verse 22 of our aliyah plainly and purposefully tells us that total darkness covered all of Egypt – which of course included Goshen - for three days.

Please also note that our text does not say that light illuminated the villages of Goshen in which the slaves lived. What was illuminated was not community centers where people gathered – it was only the dwellings⁶. Exodus 10:23. Inside the dwellings of the covenant people - in tent-by-tent, in house-by-house room-by-room - that is where the Holy One's Light miraculously appeared. The Light of the countenance of the Holy One shone upon His beloved. And in that Light the *proposal of divine betrothal* which Moshe as friend of the Bridegroom had brought from the Holy One to these people just a few weeks ago, which had been rejected at that time because of “anguish of spirit, and cruel bondage”, was being carefully – and prayerfully - reconsidered. Eight plagues ago He said to us:

V'hotzeti etchem mitachat sivlot Mitzrayim
I will bring you forth from your forced labor in Egypt

⁵ This should bring to the mind of the talmidim of Yeshua the following verse in Revelation 21 “*And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.*”, as well as the corresponding verse in Revelation 22: “*And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God gives them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.*”

⁶ The word our English Bibles translate as ‘dwelling’s here is *moshavtem*, a plural possessive third person form of the Hebrew word *moshav*, *mem*, *vav*, *shin*, *beit*, Strong’s word # H4186, pronounced *mo-shawv*. Figuratively it refers to encampments – places one ‘sits’, as the verb root is *yashav*, *yod*, *shin*, *beit*, Strong’s Hebrew word # 3427, meaning to *sit*.

v'hitzalti etchem mei'avodatam
and I will **free you** from their slavery.

V'ga'alti etchem bizroa netuyah uvish'fatim g'dolim
I will **liberate you** with a demonstration of My power, and with great acts of judgment.

V'lakachti etchem li l'am
I will **take you** to Myself as a nation

V'hayiti lachem l'Elohim
and I will be to you as a God.

V'datem ki ani Adonai Eloheichem
You will know that I am the Holy One your God,

ha-motzi etchem mitachat sivlot Mitzrayim
the One who is bringing you out from under the Egyptian subjugation.

V'heveti etchem el ha-aretz asher nasati et-yadi
I will **bring you** to the land regarding which I raised My hand, [swearing]

latet otah l'Avraham l'Yitzchak ul'Ya'akov
that I would give it to Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov.

V'natati otah l'chem morashah
I will **give it** to you as an inheritance.

[Exodus 6:6-8(a)]

A few weeks ago when Moshe first uttered those words in our hearing they seemed to make *no sense whatever*. Then Egypt's economy seemed invincible. Then Pharaoh seemed all-powerful. Then the state-sponsored religion of Egypt seemed like the only spiritual reality that had any relevance to our lives. And then the God Who spoke to Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov seemed distant, unknowable, and quite frankly more than a little bit *problematic*. At the time the Courtship intentions of the Holy One were spoken by Moshe on behalf of the God of our ancestors they seemed outlandish, farfetched and impossible - like *pie-in-the-sky pipe dreams*. Eight dramatic and history changing plagues later, however, our perspective on things is *radically changed*. In the aftermath of the strange supernatural happenings we have witnessed during the last few weeks, we have begun to understand – and now believe with all our hearts – that the One Who spoke those promises to Moshe even as we were gathering straw and making bricks for Pharaoh *meant every word that He said*. And we are becoming convinced that *He really is going to do all the things He promised to do*. And now even as darkness covers Egypt like a thick blanket *we sit in our dwellings bathed in Divine Light*. Now we are *overcome with awe*, and our souls are flooded with pulsing sensations of peace and hope and joy. Now our hearts are *sick with love* for the One Who has promised to betroth Himself to us forever. And now deep within our spirits we can almost hear a Voice on the Wind whispering gently:

*“Kumi! [Arise], my beloved, my beautiful one,
and come away with me! See! The winter is past;
the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come.”*
[Song of Songs 2:10-12]

Oh, Dear Reader. Close your eyes. Stop and listen for a moment. Would you believe that the Voice is *still whispering*, even today. The message has not changed.

*My Beloved! ...My Beautiful one!
Arise! ... and Come away with Me!*

The time has come to *respond* to that Voice like a Bride. The time has come to let love for your Divine Courtier swell within *you* – as it did within those slaves of Goshen. The time has come to let that swelling love within you change not only your *perspective on life* but your whole *approach to life*. The time has come to let that love change the way *you think of and relate to time and to Creation*. The time has come to let that love *redefine your purpose and your destiny*. The time has come to let that love *change the way you approach food and drink, and family, and pleasure*. The time has come to let that love *change the way you use all the members of your body, your hands, your feet*. The time has come to let that love *open your eyes that you may see His Glory*. The time has come to let that love *open your heart that you may sense His Presence*. The time has come to let that love *open your lips that you may sing His Praise*.

It is time to *sing unto the Holy One a new song!* The time has come to *let your tongue, your vocal cords and your diaphragm move in sympathetic rhythm with the eternal melody of the song of the redeemed*. The Divine Courtier is waiting, Dear Reader – waiting patiently to hear *your* voice join in singing with His *k'doshim* [set apart ones] from all the ages. What exactly is it going to take to make *you add your voice to the swelling chorus?*

Meanwhile, Back at Pharaoh's Palace ...

Revealing Himself to His betrothed-to-be, however, is just one aspect of the Holy One's plan. He has not come at this time and in this manner merely to give His people spiritual rebirth and a corresponding new self-image and worldview. As wonderful as that is, He has much *bigger plans*. He has come to take His people out of bondage in Egypt through great signs and wonders. He has come *to reveal His omnipotence, His splendor, and His glory to the entire world*. And Pharaoh is still playing games that the Holy One will not allow him to win.

Vayikra Far'oh el-Moshe v'yomer
Pharaoh summoned Moshe, saying:

lechu ivdu et-Adonai
'Go!' he said. 'Worship the Holy One!'

rak tzon'chem uv'kar'chem yutzag
Just leave your sheep and cattle behind.

gam-tap'chem yelech imachem
And even your children can go with you.'
[Exodus 10:24]

Yet another ploy on Pharaoh's part. The Hebrews can go into the wilderness and stage a worship event – and even take their children with them to that event – but they have to leave all their sheep and cattle behind. Pharaoh has 'sweetened the pot' from where we left off before the 'plague' of darkness. But ears that *sh'ma* the words of the Holy One are not taken in by Pharaoh's deceptive ploys. The Holy One has told Moshe this:

Va'ani yadati ki lo-yiten etchem melech Mitzrayim l'haloch
'But I know in advance that the Egyptian king will not allow you to leave

v'lo b'yad chazakah
unless by a strong hand.

v'shalachti et-yadi v'hikeyti et-Mitzrayim
I will then display My power and demolish Egypt

b'chol nifle'otai asher e'eseh b'kir'bo
through all the miraculous deeds that I will perform in their land.

v'acharei-chen yeshalach etchem
Then, after this, [Pharaoh] will send you out.

Venatati et-chen ha-am-hazeh b'eynei Mitzrayim
I will give the people favor/grace in the eyes of the Egyptians,

v'hayah ki teleichun lo telchu reykam
and when you walk away, you will not go empty-handed.

[Exodus 3:19-21]

The Holy One promised both that Pharaoh would *send us out* [*i.e.* expel us, not just let us leave temporarily for a worship event], and that when we leave Egypt, *we will not go empty-handed*. Pharaoh's offer is thus for something far less than what the Holy One has promised He will provide. If Pharaoh's offer was accepted it would be Pharaoh – not the Holy One – who would get the honor, the glory, and the praise.

In both regards Pharaoh's offer is *completely unacceptable*. Ears that have *sh'ma*-ed the Voice of the Holy One should not *sh'ma* the voice of another – especially the voice of the Holy One's enemy. And never, never, never, should a Pharaoh, or any man for that matter, receive any part of the honor, the glory, and the praise which belongs to the Holy One alone. Moshe therefore responds to Pharaoh's offer as follows:

Gam-atah titen b'yadeinu z'vachim v'olot

'Will you give us from your own hand animals for sacrifice and burnt offerings,

v'asinu l'Adonai Eloheinu

so that we will be able to offer them to the Holy One our God?'

V'gam-mikneinu yelech imanu

If not, our livestock must also go along with us.

lo tisha'er parsah

Not a single hoof can be left behind.

ki mimeinu nikach la'avod et-Adonai Eloheinu

We must take them to serve the Holy One our God;

va'anachu lo-neda mah-na'avod et-Adonai ad-bo'einu shamah

we do not know what we will need to worship the Holy One until we get there.'

Wait a Minute ... What Do Animals Have to Do With Anything?

Pharaoh has offered to let the people go out to the desert to worship the Holy One *if only* they will leave behind their animals. **Exodus 10:24**. Moshe has refused this compromise reasoning that the presentation of animals as surrogates would probably be required when *the nation of Israel* gathered together for the first time to worship the Holy One. Where did Moshe get this idea? Why in Moshe's mind did worshipping the Holy One necessarily involve *animals*? What was he *thinking*? There are at least two possibilities. Animals were used in ancient religious services in two very different ways. 'Clean' animals without defect were used very sparingly and respectfully by the Ancients and the *Avot* [Fathers/Patriarchs] as surrogates of intimate approach; and peoples of pagan religion slaughtered every animal they could find cruelly and indiscriminately as '*food for appeasement*' of their imaginary, and very human-like, sensual, flesh-obsessed, and blood-thirsty occult influences. Let's spend a few moments discussing these very different approaches.

1. Sparing, Reverent Use of Surrogates for Intimate Approach

This practice of employing the best of one's 'clean' animals as surrogates of intimate approach to the Creator of all life – *i.e.* the process of reverently presenting the life and blood of animals before the Holy One in substitution for the life and blood of the owner - had characterized the private worship activities of all the patriarchs. From Hevel (who presented to the Holy One the firstborn of his flock) to Noah (who presented to the Holy One by fire, on an altar, some of the *lo tamei* species of animals when alighting from the ark) to Avraham (who was told to kill specific animals in connection with the covenant ceremony of Genesis 15), the patriarchs followed this approach to the involvement of animals in covenant atonement protocols. The most 'perfect' example of the use of animals as surrogates of intimate

approach is actually provided by the story of the *Akeida* [Hebrew for ‘binding’]. In that case the Holy One supernaturally provided a ram for Avraham to substitute in place of Yitzchak. The Holy One thus validated the ancient practice of the *tzaddikim* in using animals as surrogates of approach – *i.e.* of symbolically transcending the barrier that exists between fallen man and the Holy Courts and Chambers where the Almighty dwells, and into which He calls every man to make a pilgrimage of faith.

2. Indiscriminate Animal Sacrifices Designed to Appease ‘Gods’ Whom Pagan Peoples Believed to be Angry and Bloodthirsty

On the other hand, the use of animals in religious ceremonies had been perverted by pagan religions into something very, very different. Pagans took the practice which the Holy One had validated and twisted it 180 degrees, turning it into what we today – with Greek [pagan] mindsets - think of as ‘animal sacrifice’. The pagans, you see, thought of ‘the gods’ as very sensual beings with huge physical appetites who had to be kept well fed so they would not get angry and wreak havoc on their world. The practitioners of pagan religions thus presented the flesh and blood of animals to their gods not as a means to draw close to their gods [which was the whole idea behind *substitutionary atonement*], but as *food of appeasement* in order to keep the gods fat, dumb, happy, and, most importantly, *out of their business*.

These very different uses of animals paralleled the two primary approaches to religion. The pagans wanted primarily *to be left alone by the gods* to do their own thing – yet desired to be able to manipulate them in ways that served their self-interest (to fight against enemies, etc.). The Ancients and the *Avot*, of course, desired just the opposite. They wanted to *draw close* to their Creator, to totally *bind up their lives with Him in an intimate covenant relationship*, to *commune intimately with Him*, and to *submit to His Will and instruction for living*, in order that through them *His purposes might be fulfilled on earth*.

The Complete Breakdown of Diplomacy

Moshe refuses to leave Egypt *on Pharaoh’s terms*. *Only if Pharaoh himself will supply livestock will they go under Pharaoh’s proposal*. What do you say, Pharaoh?

The words of Moshe’s response strike Pharaoh in the heart. Provide animals from his own herds and flocks? Pharaoh knew – as did Moshe - that he couldn’t do that. He had no animals left, you see. Those not smitten by the livestock epidemic had succumbed to the anthrax-like boils. Those that somehow survived the boils died in the great hailstorm.

Pharaoh had thumbed his nose at the Holy One's word so many times that he was now out of 'grace' opportunities – and out of bargaining chips. As Torah puts it:

Vayechazeik Adonai et-lev Pharaoh

And [at that point] the Holy One added strength to the heart of Pharaoh

v'lo avah l'shaleicham

and he refused to let send [the Hebrews] forth.

[Exodus 10:27]

Pharaoh Banishes Moshe from the Palace

With no more bargaining chips left at his disposal, Pharaoh decides that *he has had quite enough of Moshe*. He ceased to be amused and entertained by him long ago. And now, after playing his last card, he sees no way even to get any political mileage from letting Moshe hang around and insult him anymore. In a fit of rage he *banishes Moshe from his palace* forever.

V'yomer-lo Far'oh lech me'alai hishamer lecha

'Leave my presence!' said Pharaoh.

al-tosef re'ot panai

'Don't dare see my face again!

ki b'yom rei'otcha f'nai tamut

The day you appear before me, you will die!'

Vayomer Moshe ken dibarta lo-osif od re'ot paneycha

And Moshe replied, "As you say, I will not see your face again.'

[Exodus 10:28-29]

Moshe accepts Pharaoh's banishment decree. Before he leaves the palace for the last time, however, he will have a few more words that Pharaoh needs to hear. We will study the last words Moshe spoke to Pharaoh in detail tomorrow. For now, however, just know that it is those words that will announce to Pharaoh the *final judgment* of the Holy One upon him – and upon all Egypt. And know this as well, Dear Reader – know that at long last, as a result of this crushing final judgment, *Pharaoh will indeed finally do exactly what the Holy One said he would do*, and *forcefully expel* the descendants of Avraham, of Yitzhak and of Ya'akov from the land of Egypt.

Questions For Today's Study

1. In today's second aliyah of *Bo* the Holy One unleashes the ninth judgment/plague upon Pharaoh and his kingdom - a thick darkness you could feel, like a *fine mist* or like *an overwhelming dust storm* that completely blotted out the light of the sun.

[A] In your encyclopedia, look up *Re* (or *Ra*), the chief god worshipped in Egypt. How did this ninth judgment on Egypt demonstrate the Holy One's superiority over *Re*?

[B] Our aliyah begins with the Holy One's instructions to Moshe concerning the ninth judgment/plague. What did the Holy One tell Moshe to do?

[C] What was similar about the way this plague was introduced to the way the third and sixth plagues were introduced? [Hint: what did not precede these 3 plagues that did precede all the others?]

[D] How many days did the darkness stay on Egypt?

[E] What descriptions of the darkness does Torah give us?

[F] When Pharaoh summoned Moshe during the midst of the ninth plague, did he phrase his summons as an *invitation* to the palace, or a *command* that Moshe appear?

[G] Pharaoh is still trying to achieve a "compromise" with regard to the departure of the Hebrews. What compromise does he propose this time?

[H] What is the reason Moshe gives Pharaoh as to why the compromise proposed by Pharaoh was unacceptable.

[I] What was Pharaoh's response to Moshe's explanation?

[J] Read Revelation 6:12-17; Revelation 8:12; Revelation 9:1-6; and Revelation 16:10-11. What do each of these passages have in common with today's aliyah?

2. In today's Haftarah reading the Hebrew prophet *Yirmayahu* [Jeremiah] receives a specific word of the Holy One for the forces of Egypt who are getting ready to engage in battle with the invading forces of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

*The word that the Holy One spoke to Yirmayahu the prophet,
how that Nevukhadretzar king of Bavel should come and strike the land of Mitzrayim.
Declare in Mitzrayim, and publish in Migdol,
and publish in Mof and in Tachpanches: say, **Stand forth, and prepare yourself;
for the sword has devoured round about you.***

[A] Which cities of Egypt are to receive prophetic announcements?

[B] In your Encyclopedia, look up these Egyptian cities, and write at least three sentences describing each one about which you can find a reference. [Specifically note if any of the cities are inhabited today].

[C] According to the word of the Holy One what are the two things the people in those three cities are to do?

[D] According to verse 14 why are the people in these three Egyptian cities told to do these two things?

3. In today's B'rit Chadasha reading Shaul [known to most modern English persons by the "nick-name" 'Paul' - but called *Shaul* by Messiah Yeshua in Acts 9] begins to clarify

what he meant in yesterday's aliyah when he said that each person is to *present himself to the Holy One as a living korban* (approach offering).

*Don't be conformed⁷ to this world,
but be transformed⁸ by the renewing⁹ of your mind¹⁰,
so that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will¹¹ of the Holy One.*

[A] If one presents himself or herself to the Holy One as Shaul prescribes, what will he or she no longer look like or fit the mold of?

[B] Describe the change that Shaul says is to happen to the person who presents himself or herself as a living *korban*?

[C] What Hebrew concept do you think Shaul is thinking/talking about when he speaks of “the renewing of your mind”? Try to find such a concept in Torah. Write down the passage(s) and explain the process and how it relates to what Shaul is talking about in Romans 12.

[D] According to the last clause of today's verse what is the expected result and benefit of the ‘renewal’ [Greek *metamorphoo*] of a person's mind [Greek *nous*]?

*May you always bask in the Holy One's Light – even in the midst of the darkness of this world -
and may you, as a result, know and do His perfect will.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 18:43-45

*You have delivered me from the strivings of the people.
You have made me the head of the nations.
A people whom I have not known will serve me.
As soon as they hear of me they will **sh'ma** me.
The foreigners will submit themselves to me.
The foreigners will fade away,
and will come trembling out of their close places.*

⁷The Greek word our English Bibles translate as ‘conformed’ in this verse is *suschematizo*, Strong's Greek word #4964.

⁸ The word translated ‘transformed’ here is *metamorphoo*, Strong's Greek word #3339.

⁹ The word translated ‘renewing’ here is *anakainosis*, Strong's #G342.

¹⁰ The Greek word translated as ‘mind’ in this verse is *nous*, Strong's #G3563.

¹¹ The Greek word translated as ‘will’ in this verse is *thelema*, Strong's #G2307. The Hebrew concept, however, is found in the word *ratzon, resh, tzade, vav, nun sofit*, Strong's #H7522, pronounced *raw-tzone*. That word is translated as ‘will’ in Psalm 40:8, where the Psalmist says to the Holy One “***I delight to do Your will; yes, Your Torah is within my heart.***” The verb root is *ratzah, resh, tzade, alef*, Strong's #H7521, meaning to accept, to approve, and delight in something.