

Shiur L'Yom Shenì¹

[Monday's Study]

READINGS: **Torah Bo:** **Exodus 10:1-20**
 Haftarah: **Jeremiah 46:1-12**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Romans 12:1**

Do you not realize - Egypt is destroyed!

[Exodus 10:7]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 18:39-42;

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 ... **Bo et-Paro** – Come/Go to Pharaoh ... **ki-ani hichbadeti et-libo v'et-lev avadav** – for I have made his heart and the hearts of his servants heavy with My glory ... **l'ma'an shiti ototai eleh b'kirbo** – in order that I may demonstrate my otot before him. **Exodus 10:1b.**

This week's parsha is a stunning literary masterpiece. It is fast-paced, action-packed, and intense – the perfect sequel to *Va'era*. In this part of the Great Nation-Building Chronicles the Writer of Torah takes the reader on a wild, suspenseful, cathartic ride from despair to exultation, from suffering to celebration, from rags to riches, and from bondage to freedom.

Things Never Before Seen; Events Never to Be Forgotten

The *Bo* narrative contains a number of epic and totally 'unnatural' events. First, in contrast to the normal weather patterns in the region, a strong wind will begin to blow into the Nile River Valley from the East. In addition to creating monster sandstorms everywhere, this great storm will deposit swarm after swarm of locusts. The ravenous insects will spread over the countryside, wreaking havoc on Egypt's food supply. Miraculously, every time the locusts come upon a tree, a grain silo, a field of growing grain, or a budding vineyard or orchard owned/managed by a Hebrew they will seem to recognize that asset or area as 'off-limits. They will immediately stop eating. They will tread lightly around the asset or through area causing neither harm or growth-disturbance. As soon as they upon the next tree, vine, field, or silo that is owned/managed by an Egyptian, however, they will resume their devastating consumption pattern. Just a few days after the locusts disappear, a total blackout eclipse of all luminaries will occur that will cast all territory controlled by Egypt into complete, paralyzing darkness – except in Goshen, where a mysterious light source illumine the interior of every Hebrew's home. This historic simultaneous eclipse of all natural luminaries will last three

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long days. As soon as the heavenly luminaries re-emerge, Egypt will see a massive, Divinely choreographed, and *totally voluntary* transfer of wealth from the ‘have’s’ to the ‘have not’s’. This wealth transfer will not come about by virtue of any official decree or change in the law. No politician will be able to claim credit for it; nor will any army be required to enforce it. No threat of riot, violence, or vengeance will induce it. It will *just happen*. As this wealth-transfer is wrapping up, a deadly, never-before witnessed *ot* – a pestilence that lasts only one night, and affects only firstborn sons – will wreak havoc throughout the land. Strangely, the angel of death will skip over dwellings the doorposts of which bear the covenant sign of lambs’ blood. We will then have our minds blown by the largest contemporaneous emancipation of enslaved people-groups in human history. And in the midst of the ensuing chaos, we will celebrate the founding of a nation of pilgrims destined to change the world forever.

The Maker of the Heavens and the Earth is indeed about to do awesome and unheard-of wonders; and the world will be changed dramatically - and permanently - as a result.

Welcome to the Wonderful World of Otot

The *otot* the Holy One is going to unleash to frame the narrative of this story are going to hit Egypt and its Pharaoh like a meteor; they will send shock waves pulsing throughout the cosmos. What are *otot*, you ask? While our English Bibles translate *otot* as ‘signs’, and our Western mentalities like to think of them as ‘wonders’ or ‘miracles’, *otot* are actually much more important than any of those English words, or even the combination of them, could possibly connote.

Imagine you are on a sailboat, looking out on a peaceful sea. Now imagine you see something emerging ever so minutely out of the water in front of you, directly in your path. Your attention is at drawn to the unexpected anomaly, but you take no action. It is probably just a *buoy* - *i.e.* a ‘sign’. You maintain your course, and continue to gaze at the object. And then you realize that what you are seeing in the water is not a buoy [*i.e.* a sign]; it is, instead, *the tip of an iceberg* – a great chunk off a glacial ecosystem that you had never seriously considered might be present in the sea, unseen by you, the whole time. While you are amazed at the stunning image presented by the small buoyant tip of the iceberg that you can see, you begin to quiver inside at that thought of the massive ‘other worldly’ power and potential ‘other worldly’ danger that you suddenly realize is about to impact your world. Now, imagine that you suddenly see, popping up all around you, not merely one of these ‘other worldly’ objects, but two, then three, then four, then five – then *TEN!* Imagine the moment you are gripped by the realization that you have entered *the domain of the ‘other world’* – in this case, the *glacier-world* – and that the powers

of that world, and not you, your strength, or your wits, or your money, now control your destiny. If you have followed this imagery, you are now ready to understand the Holy One's *otot*. Each individual 'plague' that Egypt has encountered has been merely the tip of an iceberg – the warning that another, much more powerful, but usually unseen, realm coexists with the one you inhabit. The Holy One uses *otot* to demonstrate to all who are accompanying men like Pharaoh on the 'sailboat' excursion of life that HIS DOMAIN can invade and take over their world any time it wants – and that those things which are UNSEEN are actually far greater, and affects men's destinies far more, than that which is SEEN. Each *ot* that men see or tell stories about, like the tip of an iceberg, provides evidence of the vast power of the things that are very, very near, but are *not seen*. The manifestation of multiple *otot* in the same place and era are meant to bring about the realization in the human beings that inhabit that place and time that it is what lies in the UNSEEN realm, not those things that lie in the seen realm, that truly control their destiny.

What is this UNSEEN REALM that controls our destiny? It is none other than the Kingdom of Heaven. It is the realm of angels, and living creatures, and cherubim, and serafim, and twenty-four seated elders, and a sea of glass, and a Glorious Throne on which is seated the Ultimate Great King. This UNSEEN REALM is always with us, all around us, recording – and affecting - every aspect of our lives. We just do not see it - most of the time, that is. But then come the *otot* of the Great King. And we begin to see just a little of what the 'unseen realm' has to offer. And then we must change our course, and learn to appreciate and navigate the unseen realm, or we will crash into its icebergs, and come apart, piece-by-piece.

Bo el-Paro – i.e. Come/Go – TO PHARAOH!

The curtain of Bo - the third installment of *the Divine Courtship Chronicles* - opens to find Egypt reeling in the aftermath of a bizarre hailstorm. In connection with this storm – actually an *ot* – the atmosphere was filled with great chunks of ice from another realm, with the descent of each chunk of ice being accompanied by a streak of fire that looked something like lightning. It was somewhat like what would happen if a comet entered the earth's atmosphere, broke into pieces, and struck Egypt. Torah told us that:

*... the hail struck throughout the whole land of Egypt,
all that was in the field, both man and beast;
and the hail struck every herb of the field and broke every tree of the field.
Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, there was no hail.
And Pharaoh sent and called for Moshe and Aharon,
and he said to them, "I have sinned this time.
The Holy One is righteous, and my people and I are wicked.
Entreat the Holy One, that there may be no more mighty thundering and hail,
for it is too much. I will let you go, and you will stay no longer."*
[Exodus 9:25-28]

Moshe and Aharon did exactly as Pharaoh asked. They went out and entreated the Holy One to lift the plague. The Holy One heard their prayer, and did just that. Unfortunately for Pharaoh and his people, however, the story did not end there. As soon as Pharaoh confirmed that the rain, hail, and thunder had ceased, Torah tells us that he “*sinned yet more; and he hardened his heart, he and his servants*”. Then Pharaoh reneged yet again on his promise to let the people go. **Exodus 9:34-35.**

The Divine Dance of Give and Take, Move and Counter Move

The Holy One is not surprised – much less offended - by Pharaoh’s trickery. He has not stepped out of eternity, invisibility, and incorporeality to be offended at what He finds in this realm. The Creator always knows exactly what He is getting into when He chooses to interact with fallen human beings.

It is by no means just Pharaoh that the Holy One has to work through things with, however. It is the same with all of us. All of us have a *self-defined comfort zone* He knows He has to penetrate. Every one of us has *pressure points* He has to work around. We all have a *network of fleshly appetites, urges, and drives* He knows He has to tranquilize. Each of us has a *mixed bag of misinformed attitudes and opinions* He knows has to fight through. We all have a *stubborn streak* He has to neutralize. All of us have *fear factors, rage triggers*, and a *pain threshold* through which He knows He has to push us in order to make us truly come truly alive.

The Holy One knows that before any fallen man, woman or child will surrender to His Will there has to be some significant *give and take*, some *move and counter move*. That is because fallen men now have to process every Divine proposal through the multiple levels of paranoid delusion that result from our ingestion of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Of course, because of the goodness of our Creator’s Nature the reality is that His Will is always going to prove to be in our best interest and in the best interest of everyone in our household. But alas we have at this point eaten so much of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and have *sh’ma*-ed so much venomous serpent-speak about our Creator for so long, that we have to be carefully and painstakingly deprogrammed. Fallen men, women and children now have *pathological obsessions with physical pleasure, comfort, entertainment, thrill, and control* to let go of before the Holy One’s Will can be done. We also now have *multiple strongholds – in the form of the combined deceptions of the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life, the fear of man, the fear of failure, the fear of rejection, the fear of the unknown*, etc. - to overcome. Even worse we now have *vast minefields of wounds, disappointments, failures and offenses against our fellow man* that have to be navigated through before any of us can accept the Holy

One's Will for our lives as the treasure and blessing it is. And then, of course, there are *the intellectual force fields of man-generated philosophical principles, scientific theories, and theological doctrines* that He has to expose for the utter and useless foolishness they are before we will even listen to the Sweetness of His Still, Small Voice speaking Wisdom and Truth.

The Holy One knows all these things very, very well. He also knows exactly what kind and what extent of deprogramming experiences each of us is going to require before we are willing to let go of each pathological obsession we indulge, to leave the perceived comfort and safety of each stronghold we have erected, and to walk with Him through the minefields the enemy of our souls has established around us.

The Holy One knows that, despite the incontrovertible reality that His Will is always for our good, as fallen human beings we will never just accept it without first engaging with Him in a *dance of give and take, move and counter move*. We will not let go of our poison fruit unless we receive something we perceive as more valuable in return. Fortunately, in every instance the Holy One knows precisely how much give and take, how many moves and counter-moves – not to mention how much it will cost in the lives of people in each affected sphere of influence – to have each human being involved finally awaken to reality and accept His Will as the best possible alternative. That applies to you and to me as well as to Pharaoh and all his Egyptian advisors. It applies to people in covenant with Him and those who are not. The Holy One gives – and the Holy One takes away. Blessed be the Name of the Holy One². He is patient. He is kind. He is slow to anger. And He never gives up. He knows what our fallen minds now require in order to be convinced of what should be as plain as the nose on our face – and He keeps pushing the envelope until we either accept it or quit dancing the dance.

Planning the Next Phase of Give and Take, Move and Countermove

As *Bo* begins, therefore, we find Moshe once again in the Secret Place of the Most High, receiving yet another briefing from Heaven. A download of the next phase in the *give-and-take, move-and-counter move dance* the Holy One is dancing simultaneously with Pharaoh and with B'nei Yisrael is in progress. In the aftermath of the first plague which claimed human lives – *i.e.* the plague of hail mixed with fire - the Holy One has *drawn Moshe into His Private Chambers*. He is briefing His prophet once again on what He is doing and how He intends to do it.

Even as Pharaoh has *hardened his own heart* once again, and arrogantly *reneged on yet another promise to let the Hebrews leave*, the glorious Voice of the Holy One has set Moshe's inner ear vibrating at a Heavenly frequency. The Holy One

² Job 1:21.

wants Moshe to know that He has not hit Pharaoh with anything even approaching His 'best shot'. He has, to the contrary, thus far been unbelievably gentle. But that is about to change. The Holy One therefore tells Moshe: **Bo el-Paroh** – i.e. 'Come/go to Pharaoh. Exodus 10:1(a). As we have discussed previously, the first word the Holy One spoke in this discourse was *bo*, a Hebrew word meaning to *make a purposeful journey*. *Bo* is not direction specific. It can mean either to go [i.e. to depart from a place for a purpose], or to come [i.e. to arrive at a place for a purpose]. It merely means to *make a purposeful transition*, or, as in this case, to *move under specific orders and directions*. The Holy One did not want Moshe stumbling into Pharaoh's court, playing this 'prophet-of-the-Exodus' role by ear. Neither did he want his prophet operating out of habit, or 'principle', or 'moral outrage'. The Holy One did not want Moshe to operate in the power or direction of his own agenda. He did not want Moshe to act on his own initiative. He did not want the words Moshe spoke to be the product of the prophet's own thoughts, opinions, emotions, or judgments. When Moshe got to Pharaoh's palace the Holy One wanted Moshe to *bo* – i.e. to make a purposeful transition – under specific orders - in *sh'ma* response to a *Now Word* from the Holy One's mouth.

The Holy One wanted the next message Moshe delivered to Pharaoh to be *fresh*, *alive*, and *absolutely radiating* in both Moshe's heart and mind. The Holy One therefore told Moshe exactly what of give and take, move and counter-move strategy He was employing with Pharaoh and his advisors, and what His purposes were in the dance. He told Moshe concerning Pharaoh:

Ki-ani hichbadeti et-libo v'et-lev avadav

I have made his and his advisors' hearts heavy with My Glory

L'ma'an shiti ototai eleh bekirbo

so that I will be able to demonstrate these otot among them,

Ul'ma'an tesaper be'oznei vincha uven-bincha

and in order that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son's son

et asher hit'alalti b'Mitzrayim

the mighty things I have done in Egypt,

v'et-ototai asher-samti vam

and My otot that I have made happen among them,

vidatem ki-ani Adonai

that they may know that I am YHVH."

[Exodus 10:1(b)-2]

Hmmmmn. So the reason the Holy One has been wreaking havoc on Egypt's economic, political, religious, and social system with surgically precise strikes has a whole lot less to do with judgment on Egypt and its Pharaoh and a whole lot more to do with *the life mission of the Hebrew people*. His ultimate objective is to

impart to all descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov, in all generations, an *unforgettable and undeniable testimony of His Unshakeable Commitment to His Covenant*. He wants B'nei Yisrael to share this great testimony – not theological arguments - with all the peoples, families, and nations of the world. He wants our story to be this testimony of mighty Hand deliverance - not recitations of creed. This personal testimony of His covenant faithfulness - not sermons, symbols, or sacraments. This testimony of the awesome works He performed in connection with our national redemption – not a ‘systematic theology’ of soteriology. In other words, what the Holy One is doing is not at essence motivated by any degree of *anger against Pharaoh* or the Egyptian race; everything He is doing is motivated instead by *passionate love for future generations of His Covenant People*. So the Holy One wants to write a story on the hearts and minds of this generation that when they retell in the hearing of future generations the awesome and wonderful way in which the Holy One heard their cries, responded to them, and delivered them, those future generations will be every bit as awed by the story as those who witnessed it first-hand. Could it be that the purpose for which the Holy One is doing all these wondrous works in Egypt is simply so that forever the Hebrew people “... *may tell in the hearing of your son and son's son ...*” the story He is writing on the pages of history? Could it be that the most important thing we can glean from the plague and Exodus narrative of Torah is ‘that future generations may know – intimately and experientially and personally – *Who* the Holy One our God is and *what He is like* – just as much as Moshe, Aharon, Miryam, Y'hoshua, Kalev and their generation did - i.e. *that they may know that I am the Holy One?*

A Time for Confrontation - Not Negotiation

Moshe and Aharon will actually wind up before Pharaoh *twice* in today's aliyah. We will look at both of today's confrontations in turn. The first time Moshe and Aharon appear before Pharaoh it is to warn him that another ‘plague’ [Hebrew, *ot*, meaning ‘sign’] is coming. Specifically, Moshe and Aharon warn Pharaoh that, if the Hebrews are not allowed to leave, a *supernatural locust horde* will appear and destroy all the food supplies in the country that the glorious hail left. Moshe and Aharon will then leave and let Pharaoh ‘sleep on it’ so to speak.

After Moshe and Aharon leave the palace, however, the courts of Pharaoh erupt in infighting. Pharaoh is losing control. The Egyptian people – and even some of Pharaoh's closest advisors - are figuring out that the Holy One is *with the Hebrews* and that *the only hope their nation has of surviving this series of calamities is to let the Hebrews go*.

Pharaoh is still not convinced. He has some *damage control* to do, for sure, but he feels certain his skill in bargaining – not to mention his capabilities in the realm of

‘spin’-doctoring – can still prevail. In response to the infighting Pharaoh decides to call Moshe and Aharon back into his court and try to negotiate a *compromise* with the Holy One. He will not be successful. The testimony the Holy One wants His people to pass on to future generations and to spread throughout the ends of the earth is 100% *non-negotiable*. The testimony of the Holy One’s deliverance absolutely must be written in *the blood of the lamb*.

But alas I am, once again, getting way ahead of myself. Let us go back and look at the two confrontations between Moshe and Pharaoh that are contained within today’s aliyah.

Moshe Delivers to Pharaoh the Holy One’s Warning Concerning Ot Ha-Arbeh [the sign of the locust swarm]

The Holy One sends Moshe back to Pharaoh’s palace with a rather pointed message. If you will recall after the *ot ha-barad k’ved* [sign of the glorious hail] Torah pointed out that Egypt had only *one chance for a major food source left* – i.e. the crop of *wheat and spelt* that were left un-affected by the hail. The Holy One tells Moshe to warn Pharaoh that this last food source would, like the others [beginning with the fish, and continuing through the barley, flax, and livestock], be destroyed if he did not let the Hebrews go to worship Him. Here is the warning:

Ki im-ma'en atah l'shalei'ach et-ami

If you refuse to let My people leave

hineni mevi machar arbeh bigvuleicha

I will bring locusts³ to your territories tomorrow.

V'chisah et-eyn ha-aretz

They will cover every visible speck of land

V'lo yuchal lir'ot et ha-aretz

so that you will not be able to see the ground,

v'achal et-yeter ha-p'letah ha-nish'eret lachem min ha-barad

and they will eat all that was spared for you by the hail,

v'achal et-kol ha-etz ha-tzome'ach lachem min ha-sadeh

devouring every tree growing in the field.

[Exodus 10:4-5]

With this dire prediction Moshe and Aharon take their leave from Pharaoh’s palace.

The key word in that discourse is *machar* [i.e. tomorrow]. *Tomorrow* locusts will fill

³ The word our English Bibles translate as ‘locust’ is *alef, resh, beit, hey*, Strong’s Hebrew word #697, pronounced *awr-beh*. This is a noun derived from the Hebrew verb root ***rabah***, *resh, beit, hey*, Strong’s #H7235, meaning to ‘become many’, or ‘greatly multiply’.

the skies – and fields of Egypt – UNLESS! It does not have to happen. The only way it will happen is if Pharaoh persists in making the wrong and foolish decision – refusing to let the Hebrew people go. Okay, so ... the clock is ticking, Pharaoh! In less than 24 hours – unless you do something intelligent for a change – the locusts will appear. What is at stake? The absolute ‘last hope’ to salvage a food supply for Egypt’s people is the ‘latter day harvest’. That harvest consists of [a] the wheat and spelt presently growing in the fields, as well as [b] the date palms, pomegranates, olives, and figs growing in the cultivated orchards alongside the Nile and the irrigation canals branching off therefrom. If these essential crops are destroyed as well as everything else ... well, suffice it to say that if that happens Egypt will, at least for a season, cease to be either the *breadbasket of the world* or *the earth’s strongest superpower*.

It is all up to you, Pharaoh. Stay on the same path, and there will be no food. Send the Hebrews out to worship the Holy One, with no preconditions, and everybody eats like a king. Your choice, big guy!

Eavesdropping on the Private Conversations Going On in Pharaoh’s Court

For some time now there has been major trouble – of the *internal* variety - brewing in Pharaoh’s palace. If you will recall the events relating to the last ‘plague’ – the plague of the *glorious hail* - you will remember that some of the Egyptians heeded the Holy One’s warning of the coming hailstorm, *sh’ma*-ed the Holy One’s Voice and rushed to get their animals, slaves, and family members to shelter. They thereby escaped the ‘plague’ entirely, while their countrymen - those who followed Pharaoh’s leadership - suffered greatly. This series of events was a public relations nightmare for Pharaoh, which common sense would tell us gave rise to a groundswell of division and dissent. There has, I am sure, been an increasing level of whispering behind Pharaoh’s back since that time. Some of Pharaoh’s advisors have finally begun to believe the Holy One is capable of doing – and will do – exactly what He says He will do. Even Pharaoh’s hardline advisors, however, have to recognize that their leader is in a battle he cannot win. They know the stakes are very, very high for Egypt and its people. And they know things are not getting any better. Someone will have to say something to Pharaoh - and soon! The whispering is getting louder with each plague. And so, after Moshe and Aharon give the warning about the locust invasion to come, Pharaoh’s advisors determine that it is time they told him exactly what they have been seeing, hearing, and sensing. At the risk of their positions in the court – if not their lives – they decide the time has come to *confront* the exposed narcissist that they once considered a god.

You get to play the part of a fly on the wall, Dear Reader. Listen in on the conversation no one thought would – indeed *could* - ever happen. Pharaoh's own officials are saying to him ***ad-matai*** [how long?]:

Ad-matai yihyeh zeh lanu l'mokesh

'How long will this [man] continue to be a menace to us?

shalach et ha-anashim veyavdu et-Adonai Eloheihem

Let the men go, and let them serve the Holy One their Lord.

Ha-terem teida ki avdah Mitzrayim

Don't you yet realize that Egypt is being destroyed?'

Can you hear the *edge* and the *emotion* in that last question? Permit me to paraphrase: “Do you not yet realize, Pharaoh, that Egypt is being destroyed by your stubbornness? Do you not realize, Pharaoh, that Egypt is being destroyed by your pride? Do you not yet realize, Pharaoh, that more is at stake here than the public image you have created for yourself? Do you not realize that real people's lives are at stake? Are you so foolish? Are you so blind? Do you really not yet realize?”

The consensus solution Pharaoh's advisors propose is ‘***Shalach et ha-anashim***’ – let *the men* go. The advisors have hardened their hearts as well. They do not propose that Pharaoh let the Hebrew *PEOPLE* [i.e. *ha-am*] go - only that he let the Hebrew *MEN* [i.e. *ha-anashim*] go. The advisors, like Pharaoh, and like us, each have their own comfort zones the Holy One has to penetrate, their own stubborn streaks He has to work around, and their own pain thresholds and fear factors He has to push them through.

Pharaoh has been warned by his advisors. Their passionate ‘*ad-matai*’ [i.e. *how long?*] challenge is ringing in his ears. How will he respond?

The Secret Place of the Prince of Darkness

While Moshe is dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, Pharaoh is dwelling in a secret place as well. The council chamber in which Pharaoh is abiding is not the secret place of the Most High, however; it is the *secret place of the powers of darkness*. And the counsel that Pharaoh is receiving is accompanied in the far distant background by muffled cackles and the rubbing together of bloody palms.

By reason of the counsel Pharaoh receives in this secret place of darkness he is about to draw a horrible line in the Egyptian sand. He is about to order Moshe and Aharon back the palace. Evil confidantes have convinced him that he can draw upon his powers of persuasion and silence both the Hebrews and the budding ‘dissent’ movement which has taken root even in his own personal staff. Hence we

read in Torah:

Vayushav et-Moshe v'et-Aharon el-Pharaoh

Moshe and Aharon were brought back to Pharaoh.

vayomer aleihem lechu ivdu et-Adonai Eloheichem

'And he said: You may go hold a worship event for the Holy One your God.'

Pharaoh's proposal sounds great so far, doesn't it? He is offering exactly what Moshe and Aharon have been asking for, isn't he? But wait – Pharaoh is not through. After making the long-awaited declaration Pharaoh pauses to ask a question which will show everyone he is still in absolute control: ***mi vami holeichim*** [i.e. *But exactly who will be going?*]. **Exodus 10:8**. Following the script laid out for him in the secret place of the prince of darkness, Pharaoh is working an *angle*. Moshe responded:

bine'areinu uvizkeneinu neilech

'Young and old alike will go.

b'vaneinu uviv'noteinu b'tzoneinu uvivkareinu neilech

We will go with our sons and our daughters, with our sheep and cattle.

ki chag-Adonai lanu

It is a festival of celebration to the Holy One for [all of] us.'

[Exodus 10:9]

Pharaoh then drops 'the bombshell'. It is hard to translate into English from Hebrew - but the gist of it is clear. Here is my paraphrase:

You can go, Moshe – you and all the elders of Israel, and even all the Hebrew men
- But I will keep your children for you!

Go if you want – worship the Holy One your God.

Your wives and children kids will, however, remain here with me.

With that Pharaoh sent Moshe and Aharon packing. In his mind, he had 'won'. He knew that the Hebrews could not – would not - go anywhere without their children. And therefore, he could now tell his officials and his people that he had generously *offered* to let the men go, *and they stubbornly refused*. Whatever happened from this point forward, therefore, he reasoned, *would not be his fault*.

Well played, Pharaoh – except for one thing. You are not dealing with a man. You are dealing with the Creator of the Universe. He is always multiple steps ahead of you. You can fool all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time; but you cannot fool the God of the Hebrews any of the time. He is coming to get His people, whether you like it or not. Ring the bell. Round 8 of the 10-round bout is about to begin.

The Greatest of All Locust Swarms

The Voice of the Holy One comes to Moshe at the appointed time, saying:

Neteh yadeicha al-eretz Mitzrayim ba'arbeh

Extend your hand over Egypt [to bring] the locusts,

veya'al al-eretz Mitzrayim

and they will emerge in Egypt.

V'yochal et-kol-esev ha-aretz et kol-asher hi-sh'ir ha-barad

They will eat all the foliage in the land – whatever was spared by the hail.'

Moshe raised his hand. Then the Holy One made an east wind blow over the land all that day and all through the night. And when morning came – so did the greatest locust swarm in history!

V'yechas et-eyn kol ha-aretz v'techeshach ha-aretz

The [locusts] covered the entire surface of the land, making the ground black.

With the arrival of the locust swarms the last remaining food source of the country considered to be the 'breadbasket of the ancient world' was 'gone with the wind'. Here is how Torah describes the havoc the locusts wrought:

V'yochal et-kol-esev ha-aretz v'et kol-peri ha-etz

They ate all the plants on the ground and all the fruit on the trees,

asher hotir ha-barad

whatever had been spared by the hail.

v'lo-notar kol-yerek b'etz uve'esev ha-sadeh b'chol-eretz Mitzrayim

Nothing green remained on the trees and plants throughout all Egypt.

Pharaoh's ingenious ploy had not worked. At the appointed time - all Pharaoh's clever scheming notwithstanding - the locust swarm destroyed the remainder of Egypt's crops and trees. And in Pharaoh's palace you can bet that the whispering among the officials about Pharaoh's competence – and what would, or at least *should*, happen next - began all over again. The Holy One's dance of give and take, move and counter move, goes on.

Meanwhile, Back in the Safe-Houses of Goshen ...

Meanwhile, in Goshen, among the slave population, there is *another kind of whispering* going on and another dance of give and take, move and counter move in progress. The Hebrews also had comfort zones the Holy knew He had to penetrate, stubborn streaks He knew He had to work around, and pain thresholds and fear factors He knew He had to push them through.

In each of these ancestral camps sat clusters of shell-shocked men and women who had thought that they and their children would live out all the days of their lives as

Egyptians. Yes, they were slaves *now*, they had always acknowledged, but *at least they were privileged to be residents of the most powerful, most technologically advanced and culturally attuned nation in the world*. Their dream - indeed their highest ambition - had been simply to *improve their children's status in Egypt* - to prove *their worth and loyalty to the regime*, and to thereby *earn full rights to participate in Egyptian society and its economy*. Their highest hope had been to make Egypt a better place to live - for their children, yes, but also and for all residents of Mitzrayim, whatever their nationality or social status. "*Work within the system, and improve it*" - this had always been the counsel of the elders. They dared not personally indulge – much less stir up in others - hope for anything more than that.

But that was then, and this is now. The events that have taken place over the past few weeks have finally caused those who had run to Goshen for shelter to rethink their future in Egypt. Perhaps they had too quickly accepted Pharaoh as their provider, Egypt's technology as their hope for advancement, and Mitzrayim as their home. Behind the backs of the elders some actually began to dare to whisper - do we *really* want to spend our lives "working within" a system that is *falling apart at its seams right before our eyes*? Is there perhaps a larger, grander destiny for us and for our children than building store-cities for Pharaoh? And now that work had stopped in Egypt for several weeks due to the plagues, and now that the people had abandoned the slave camps and returned to their ancestral homes in Goshen, they were rediscovering the joy of what it means to be Hebrew. They began to **think** - and look at life - Hebraically again. They began to see the wonder of Creation again - when just a few days ago they were mesmerized by the grandeur of Pharaoh's building program and the seeming prosperity of Egypt's progressive economy. A "new" sense of family and community - of return to *traditional values and ancient patriarchal ways* - discarded (or at least shoved far into the background) for generations - began to grip the hearts of first *one*, then *ten*, then a *hundred*. It just kept growing. Tent to tent and house-to-house an almost tangible atmosphere of worship began to spread. More and more parents found themselves retelling the stories they had learned from their grandfathers. Stories of men like Adam, and Noach, and Shem. Stories of Avraham and Sarah and Lot, of Yitzchak and Rivkah and Lavan, of Ya'akov and Esav, Rachel and Leah. Stories of Yosef and his brothers, and the adoption of Efrayim and Menashe. And the children began to catch a *greater vision*, of a *greater story*, than Egypt had ever offered anyone.

A Message Carried on the Wind

The very wind in the date palms of Goshen seemed to whisper "***Hear O Israel! The Holy One your God – the Holy One is One!***" The Name that no one ever

spoke suddenly was *dancing in people's hearts*. And now that their taskmasters could no longer, in the face of catastrophic “natural” disasters, force them to work in the store-cities on the day their grandfathers had called “Shabbat”, they experienced for the first time what it meant to “rest” on the Seventh day. The words of ancient blessings in the Hebrew tongue wafted from tent to tent. And the taste of freedom was sweet, and wonderful.

Some of the young ones began to whisper among themselves - “Do you think, having tasted freedom, and begun to see ourselves as distinct from Egypt, we can *ever* go back to life in Pharaoh’s slave crews?” And the older ones in their midst, overhearing those whispers, *smiled and wept at the same time*. And all the while, not far away, in a dusty coffin, all but forgotten, the bones of Yosef lay disjointed, and *very dry*. But lo, as the wind blew across Egypt, first Eastward, then towards the West and the Sea of Reeds, some thought they heard a faint *rattling noise*. And unseen to any but the Holy One, those very dry bones began, slowly, but surely, to *come together*, bone unto bone

Bless the Holy One. There is no turning back now. Let the wind blow! And let all the people dance the give-and-take, move-and-counter-move dance of YHVH until His Will is accepted by all as the best possible and most delightful option available.

Questions For Today's Study

1. The name of this week’s parsha is “**Bo**”. Do a study on this Hebrew verb, as follows:

- [i] In Strong’s look up the Hebrew word our text translates as “**go**”;
- [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 several other usages of this word you can find in the Torah, in the Psalms, and in the prophetic writings, and discuss the meaning of the word in the passages you have selected.
- [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 telling Moshe to do, considering what this Hebrew word really means.

2. At the beginning of today’s aliyah, at an “intermission” between waves of judgment upon Mitzrayim, the Holy One appears to Moshe and Aharon, and makes some startling announcements to them.

***Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants,
that I may show these my signs in the midst of them,***

*and that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your son's son,
what things I have done to Mitzrayim, and my signs that I have done among them;
that you may know that I am the Holy One."*

[A] For what three purposes does the Holy One say He has “hardened” the hearts of Pharaoh and his servants?

[B] Read Romans 9:14-2. What do you think it means that the Holy One “hardens” someone’s heart?

3. After the Holy One appears to Moshe and Aharon and announces His purposes in dealing with Pharaoh, Moshe and Aharon go to see Pharaoh.

*Moshe and Aharon went in to Pharaoh, and said to him,
"This is what the Holy One, the God of the Hebrews, says:
'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me?
Let my people go, that they may serve me. Or else, if you refuse to let my people go,
behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country,
and they shall cover the surface of the eretz, so that one won't be able to see the eretz.
They shall eat the residue of that which has escaped, which remains to you from the hail,
and shall eat every tree which grows for you out of the field.
Your houses shall be filled, and the houses of all your servants,
and the houses of all the Mitzrim;
as neither your fathers nor your fathers' fathers have seen,
since the day that they were on the eretz to this day.'"
He turned, and went out from Pharaoh.*

[A] What question do Moshe and Aharon ask the most powerful man on earth?

[B] What instrument of destruction and judgment do Moshe and Aharon say the Holy One will unleash upon Pharaoh and Mitzrayim if the Hebrews are not allowed to approach the Holy One through offerings?

[C] List the places Moshe says will be affected by this eighth “plague”, in the order Moshe gives them.

[D] Whose house does Moshe say the creatures will attack first?

4. After Moshe and Aharon say what they were told to say, they abruptly leave; yet we are, through the supernatural perspective of the Torah, given the opportunity to “eavesdrop” on the resultant conversation between Pharaoh and his officials! The “whispering” that I referenced in the introductory comments is vocalized by a few brave - or desperate - souls in Pharaoh’s employ. And they respectfully but firmly pose tough questions for Pharaoh to answer.

*Pharaoh's servants said to him, "How long will this man be a snare to us?
Let the men go, that they may serve the Holy One, their God.
Don't you yet know that Mitzrayim is destroyed?"*

[A] Pharaoh’s officials themselves ask Pharaoh two questions. What

questions do they ask?

[B] Sandwiched between the two questions Pharaoh's officials ask is a recommendation. What did the officials of Pharaoh recommend, and why?

[C] Do a study on the word our English Bibles translate as "destroyed" in verse 7, as follows:

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

[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 any other usages of this word you can find in the Torah, in the Psalms, or in the prophetic writings, and discuss the meaning of the word in those passages.

[vi] After reviewing the other notes of Gesenius regarding this word, write a paragraph (at least three sentences) describing what concept, or picture, you think Pharaoh's officials were trying to convey, considering what this Hebrew word really means.

5. Stung by the questions of Moshe, Aharon, and his own officials/advisors, and faced with a crisis of confidence politically, Pharaoh decides a little diplomacy might not be so bad after all. He orders Moshe and Aharon to be summoned back to the palace, and makes a proposal.

... he said to them, "Go, serve the Holy One your God; but who are those who will go?"

*Moshe said, "We will go with our young and with our old;
with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds will we go;
for we must hold a feast to the Holy One."*

He said to them, "The Holy One be with you if I will let you go with your little ones!

See, evil is clearly before your faces.

Not so! Go now you who are men, and serve the Holy One; for that is what you desire!"

They were driven out from Pharaoh's presence.

[A] What restrictions does Pharaoh place on his offer to let the Hebrews go offer sacrifices to the Holy One?

[B] What is Moshe's explanation as to why these restrictions are not acceptable?

[C] Do a study on the word translated by our English Bibles as "feast" in verse 9, as follows:

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

[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 any other usages of this word you can find in the Torah, in the Psalms, or in the prophetic writings, and discuss the meaning of

the word in those passages.

[vi] After reviewing the other notes of Gesenius regarding this word, write a paragraph (at least three sentences) describing what kind of meeting the Holy One planned for the Hebrews in the desert, considering what this Hebrew word really means.

[D] What was Pharaoh's response to Moshe's explanation of why Pharaoh's compromise proposal was not acceptable?

6. When Pharaoh refuses to lift the restrictions he sought to impose, the seventh plague is unleashed on Egypt.

*Moshe stretched forth his rod over the land of Mitzrayim,
and the Holy One brought an east wind on the land all that day, and all the night;
and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts.*

*The locusts went up over all the land of Mitzrayim, and rested in all the borders of Mitzrayim.
They were very grievous. Before them there were no such locusts as they,
neither after them shall be such.*

*For they covered the surface of the whole eretz, so that the land was darkened,
and they ate every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left.
There remained nothing green, either tree or herb of the field, through all the land of Mitzrayim.*

[A] What was the signal for the locust invasion to begin?

[B] From whence did the locusts come? How did they get to Egypt?

[C] What do you think the locusts did when they "swarmed" (verse 12)?

7. In verses 16-20 we see an example of the difference between **confessing** sin and **repenting of** sin.

*Then Pharaoh called for Moshe and Aharon in haste, and he said, "I **have sinned**
against the Holy One your God, and against you.*

*Now therefore please forgive my sin again, and pray to the Holy One your God,
that he may also take away from me this death."*

He went out from Pharaoh, and prayed to the Holy One.

*The Holy One turned an exceeding strong west wind, which took up the locusts,
and drove them into the Sea of Suf.*

*There remained not one **arbeh** in all the borders of Mitzrayim.*

But the Holy One hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he didn't let the children of Yisra'el go.

[A] Explain in your own words the difference between *confessing sin and asking forgiveness*, and *repenting* from it in the Hebraic sense of *making t'shuvah*

[B] Explain why confessing sin and asking forgiveness is *insufficient* to deal with sin against either the Holy One or a fellow man.

8. In today's haftarah reading the prophet *Yirmayahu* [Jeremiah] begins to announce the Holy One's judgments upon the nations of the earth. The first nation to be judged is - you guessed it - *Mitzrayim*!

*. . . [C]oncerning the army of Pharaoh-Nekho king of Mitzrayim,
which was by the river Perat in Karkemish, which Nevukhadretztzar king of Bavel struck
in the fourth year of Yehoiakim the son of Yoshiyahu, king of Y'hudah.*

*Prepare you the buckler and shield, and draw near to battle.
Harness the horses, and get up, you horsemen,
and stand forth with your helmets; furbish the spears, put on the coats of mail.*

*Why have I seen it? They are dismayed and are turned backward;
and their mighty ones are beaten down, and have fled apace, and don't look back:
terror is on every side, says the Holy One.*

*Don't let the swift flee away, nor the mighty man escape;
in the north by the river Perat have they stumbled and fallen.*

*Who is this who rises up like the Nile, whose waters toss themselves like the rivers?
Mitzrayim rises up like the Nile, and his waters toss themselves like the rivers:
and he says, I will rise up, I will cover the eretz; I will destroy cities and the inhabitants of it.
Go up, you horses; and rage, you chariots; and let the mighty men go forth:
Kush and Put, who handle the shield; and the Ludim, who handle and bend the bow.*

*For that day is [a day] of the Holy One, Adon of Hosts,
a day of vengeance, that he may avenge him of his adversaries:
and the sword shall devour and be satiate, and shall drink its fill of their blood;
for the Holy One, the Adon of hosts, has a sacrifice in the north country by the river Perat.*

*Go up into Gil'ad, and take balm, virgin daughter of Mitzrayim:
in vain do you use many medicines; there is no healing for you.*

*The nations have heard of your shame, and the eretz is full of your cry;
for the mighty man has stumbled against the mighty, they are fallen both of them together.*

[A] Which Pharaoh is the subject of Yirmayahu's warning of judgment?

[B] What enemy faced this Pharaoh? And where and when did the battle occur?

[C] According to Yirmayahu who attacked whom in this battle, and why?

[D] Who, according to Yirmayahu will control the outcome of this battle [see verse 10]?

[E] According to verses 11-12 list the things that will happen to Egypt as a result of this judgment.

9. In today's reading from the *B'rit Chadasha* Shaul of Tarsus urges all those he calls his "brothers" to come near to the Holy One their God through a particular type of *korban* [approach offering]. The *korban* that he calls upon us to bring to the altar is a life of holiness, through *mitzvot*. In other words, Shaul is calling upon all "brothers" [natural and engrafted Hebrews] to "be holy" – *k'dosh'im* – as the Holy One is holy – *k'dosh*.

*Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of the Holy One, to present your bodies
a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to the Holy One, which is your spiritual service.*

[A] Shaul starts this verse with the word "therefore", referring to something

which he has said before, and which gives sufficient reason for the making of the offering that he proposes. To what from the preceding chapter(s) is Shaul referring when he says “therefore”?

[B] In Strong’s look up the words our English Bibles translate as “*mercies*”, “*sacrifice*”, “*holy*”, “*acceptable*”, “*reasonable*” and “*service*”. Write the Greek words and their definitions. Then see how many Hebrew equivalents you can find, and note any different shades of meaning between the Greek words and the Hebrew concepts to which Shaul had in mind.

[C] How can Shaul’s exhortation that all who are his brothers present an “offering” be reconciled with the popular teaching that, in Messiah, all “offerings” ceased?

*May the winds of freedom blow through your tent
and transform your view of the world - and of your own destiny!*

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today’s Study

Psalm 18:39-42

*For you have girded me with strength to the battle.
You have subdued under me those who rose up against me.
You have also made my enemies turn their backs to me,
That I might cut off those who hate me.
They cried, but there was none to save; even to the Holy One, but He didn't answer them.
Then I beat them small as the dust before the wind.
I cast them out as the mire of the streets.*