



# Shabbat Table Talk Page

## Overview

- **Parashah Name: Va'era (וַאֲרָא, "and I appeared")**
- **Chapters: Exodus 6:2-9:35**



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעֲסוֹק בְּדַרְבֵּי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

## Synopsis

Last week's Torah portion (*Shemot*) told how Moses and Aaron were commissioned to go before Pharaoh and deliver the Lord's message: "Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness" (Exod. 5:1). Not only did Pharaoh reject the request, however, but he further imposed harsh decrees against the Israelites which caused them to suffer even more. Moses then appealed to the LORD, who reassured him that Pharaoh would eventually relent because of "the greater might" of God's power to deliver His people.

In this week's portion, the LORD told Moses that He was going to fulfill His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by giving the Israelites the land of Canaan, and that he had heard the "groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians held as slaves" (Exod. 6:5). God therefore instructed Moses to say to the people, "I am the LORD and *I will bring you out* from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and *I will deliver you* from their bondage, and *I will redeem you* with an outstretched arm and with great judgment; and *I will take you to me* for a people and I will be to you a God" (these four statements are sometimes called the "four expressions of redemption").

Despite these great promises, however, the people were unable to listen because of their "shortness of breath" on account of their harsh slavery. The LORD then told Moses: "Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the people of Israel go out of his land." Moses protested that if the Israelites would not listen to him, how could he ever hope to convince Pharaoh? The narrative does not provide an explicit answer to Moses' question, though it repeats that God "charged" Moses and Aaron to bring the people out of Egypt (Exod. 6:13).

The portion then provides the genealogy of Moses and Aaron, perhaps to serve as a prelude for establishing their authority among the people of Israel: "And the LORD said to Moses, 'See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land'" (Exod. 7:1-2). The Torah tells us that Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old when they first encountered Pharaoh. God then foretold that he would harden Pharaoh's heart so that he would not listen to them, which would then cause Him to execute judgment upon Egypt for its oppression of the Jewish people. "Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment" (Exod. 7:4).



When Pharaoh again refused to let the people journey to the wilderness to worship the LORD, the “showdown” between the kingdom of man and the kingdom of God began. In the first exchange, Aaron’s staff turned into a snake that entirely swallowed the staffs of the Egyptian sorcerers. Nonetheless, Pharaoh “hardened his heart” and refused to let the Israelites go. God then began sending an increasingly severe series of plagues upon the Egyptians. First the waters of the Nile river were turned to blood; then swarms of frogs began to overrun the land. Lice then came up from the dust, followed by swarms of noxious beasts. Pestilence began killing the domestic animals while painful boils afflicted the Egyptians. For the seventh plague, God sent a hail of “fire and ice” from the heavens that devastated much of the land. Despite witnessing all these miracles, however, Pharaoh remained proud and unmoved. After Pharaoh still failed to relent, God further “hardened” his heart, setting the stage for the final plagues upon Egypt and the great Exodus of Israel.

## Parashah Questions

1. What does the word “va’era” (וַאֲרָא) mean? <sup>1</sup>
2. Why did God say to Moses, “I am the LORD?” (Exod. 6:2) <sup>2</sup>
3. What does El Shaddai (אֱלֹהֵי שָׁדַי) mean? <sup>3</sup>
4. Why did God say that He never made his name YHVH (יהוה) known to the patriarchs, especially since they called Him YHVH? (6:3) <sup>4</sup>



<sup>1</sup> The word “va’era” is the first person, simple passive form of the verb ra’ah (רָאָה), “to see,” that means “I was seen” or “I appeared” (i.e., God appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and to Jacob).

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the Torah whenever God spoke to Moses, the expression “And the LORD spoke to Moses saying (וַיֹּאמֶר לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי מֹשֶׁה) is used, except in this case, where the Name Elohim (אֱלֹהִים) is used. Since the Name YHVH is associated with God’s compassion and mercy, and Elohim is associated with God’s justice and righteousness, some of the sages state that God was either dealing with Moses in reproof for earlier asking His Name (3:13), or was revealing that God’s judgment against Egypt was His compassion for Israel.

<sup>3</sup> The Name El Shaddai (אֱלֹהֵי שָׁדַי) is often translated as “God Almighty,” probably because the translators of the Septuagint (i.e., the Greek translation of the Old Testament) thought Shaddai came from a root verb (*shadad*) that means “to overpower” or “to destroy.” The Latin Vulgate likewise translated Shaddai as “Omnipotens” (from which we get our English word omnipotent). God is so overpowering that He is considered “Almighty.” It is more likely, however, that the name *Shaddai* is connected to *shadayim* (שָׁדַיִם) the Hebrew word for “breasts,” indicating sufficiency and nourishment (i.e., the breasts of a mother who shows *rachamim*, compassion). Indeed, the compound name (El Shaddai) is regularly connected with fruitfulness and fertility of the original families of Israel.

<sup>4</sup> Since each of the patriarchs called upon the Name of the LORD (see Gen. 12:7-8, 26:25; 28:16, 32:9, 49:18, etc.), we must understand this to mean that the revelation of God’s attributes as the powerful redeemer of Israel was new revelation. Indeed some ask whether the “signs and wonders” of the plagues were intended more for the Israelites than for the Egyptians, since the Israelites had been oppressed by the powers of Egypt to the point of being “without the breath of hope.” The traditional Jewish commentators have said that God’s statement (i.e., “I did not make my Name known to them”) was actually a form of rebuke of Moses’ request to know the inner meaning of God’s Name. The patriarchs had perfect trust in God and never pressed Him to disclose more about His identity.



5. What were the four promises of God that are remembered using the four cups of wine during the traditional Passover Seder? (6:6-8) <sup>5</sup>
6. How did the people respond to the promises of God? (6:9) <sup>6</sup>
7. When God told Moses to go before Pharaoh to make him let the people of Israel go, what did he say in reply? (6:10-12) <sup>7</sup>
8. Why did Moses have a speech impediment? (6:12) <sup>8</sup>
9. Why didn't God heal Moses of his speech impediment? <sup>9</sup>
10. How did God concede to Moses' weakness that he was of "uncircumcised lips"? <sup>10</sup>
11. Why is the lineage of Levi preceded by that of Reuben and Simeon? (6:14-16) <sup>11</sup>
12. What was the main reason for the redemption from Egypt? <sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The four promises are "I will bring you out," "I will deliver you," "I will redeem you," and "I will take you as my people." Note, however, that there are actually more than four promises in this passage: "I will bring you into the land" and "I will give you the land for an everlasting possession."

<sup>6</sup> They did not listen to Moses because of "shortness of breath" caused by their harsh slavery.

<sup>7</sup> Moses logically argued (kal vahomer – from light to heavy) that if the Israelites would not listen to him when he gave a message of hope, how could he expect Pharaoh to listen to him when he gave a message of doom? In addition, Moses reminded God that he had a speech impediment which would make him a poor speaker. The idea that he had "uncircumcised lips" meant that he regarded his lips as of no acceptable use to God (cp. Exod. 4:10).

<sup>8</sup> According to midrash (Shemot Rabbah), as a very young lad Moses was once seen throwing Pharaoh's gold crown to the ground. Upon learning of this apparent act of insolence, Pharaoh devised a test to see if the child understood what he was doing. He therefore commanded that a platter with a piece of gold and a glowing piece of coal be brought before Moses and ordered the little boy to choose one. If Moses chose the gold, it would imply that he understood its value, and therefore he would be killed. On the other hand, if Moses chose the burning coal, he would be spared since he was unable to differentiate between gold and a glowing piece of coal. Moses began to reach out for the gold when an angel pushed his hand aside and he grabbed the coal instead. Moses then immediately put his hand in his mouth, but that burned his lips and tongue so badly that he had a permanent speech impediment as a consequence. Later, when God commissioned Moses to speak to the children of Israel, he protested to the LORD that he was kevad peh - "heavy of mouth" and kevad lashon, "heavy of tongue," and therefore unable to speak on behalf of the LORD (Exod. 4:10).

<sup>9</sup> According to midrash, God did not cure Moses of his stuttering since He wanted Israel to know that he was a divine messenger. When he spoke in the Name of the LORD, the stuttering entirely disappeared and Moses spoke with fluent ease. This was to teach the people not to trust in human oratory or wisdom, but rather in the power of God...

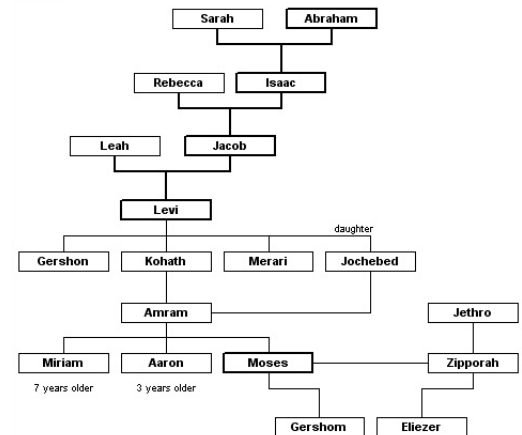
<sup>10</sup> The next time God spoke it was to Moses and Aaron together. Since Moses complained that he was a poor speaker, God appointed his brother to be his spokesman (cp. Exod. 4:14-15).

<sup>11</sup> God wanted to record the family history of Moses, beginning with Levi, but it would have been disrespectful to Levi's older brothers if they were not mentioned first. This also shows that Moses and Aaron owe their position to God's providence, since there was no one in the two older tribes worthy to lead the people. This also explains why the other tribes are not mentioned, since there was no need to look further after Moses and Aaron had been found.

<sup>12</sup> The main reason was to receive the Torah at Sinai and to become God's covenant nation. However, the climax of the revelation at Sinai was the pattern of the Tabernacle, which prefigured the sacrifice of Yeshua.



13. Name the three sons of Jacob's son Levi (6:16) <sup>13</sup>
14. What was Moses' father's name? (6:17-19) <sup>14</sup>
15. Whom did Amram marry? (6:20) <sup>15</sup>
16. What were the names of Yocheved's children? <sup>16</sup>
17. Whom did Aaron marry? (6:22) <sup>17</sup>
18. Can you name Aaron's four sons? (6:23) <sup>18</sup>
19. Who was Korah (קֹרַח) and his sons (6:24-25)? <sup>19</sup>
20. Who was Pinchas (ie., Phinehas)? (6:25) <sup>20</sup>
21. How was Moses "as a god" to Pharaoh, and Aaron as a prophet? (7:1) <sup>21</sup>
22. Why was Moses being a "god" to Pharaoh ironic? <sup>22</sup>
23. Why did God harden Pharaoh's heart so that he would not let the Israelites go? <sup>23</sup>
24. If God hardened Pharaoh's heart by making him stubborn, how could Pharaoh be held responsible for his actions? Why was he punished so harshly? (7:3; Rom. 9:17-ff) <sup>24</sup>



<sup>13</sup> The three sons were named Gershon (גֵּרְשׁוֹן), "a stranger there" (i.e., an exile); Kehath (קֵהָת), a (troubled) "assembly"; and Merari (מֵרָרִי), "bitterness" (maror). Moses and Aaron were Kohathites.

<sup>14</sup> Moses' father was Amram (אַמְרָם), the firstborn son of Kehath (קֵהָת) and a leader of the tribe of Levi (לֵוִי).

<sup>15</sup> Amram married his aunt Yocheved (יֹכֶבֶד) who was the daughter of Levi. Note that though his father Kehath and Yocheved had the same father (Levi), they did not have the same mother.

<sup>16</sup> Yocheved bore Amram three children: Miriam, Aaron, and Moses.

<sup>17</sup> Aaron married Nachshon's sister Elisheva the daughter of Aminadav (אֵלִישֶׁבַע בַּת־עַמִּינָדָב). Elisheva was the sister of a leader of the tribe of Judah who is credited with first stepping into the Sea before the waters parted (Num. 1:7).

<sup>18</sup> Elisheva bore Aaron four sons: Nadab (נָדָב), Abihu (אַבִּיהוּא), Elazar (אֶלְעָזָר), and Ithamar (אִיתָמָר).

<sup>19</sup> Korah was a Kohathite cousin of Moses who later led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron (Num. 16). Some of his sons were not swallowed up by the earth, however, and later became psalmists (Psalms 42, 44–49, 84, 85, 87, and 88 are ascribed to the "sons of Korah").

<sup>20</sup> Pinchas (פִּינְחָס) was the son of Aaron's son Elazar who had married a "daughter of Putiel" (Jethro?). Later Pinchas served God with great zeal and delivered Israel from judgment due to the tragic Baal Peor incident.

<sup>21</sup> Moses was like a god in the sense that he would be the judge and the court, imposing harsh penalties upon Pharaoh. Moses would exercise divine authority (exousia) over Egypt and all of Egypt would be subjected to him. Aaron would be like a prophet to Pharaoh since he would be Moses' spokesman.

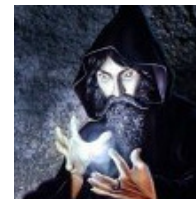
<sup>22</sup> It was ironic because the Pharaoh claimed to be god, but God would show him that he is really nothing.

<sup>23</sup> So that God could multiply His signs and wonders in order to reveal to all the world that He was God (Exod. 7:3)

<sup>24</sup> God hardened Pharaoh's heart but only after the despot had already hardened it by refusing the message of the first five plagues (Exod. 7:22, 8:15, 8:19, 8:32, 9:7). After the 6th plague, however, the Torah reads, "And the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart" (Exod. 9:12). One sin leads to another. If someone repeatedly refuses to submit to God, the Lord may ratify the decision and prevent repentance (see Paul in Romans 9:17-ff). Another interpretation: God "strengthened" the king's heart so that he would be able to express his free will – *despite* the afflictions upon Egypt.



25. How old was Moses when he began confronting Pharaoh? (7:6-7) <sup>25</sup>
26. What was the first sign used to authenticate Moses' message? (7:8-9) <sup>26</sup>
27. What happened when the Egyptian magicians duplicated this sign? (7:11-13) <sup>27</sup>
28. What is the Hebrew word for "plague"? <sup>28</sup>
29. Did Abraham foresee the redemption from Egypt? (Gen. 15:13-14) <sup>29</sup>
30. What did God mean when he said Pharaoh's heart was "stubborn"? (7:14) <sup>30</sup>
31. Why did God command Moses to go to Pharaoh in the morning, when he went out to the water of the Nile? (7:15-16) <sup>31</sup>
32. God began a series of ten plagues (*eser ha-makkot*). What was the first plague? <sup>32</sup>
33. Why did God strike the Nile river first? (7:17-18) <sup>33</sup>



<sup>25</sup> Moses was 80 years old and Aaron was 83 (God deliberately chose old men to be saviors of the Jewish people). From this verse we learn that Aaron was Moses' older brother. Moses would enter the court first, followed by Aaron as his interpreter. Moses would then speak quietly in Hebrew, while Aaron would translate his words to the Pharaoh.

<sup>26</sup> Moses would tell Aaron to throw his staff before Pharaoh and it would become a serpent (אֲרִיִּסָּה). This serpent was a symbol of Pharaoh, and when Aaron grasped it again, it would revert to being a wooden staff. This was meant to illustrate that though Pharaoh seems like a deadly viper, when you grasp him, he is like a lifeless wooden stick. The midrash says, "the first sign will be the staff, to show that I will beat him like a dog."

<sup>27</sup> Though the magicians were able to replicate the sign, Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. This caused Pharaoh to be in fear, since Aaron's staff did not change or become thicker after it swallowed up the other staffs – it could swallow things up without leaving a trace! Nonetheless, Pharaoh hardened his heart and was unmoved by all this. Note that the word for "magician" or "occultist" is used to translate the *chartumim* (חֲרָטְמִים), thought to be scribes or scholars of Egypt (from *cheret*, חֶרֶט, meaning an engraving tool).

<sup>28</sup> The Hebrew word for plague is *makkah* (מַכָּה), from the Hebrew word for "blow" "wound" or "strike."

<sup>29</sup> Yes, God told Abraham that his descendants would be foreigners in a land not their own, and the others would enslave them and torment them for 400 years. "Then I will judge the nation that enslaves them and they will leave with great wealth." Abraham foresaw the judgments upon Egypt, the ten plagues, etc., a "horror of darkness."

<sup>30</sup> The Hebrew is *kaved lev* (כָּבֵד לֵב), "heavy of heart" in the sense of unresponsive, thick, dense – like liver. In other places the Torah describes Pharaoh's hardheartedness as *chazak lev* (חֲזָק לֵב), meaning stouthearted or defiantly resolute... In this verse, Pharaoh's stubbornness meant that he refused to let the people go.

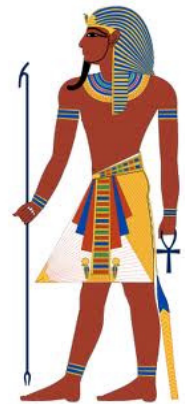
<sup>31</sup> Pharaoh was regarded as divine by the people, so he had to perform his ablutions (i.e., relieve himself) in a hidden area beside the river. After doing this, he would meditate beside the river and practice his occultic arts. God sent Moses right into the seclusion of Pharaoh's bathroom to "tap him on the shoulder with his staff," so to speak... "Excuse me... the LORD God of the Hebrews sent me to have a few words with you.... Let my people go."

<sup>32</sup> The plague of blood (*makkat-ha'dam*: מַכַּת־הַדָּם) as described in Exodus 7:14-25. All the waters of Egypt – from the Nile River to common drinking vessels – turned to blood.

<sup>33</sup> Since the king refused to know the LORD and heed His voice, God would reveal his power to him by turning the waters of the Nile river into blood. This was appropriate, since the Egyptians worshipped the river as a god, and therefore the LORD struck here first, at the source of their physical life, to demonstrate his power over it. When the river was struck, the entire Nile did not turn to blood, but only that portion of the river that flowed in Egypt. As soon as the water crossed the border of Egypt, it turned to blood – all the way down to the bottom so that the fish died – and once it was poured out into the salt water of the Mediterranean, it would return to pure water.



34. Why were the waters of the Nile river turned into blood? <sup>34</sup>
35. Were the magicians of Egypt able to replicate the first plague? (7:22) <sup>35</sup>
36. Since Pharaoh did not change his heart, God sent another plague. How many days passed before God sent this second plague? (7:25) <sup>36</sup>
37. What was the second plague? (7:26-29) <sup>37</sup>
38. Why was Aaron's staff used to initiate the first two plagues? <sup>38</sup>
39. Were the Egyptian magicians able to replicate this plague? (8:3) <sup>39</sup>
40. Why did Pharaoh request the frogs to leave the following morning? (8:5-7) <sup>40</sup>
41. When Pharaoh saw that the frogs began dying off, what did he do? (8:11) <sup>41</sup>
42. What was the third plague, and why did the sorcerers regard it as a sign from God? (8:12) <sup>42</sup>



<sup>34</sup> Because the blood of innocent Jewish babies was shed by throwing them into the river, God would now make all this blood visible before the people of Egypt... That the fish also died shows the depth of the blood – that it was more than surface deep. Indeed the whole land was filled with blood. Jars of food were polluted with blood, the Egyptians walked around and their clothing was soiled with blood, etc. The Israelites still had ample supplies of fresh, pure water, but when the Egyptians forced them to give them some, as soon as it touched their lips it would turn to blood. Finally the Egyptians were forced to buy water from the Israelites so they could drink.

<sup>35</sup> Yes, though of course this only made matters worse for Egypt. Because of this, however, Pharaoh hardened his heart again – he did not want to believe - and therefore the showdown continued...

<sup>36</sup> Seven full days. According to tradition, each plague lasted 7 days (except for the last two: the plague of darkness lasted 6 days and the death of the firstborn lasted one day).

<sup>37</sup> The plague of frogs (*makkat tzefarde'a*: מַכַּת צְפַרְדֵּי'א) as described in Exod. 8:1–8:14. Note that the Hebrew word for “frogs” is actually singular: “The plague of the Frog.” The midrash says there was at first one giant frog that came up from the Nile, but when the Egyptians tried to smash it, more would come out; and when these were smashed, more came out from them, and so on. This plague was to demonstrate YHVH's complete authority over the Nile, which would produce frogs that would directly harm Pharaoh and his people. The incessant croaking of the frogs caused the Egyptians to go without rest, and was meant as repayment for the crying of the Israelites because of their harsh oppression. The frogs got into everything, including people's clothing and attacked their genitals, etc. The word “frogs” (צְפַרְדֵּי'א) appears ten times in this section, alluding that the plague was as bad as ten plagues.

<sup>38</sup> According to Jewish tradition, Moses could not initiate these plagues because the Nile river had once protected him. Therefore Aaron's staff was used to begin the plague.

<sup>39</sup> Yes, though again this only made matters worse...

<sup>40</sup> Each of the plagues lasted seven days, and therefore Pharaoh asked Moses to plead with the LORD to remove the frogs as soon as possible. Since it was the sixth day when he made his request, the following day was the soonest the frogs could be ordered to leave the land. According to another tradition, it was already the seventh day of the plague, and the magicians told Pharaoh that the frogs were going to leave that day anyway, so the king hoped to show that Moses was a fake. Moses, of course, told the Pharaoh the frogs would leave at his command on the following day – and they did. The magicians were therefore exposed as the fakes to Pharaoh.

<sup>41</sup> Even though he could smell the stench of the dead frogs in the palace, he still made his heart heavy in defiance.

<sup>42</sup> The plague of lice or gnats (*makkat kinnim*: מַכַּת כִּנּוּמִים) as described in Exod. 8:16-19. They believed it was a sign from God (lit., “the finger of God” - אֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים) because they could not duplicate it using their magical arts. Every Egyptian was covered with lice and vermin as if he had lived in a garbage dump for a year.



- 43. What was the fourth plague? (8:16-23) <sup>43</sup>
- 44. How did Pharaoh attempt to bargain with Moses? (8:24-25) <sup>44</sup>
- 45. Did the Pharaoh finally relent after the fourth plague ended? (8:28) <sup>45</sup>
- 46. What was the fifth plague? (9:1-6) <sup>46</sup>
- 47. And what was the sixth plague? (9:8-12) <sup>47</sup>
- 48. How could the boils be on the Egyptian's animals if they had all died during the fifth plague? <sup>48</sup>
- 49. What was the seventh plague? (9:13-35) <sup>49</sup>
- 50. Why didn't God simply exterminate Pharaoh and the Egyptians? (9:15-16) <sup>50</sup>
- 51. Why does the Torah mention that after the 7<sup>th</sup> plague the flax and barley were struck down, but the wheat and spelt were not? (9:31-32) <sup>51</sup>




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<sup>43</sup> The plague of “swarms” (*makkat-arov*: מַכַּת־עֲרוֹב) of flies or wild animals as described in Exod. 8:20-32. Jewish tradition tends to regard this as throngs of feral animals that attacked the Egyptians (e.g., lions, wolves, snakes, scorpions, wasps, spiders, crows, locusts, and other types of noxious creatures) – a terrifying mixture of all the harmful creatures of the world. These animals hunted down Egyptians and tormented them. God also miraculously set apart the land of Goshen so that none of these beasts would be able to enter there. According to midrash, this plague was repayment for forcing the Israelites to capture animals and keep up the zoos of the Egyptians. Also, because of their slavery, the Israelite's flocks were attacked by wild animals, and this was return for their trouble.

<sup>44</sup> Pharaoh offered that the Israelites could go an offer sacrifice “in the land,” but Moses refused, stating that the people needed to make a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices. Besides, the Egyptians were vegetarians (actually, “vegans”), and would regard sacrifices in the land as an “abomination.” Pharaoh then said he would allow them to go into the desert, “only you must not go very far away.” The king also asked Moses to pray for him, suggesting that he was unraveling altogether by this point. Moses agreed but warned Pharaoh not to attempt to trick him again, or to change his mind by refusing to let the people go sacrifice to the LORD.

<sup>45</sup> No, he again “hardened his heart” and refused to let the people go.

<sup>46</sup> The fifth plague was pestilence (*makkat-dever*: מַכַּת־דֵּבַר) as described in Exod. 9:1-7. The livestock of Egyptians got sick and died, though none of the Israelite animals died. This plague was repayment for forcing the Israelites to care for the Egyptian animals while they worked as animals during their slavery. Pharaoh was unmoved by this plague, and therefore the Torah states that God Himself began to harden his heart (Exod. 9:12).

<sup>47</sup> The sixth plague was that of boils, blisters, rashes, and ulcers upon all the Egyptians and animals of the Egyptians. This is called *makkat-shechin* (מַכַּת־שִׁחִין) as described in Exod. 9:8-12.

<sup>48</sup> Midrash: Before the 5<sup>th</sup> plague, God gave the Egyptians the chance to listen to his warning and take their livestock inside, where they would be safe. Note further that the Hebrew words for “livestock” and “animals” are different.

<sup>49</sup> The seventh plague was that of hail mixed with fire (i.e., *makkat barad*: מַכַּת־בָּרָד) as described in Exod. 9:13-35. According to midrash, each huge hailstone contained burning fire so that they resembled stars falling from heaven. Compare this to Yeshua's description of the Great Tribulation in Matthew 24:29.

<sup>50</sup> God said to Pharaoh: “for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you My power, so that my Name may be proclaimed in all the earth” (see Rom. 9:17-ff).

<sup>51</sup> Since the Exodus occurred on Nisan 15, it is likely the 7<sup>th</sup> plague occurred a month or two before, since the growing season in Egypt occurs earlier than it does in the Promised Land.



52. How did Pharaoh respond to the miraculous hail that fell? (9:27-28) <sup>52</sup>

## Advanced Questions

1. God gave at least *five* promises to the Israelites at the start of the redemption (Exod. 6:6-9):
  - a. “I will bring you out” (i.e., *hotzeiti*: הוֹצֵאתִי)
  - b. “I will deliver you” (i.e., *hitzalti*: הִצַּלְתִּי)
  - c. “I will redeem you” (i.e., *ga’alti*: גָּאַלְתִּי)
  - d. “I will take you” as my own people (i.e., *lakachti*: לָקַחְתִּי)
  - e. “I will bring you” into the land I swore to give to the fathers (i.e., *heveti*: הֵבֵאתִי)

During the traditional Passover Seder, we drink *four* cups<sup>53</sup> of wine to commemorate the fulfillment of each of these four promises of God:

- a. The Cup of Sanctification – Kiddush for Passover
- b. The Cup of Deliverance - Celebrates the story of deliverance and the ten plagues
- c. The Cup of Redemption - Celebrates God’s redemption through the blood of the lamb
- d. The Cup of Restoration - Closes the Passover Seder in praise
- e. The Cup of Elijah – (see footnote below)<sup>53</sup>

How do each of these cups correspond to each of the four promises? How do you see the salvation given in the Messiah in relation to each cup? What about the Cup of Elijah?

2. The Exodus is perhaps the most fundamental event of Jewish history. It is commemorated every year during Passover; it is mentioned in the very first of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:2); and it is recalled every Sabbath (Deut. 5:12-15). The major festivals of Shavuot (Pentecost) and Sukkot (Tabernacles) derive from it. Indeed, nearly every commandment of the Torah (including the laws of the Tabernacle and the sacrificial system) may be traced back to the story of the Exodus. Most importantly, the Exodus prefigures and exemplifies the work of redemption given through the sacrificial life of Yeshua the Messiah, the true King of the Jews and the Lamb of God.

Compare (and contrast) how the historical Exodus of Israel is a “type” or “picture” of the spiritual Exodus of those redeemed by Yeshua the Messiah. In what ways has the Exodus *already* been fulfilled, and in what ways are we still waiting for our redemption? Indeed, what do think is the central idea of redemption itself? What does God have in mind, so to speak, regarding the entire program to redeem people from bondage to sin and death?

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<sup>52</sup> He again feigned repentance and confessed that he had sinned. “God is just; it is I and my people who are in the wrong.” Nonetheless after Moses went out and spread out his hands to God to stop the storm, Pharaoh hardened his heart yet again, just as God had foretold to Moses. This is the mentality of the wicked: when evil befalls them, they beg God for mercy, but once the evil has passed, they immediately revert to their evil ways.

<sup>53</sup> The traditional text of the Haggadah was written *before* Israel became a nation. The fifth cup is therefore traditionally commemorated as the “Cup of the prophet Elijah.” A *sixth* cup (“I will give”) is also implied...



## The Plagues of Egypt

The plagues of Egypt (i.e., *makkot Mitzraim*: מַכּוֹת מִצְרַיִם) refer to the series of calamities that befell Egypt by the hand of the God of Israel as recounted in the Book of Exodus. Since there were a total of ten distinct plagues delivered upon Egypt, they are also called the “Ten Plagues” (i.e., *eser ha-makkot*). In parashat Va'era, the first seven of the ten plagues are described.

Exodus 12:12 God says, “... on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments.” Thus the plagues are thought to be symbolic of the defeat of various gods venerated in ancient Egyptian mythology (and occultism in general):

#	Plague	Reference	Egyptian god
1	Water to blood ( <i>dam</i> : דָּם)	Exod. 7:14–25	Hapi and/or Khnum (god of the Nile)
2	Frogs ( <i>tzefarde'a</i> : צִפְרַדְיָה)	Exod. 7:25–8:11	Heket (goddess of fertility and water)
3	Lice, vermin ( <i>kinnim</i> : כִּנִּים)	Exod. 8:12–15	Geb (god of the Earth)
4	Swarms ( <i>arov</i> : עֲרוֹב)	Exod. 8:20–32	Khepri (lord of flies or beetles)
5	Pestilence ( <i>dever</i> : דֶּבֶר)	Exod. 9:1-7	Apis (goddess of animals)
6	Boils ( <i>shechin</i> : שְׁחִין)	Exod. 9:8-12	Isis (goddess of nature and healing)
7	Hail and Fire ( <i>barad</i> : בָּרָד)	Exod. 9:13-35	Nut (sky goddess and sister of Geb)
8	Locusts ( <i>arbeh</i> : אֲרֵבָה)	Exod. 10:1-20	Set (god of storms and disorder)
9	Darkness ( <i>choshekh</i> : חוֹשֶׁךְ)	Exod. 10:21-29	Ra (the Sun god)
10	Death of the firstborn ( <i>bechorot</i> : בְּכוֹרוֹת)	Exod. 11:1-12:36	Pharaoh (“son of Ra”), Khnum / Amon (ram god); Horus (war god)

Some commentators ask whether the plagues were intended more for the Israelites than for the Egyptians, since the Israelites had been oppressed by the powers of Egypt to the point of being “without the breath of hope” (Exod. 6:9). Besides, no amount of “signs” will ever change the heart of the unbeliever, while the believer will be edified by God’s intervention on his behalf...

### detzakh, adash, be'achav

During (the Maggid portion of) the Passover Seder, we spill from the second cup while reciting the names of the ten plagues. A tradition arose to recite three acronyms (“detzakh, adash, be'achav”) while spilling from the cup three times:

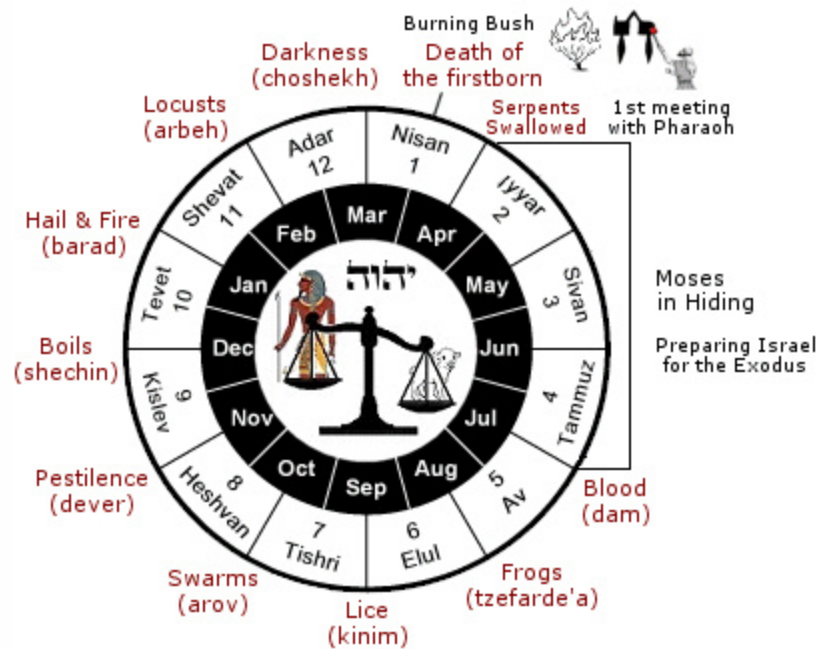
בְּאֵת"ב	עֲרֹב"ש	דֶּבֶר"ד
בָּרָד Barad	עֲרוֹב Arov	דָּם Dam
אֲרֵבָה Arbeh	דֶּבֶר Dever	צִפְרַדְיָה Tzefarde'a
חוֹשֶׁךְ Choshekh	שְׁחִין Shechin	כִּנִּים Kinnim
בְּכוֹרוֹת Bechorot		





## The Sequence of the Plagues

Rabbi Bachya wrote that the ten plagues followed one another over a twelve-month period. On Nisan 15 God spoke to Moses from the burning bush and commissioned him to go to Pharaoh. On Nisan 21, Moses told his father-in-law Yitro (Jethro) of his mission and left for Egypt. Near the end of the month of Nisan, Moses immediately went before Pharaoh and warned him to release the Jews. For the next three months (Iyyar, Sivan, and Tammuz), Moses went into hiding and instructed the elders of Israel regarding their coming deliverance. The plague of blood began on the first of Av and lasted seven days. A respite of three weeks occurred before the next plague (frogs). This was the pattern for all the ten plagues (i.e., roughly a plague a month). The last plague - that of the death of the firstborn - occurred in the month of Nisan, a year after Moses first warned Pharaoh (Exod. 4:22-23). The period of the plagues therefore totaled twelve months:



## The Divine Calendar

The first commandment given to the nation of Israel (as opposed to patriarchs or individual leaders such as Moses) was that of *Rosh Chodashim* (i.e., the Biblical New Year that begins on the first new moon of spring). “This month shall be the beginning of months for you” (Exod. 12:2). Our corporate identity therefore begins with a shared consciousness of *time* from a Divine perspective. The *mo'edim* (festivals of the LORD) all are reckoned based on the sacred calendar given to the redeemed people of God.

## For Next Week

- Read parashat Bo (i.e., Exodus 10:1-13:16)
- Read the Haftarah (Jeremiah 46:13-28)
- Read the New Testament (Luke 22:7-30; 1 Cor. 11:20-34)

