



VA'ERA/AND I APPEARED
Shemot/Exodus 6:2-9:35

We left the **Israelites** last week at a **very low point**. יהוה had sent **Moshe (Moses)** to **liberate** them and the people had **believed** his message, yet their **situation worsened**. They had to put out the **same number of bricks**, but now they had to come up with their own **straw**. They were **falsely accused** of **idleness** and **beaten**. Why should they **continue** to **believe Moshe and Aharon (Aaron)**? **Moshe** begged יהוה for an **answer** to what was going on:

Shemot 5:22 So Moshe returned to יהוה and said, "Adonai, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me?"²³ "For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all."

Concerning this **dark moment**, **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks** writes:

“The **Torah** is preparing the ground for one of its most monumental propositions: It is in the **darkest night** that **Israel has its greatest visions**. **Hope** is born at the very **edge** of the **abyss of despair**. There is **nothing natural** about this, **nothing inevitable**. **No logic** can give rise to **hope**; **no law of history** charts a path from **slavery to redemption, exile to return**. The entire **sequence of events** has been a **prelude to the single most formative moment in the history of Israel: the intervention of G-d in history – the supreme Power intervening on behalf of the supremely powerless...**”

יהוה will **answer** Moshe’s dilemma with a **speech** that is **awesome** in its **literary structure**. **Nechama Leibowitz** points out that it takes the form of a **chiastic structure**:

(A) **I am יהוה** (6:2)

(B) **Appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob** as El Shaddai, but by my name יהוה I was not known to them (6:3)

(C) I also established my covenant with them **to give them the land of Canaan**, where they lived as strangers (6:4)

(D) Moreover, **I have heard the groaning of the Israelites**, whom the **Egyptians are enslaving**, and have remembered my covenant (6:5)

(E) **Therefore say to the Israelites, I am יהוה** (6:6)

(D1) **and I will bring you out** from under the **yoke of the Egyptians**. I will free you from being slaves to them, and will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgments. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your G-d. Then you will know that I am יהוה your G-d who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. (6:6-7)

(C1) **And I will bring you to the land** I swore with uplifted hands to give (6:8)

(B1) **to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob**. I will give it to you as a possession. (6:8)

(A1) **I am יהוה** (6:8)

Here are some of the **extraordinary details** of the **Hebrew** text:

- The **first** and **second halves** of the speech each contain **exactly 50 Hebrew words**
- (B) and (B1) are about the **patriarchs**

- (C) and (C1) are about the **land**
- (D) and (D1) are about **Egypt and slavery**
- The **first half** is about the **past**, the **second half** is about the **future**
- The **first half** refers to the **Israelites** in the **third person (them)**
- The **second half** refers to the **Israelites** in the **second person (you)**
- I am יהוה – **Beginning, center, and the end** of the **speech**

It is very evident that the **Torah** is making a **distinction** between the names of **El Shaddai** and יהוה:

Shemot 6:3 "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as El Shaddai, but by My name יהוה I was not known to them.

We must be **careful** in how we **interpret** this verse. It is **not saying** that the **patriarchs "did not know" His name**. For the name יהוה appears **165 times** in the book of **Bereshith** (Genesis). Furthermore, He **addresses Himself by יהוה** specifically to both **Abraham and Jacob**:

Bereshith 15:7 Then He said to him, "I am יהוה, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."

Bereshith 28:13 And behold, יהוה stood above it and said: "I am יהוה Elohim of Abraham your father and the Elohim of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants.

We can gain insight from an explanation by **Rashi**:

“It is **not written** here, ‘(My name, יהוה) I did not make known to them’ but rather ‘(by the name, יהוה) I was not known to them’ – meaning, **I was not recognized by them in my attribute of ‘keeping faith,’ by reason of which my name is ‘יהוה,’ namely that I am faithful to fulfill My word, for I made promises to them but I did not fulfill them (during their lifetime).”**

Rav Elhanan Samet maintains that **El Shaddai guarantees descendents** to the **patriarchs**:

Bereshith 17:1 ... "I am El Shaddai...and will multiply you exceedingly."

Bereshith 35:11 ... "I am El Shaddai. Be fruitful and multiply

The name of יהוה **guarantees land** for the **patriarchs** as seen above in **Bereshith 15:7** and **28:13**. The key to the **new revelation** of יהוה is that the Almighty is **acting** on His **promise of the land** which will **begin by releasing His children from Egypt, continue with a long and sometimes torturous march, but guaranteed to end in the Promised Land**.

יהוה has a **plan**, both to **bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt** and to **educate the Egyptians** concerning who He is:

Shemot 7:5 And the Egyptians will know that I am יהוה when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it."

Let the **signs and wonders begin!**

*Shemot 7:8 Then הַיְהוָה spoke to Moshe and Aharon, saying,⁹ "When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Show a miracle for yourselves,' then you shall say to Aharon, 'Take your rod and cast it before Pharaoh, and let it become a serpent.' "*¹⁰ So Moshe and Aharon went in to Pharaoh, and they did so, just as הַיְהוָה commanded. And Aharon cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent.¹¹ But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments.¹² For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aharon's rod swallowed up their rods.¹³ And Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as הַיְהוָה had said.

From verse 9 we learn that this **miracle of turning the rod into a serpent** was not meant to be performed at the **initiative of Moshe or Aharon**, but at the **request of Pharaoh**. What was the point of this? Was it to get them to believe in הַיְהוָה? That hardly makes sense since the **wise men** and the **magicians of Egypt** were **able to do the very same thing**.

There is, however, a little bit of **one-upmanship** here. **Aharon's rod swallowed up their rods**. Yet the text indicates that **Pharaoh's heart grew hard** and **nothing seemed to come of the episode**. We are still left with the **question**, "Why would Pharaoh ask for a miracle?" Was he trying to **step into their faith**? Or was he hoping to **prove his superiority**? Remember **40 years ago**, this was also **Moshe's home**. Assuming this was a **different Pharaoh**, he could possibly have been like a **step-brother** to Moshe.

Well, let's go back in time a bit....when did we **meet magicians** for the **first time**? In the **story of Joseph** and the **dreams of Pharaoh**, it was the **magicians** who first attempted to **interpret Pharaoh's dreams**. There are a lot of **similarities** between the **two events**. **In both cases**:

- The **Hebrew** has the **advantage** over the **Egyptian magicians**
- **Something** is **swallowed**
 - **Sheaves and cows** in Pharaoh's dreams
 - A **staff** in Aharon's case
- The situation comes about as a **result of Pharaoh's fears**
 - The **Pharaoh** is **anxious** about his **dreams**
 - *Bereshith 41:8 Now it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh.*
 - The **Pharaoh** is **worried** about the **Israelites**
 - *Shemot 1:9 And he said to his people, "Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we... in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land."*

Again, what is the **point** of these **parallels**? It has been suggested that the **miracles in our Shemot story** were **not about establishing faith**; but just as the **intention of the dreams** was to **convey a message**, so these **miracles** would **bring a message**. And what could it be? Well the **prophet Ezekiel** describes **Pharaoh** as a **great serpent, ruling over everything**. The **serpent** wanted to **swallow up the weak**, thus picturing **Israel** under the **bonds of slavery**. This is where we see the **signs** come into **play**.

The **signs** show the **TRUE** strength and power of the serpent. The rod in Aharon's hand is like a **dried up stick**, but it **transforms** into a **living being**, one **capable of confronting Pharaoh**, the serpent. The rod is the **people of Israel** coming to **life**! What happens next? **Aharon's rod swallows up the rods of the**

Egyptians! The **pride** and the **strength** of the **Egyptians** will be **overtaken!** It is a **message** and a **prophecy!** The **sons of Israel** are **destined to overcome the world!** And it can happen in a **moment!**

So when **Pharaoh** witnesses what happens with the **rods**, it should have been a **trigger** to **remember the dreams** of the **earlier Pharaoh**. That particular **Pharaoh** during the time of **Joseph** was made to **understand that the abundance and contentment Egypt was enjoying would come to an end**. Now the **current Pharaoh** is given a **similar sign** that the **power and prosperity** he is enjoying will also come to an **abrupt end**.

So in summary, the **function** of the **sign** was **not to prove who was better at miracles** or to **bring Pharaoh to faith**, but to **deliver a message**. The **message being – Israel would confront and conquer Egypt**. And according to the **sign**, it would **happen quickly**.

Interestingly enough, there is a **third place** in the Scriptures where there is **mention** of the **Egyptian magicians** versus a **Hebrew**. The story is of **Daniel** and his **three friends** who are **captive in Babylon**. **Daniel's gift for understanding visions** becomes **well known**:

Daniel 1:17 As for these four young men, Elohim gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams...²⁰ And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm.

Nebuchadnezzar was the **king of Babylon** who **conquered Judah, destroyed Jerusalem**, and carried the people of the **southern kingdom (Judah/Jews) to Babylon**. Now he has a **dream**, and like the Pharaoh, **“his spirit was so troubled that his sleep left him.”** So the **magicians** are called in to **interpret the dream**:

Daniel 2:1 Now in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was so troubled that his sleep left him.² Then the king gave the command to call the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king.³ And the king said to them, "I have had a dream, and my spirit is anxious to know the dream."

Daniel interprets the dream which is about **four kingdoms**, the last one being the **Kingdom of Heaven** which will **defeat all other kingdoms and rule the world!**

Daniel 2:44 "And in the days of these kings the El of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.

This is a **divine vision**. It takes us **beyond what we are seeing with our eyes** in this world. In our parasha, the **Egyptians** had the **most powerful kingdom** in the world. The **Israelites** were just a bunch of **slaves, disheartened and miserable**. **Pharaoh** was the **great serpent** of the world. However, there is a **power** that **transcends this world** as we know it. And in that **spiritual world**, the **great serpent** is **destined to be swallowed up!**

Revelation 12:9 So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Revelation 20:2 He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;

While the **signs** that **Moshe** was given to perform were a **message** to **Pharaoh**, they also provided the people of **Israel** with **encouragement**:

- The **sign** of the **rod** – that they would come **alive** and “**swallow up**” **Egypt**!
- The **sign** of the **leprous hand** – their Elohim could **heal any disease**
- The **sign** of the **Nile** turning to **blood** – the **Nile**, also seen as a **god**, was the **life of Egypt**. When it turned to **blood**, the **Egyptians** would have seen it as the **death of a god**.

I would like to return to the **magicians** in our parasha for just a moment. It was the **magicians** who during the **first set of three plagues**, **understood** the **power of the Almighty**:

Shemot 8:19 Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of Elohim." But Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as אֱלֹהִים had said.

Now in the book of **Daniel**, the wise men and the **magicians** owed their lives to **Daniel**. For when **Nebuchadnezzar** had his **dream** he was **ready to execute them** because they were **not able to interpret** for him:

Daniel 2:9 "if you do not make known the dream to me, there is only one decree for you! For you have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the time has changed. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can give me its interpretation."¹⁰ The Chaldeans answered the king, and said, "There is not a man on earth who can tell the king's matter; therefore no king, lord, or ruler has ever asked such things of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean."¹¹ "It is a difficult thing that the king requests, and there is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh."¹² For this reason the king was angry and very furious, and gave a command to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.

When the **interpretation** to **Nebuchadnezzar's dream** was **revealed to Daniel** in a **dream**, he **saved the lives of all the wise men (includes the magicians)**:

Daniel 2:24 Therefore Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; take me before the king, and I will tell the king the interpretation."

As a **reward to Daniel** for his **interpretation**, he was made a **ruler over Babylon AND placed in charge** of all its **wise men (including the magicians)**. Now...remember it is the book of **Daniel** which is **filled with prophetic revelation**, including **Daniel's own dreams and visions of future kingdoms, the tribulation, and the anti-messiah**. How would **you** like to have been **taught by Daniel**? And **who** were some of those **under Daniel** at that time when he became a **ruler**? Do you think **Daniel** may have shared some of what he **learned with the wise men and the magicians**?

Is there any **evidence** of this? I think so! How about this story in the **Gospels**?

Matthew 2:1 After Yeshua was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the Torah, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:⁶ "But you, Bethlehem, in the land

of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel."⁷ Then **Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.**⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.¹⁰ **When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.**¹¹ **On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.** Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.¹² **And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.**

Who are the **magi**? They are astrologers, **magicians**, or **wise men** from the **east**...that is from **Babylon**. How did they know to **follow the star** and **look for the baby Yeshua**? I think this **instruction** had **originally come from Daniel**, who had **taught them truth** as their **overseer**.

Okay, let's change directions a little. In the **Almighty's revelation to Moshe** in the **burning bush**, He gives him a **brief description** of how **His plan** for **releasing the Israelites** will come about:

*Shemot 3:19 "But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand.
²⁰ "So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go.*

As **Moshe leaves for Egypt**, **יהוה** speaks to him **again**, and this time we notice that the **hardening of Pharaoh's heart** will play a **role** in the **freeing of Israel**:

Shemot 4:21 And יהוה said to Moshe, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go."²² "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says יהוה: "Israel is My son, My firstborn."²³ "So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn." ' "

Later we see that the **hardening of Pharaoh's heart** will lead to **multiple signs and wonders** which will also **open the eyes of the Egyptians** that they **might know יהוה**:

Shemot 7:3 "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt."⁴ "But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments."⁵ "And the Egyptians shall know that I am יהוה, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them."

There was a **divine order** to how this would happen. We will see that the **first nine plagues** are **divided** into **three groups of three**. The **first plague** in each group describes a **time "in the morning"** (baboker - בִּבְקֹר) when **Moshe** should **"stand"** (yatzav - יָצַב) **before Pharaoh** with his **warning**:

Plague One (blood) - *Shemot 7:15 "Go to Pharaoh in the morning (baboker - בִּבְקֹר), when he goes out to the water, and you shall stand (yatzav - יָצַב) by the river's bank to meet him...*

Plague Four (gnats) - Shemot 8:20 And ה' said to Moshe, "Rise early in the morning (baboker - בִּבְקֶרֶךְ) and stand (yatzav - יָצַב) before Pharaoh as he comes out to the water..."

Plague Seven (hail) - Shemot 9:13 Then ה' said to Moshe, "Rise early in the morning (baboker - בִּבְקֶרֶךְ) and stand (yatzav - יָצַב) before Pharaoh..."

In the **second plague** of each of the **three sets**, there is **no mention of when (in the morning)** or of "standing" before Pharaoh. Instead, we see a **different set of common phrases**:

Plague Two (frogs) - Shemot 8:1 And ה' spoke to Moshe, "Go to Pharaoh (בֵּן אֶל־פַּרְעֹה) and say to him, 'Thus says ה': "Let My people go, that they may serve Me."² "But if you refuse to send them (לֹא־אֶתְּחַנְּנוּ אֶתְּחַנְּנוּ אֶתְּחַנְּנוּ) away behold, I will smite all your territory with frogs."

Plague Five (cattle) - Shemot 9:1 Then ה' said to Moshe, "Go to Pharaoh (בֵּן אֶל־פַּרְעֹה) and tell him, 'Thus says ה' Elohim of the Hebrews: "Let My people go, that they may serve Me."² "For if you refuse to send them (לֹא־אֶתְּחַנְּנוּ אֶתְּחַנְּנוּ אֶתְּחַנְּנוּ), and still hold them,³ "behold, the hand of ה' will be on your cattle in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the oxen, and on the sheep -- a very severe pestilence."

Plague Eight (locusts) - Shemot 10:1 And ה' said to Moshe, "Go to Pharaoh (בֵּן אֶל־פַּרְעֹה); for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him,² "and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son's son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I am ה'." "³ So Moshe and Aharon came in to Pharaoh and said to him, "Thus says ה' Elohim of the Hebrews: 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me.'⁴ For, if you refuse to send out (לֹא־אֶתְּחַנְּנוּ אֶתְּחַנְּנוּ אֶתְּחַנְּנוּ) my nation, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory."

Each of the **third plagues** in the three sets **occurs without any prior warning**:

Plague Three (lice) - Shemot 8:16 So ה' said to Moshe, "Say to Aharon, 'Stretch out your rod, and strike the dust of the land, so that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt.'"

Plague Six (boils) - Shemot 9:8 So ה' said to Moshe and Aharon, "Take for yourselves handfuls of ashes from a furnace, and let Moshe scatter it toward the heavens in the sight of Pharaoh."⁹ "And it will become fine dust in all the land of Egypt, and it will cause boils that break out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt."

Plague Nine (darkness) - Shemot 10:21 Then ה' said to Moshe, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, darkness which may even be felt."

Rav Bazak teaches that **each group** brings the **Egyptians one step closer** in coming to **know the Hebrew's Elohim**. At the **beginning** of the **first plague** in **each group** we find the **definition** of the **aim of that group**.

- The goal of the **first set of three plagues** – Prove that He is יהוה

Shemot 7:17 Thus says יהוה: "By this you shall know that I am יהוה..."

Rav Bazak writes (emphasis mine, some reformatting and condensing):

“Indeed, the **central drama** in the **first group of plagues** involves the **battle against the sorcerers**, and in this respect we see a **development from one plague to the next**. In the plague of **blood** we see that the **river is stricken**, but it appears that the **sorcerers, too**, are capable of **turning water into blood**:

Shemot 7:22 Then the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments; and Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them...

We are **told nothing** of how the **plague is removed**; despite the severity of the disaster, the **Egyptians manage to overcome** the problem:

Shemot 7:24 So all the Egyptians dug all around the river for water to drink, because they could not drink the water of the river.

What has been **demonstrated** is that **Moshe's power** is at least **equal** to that of the **sorcerers**.

We detect **more progress** when it comes to the **plague of frogs**. Here, too, the **sorcerers succeed in performing the same wonders** as those shown by **Moshe and Aharon**:

Shemot 8:7 And the sorcerers did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs on the land of Egypt.

Now there is a **recognizable degree of distress** in **Egypt causing Pharaoh to request** of Moshe and Aharon:

Shemot 8:8 ... "Entreat יהוה that He may take away the frogs from me and from my people..."

Here we already see the **superiority of Moshe and Aharon, representing God, over the sorcerers**. Indeed, **Moshe hastens to make the most of this opportunity**, suggesting to Pharaoh:

Shemot 8:9 "Accept the honor of saying when I shall intercede for you, for your servants, and for your people, to destroy the frogs from you and your houses..."

And when **Pharaoh answers, 'Tomorrow,'** Moshe replies:

Shemot 8:10 "Let it be according to your word, that you may know that there is **no one like יהוה** our Elohim."

Here a **certain victory** has been **achieved** – **God's power** has been **proven superior** to that of the **sorcerers**. In the **plague of the lice**, the aim is **achieved in its entirety**. Here there is **no mention of the sorcerers succeeding** in producing a **similar phenomenon**; on the other hand, we are told that **they try in vain to remove the plague**:

Shemot 8:18 Now the magicians so worked with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not...

Immediately thereafter we read of the **sorcerers' conclusion**:

Shemot 8:19 "This is the finger of Elohim."

The **aim** of the **first group of plagues** – “**in order that you will know that I am God**” has been **achieved**. It should be added that it was **specifically the Egyptians** who first needed to be **taught** about the **existence of a transcendental Divine Cause**, for – as opposed to other ancient Middle Eastern religions – **Egyptian culture regarded the king himself as a god**. This is **highlighted in Ezekiel’s prophecy of punishment for Egypt**, in which we read:

Ezekiel 29:3 "Speak, and say, 'Thus says Adonai יהוה: "Behold, I am against you, O Pharaoh king of Egypt, O great monster who lies in the midst of his rivers, Who has said, 'My River is my own; I have made it for myself.'

Pharaoh presumes to be the **creator of Egypt’s source of water**; he **pretends** that he has the **creative power of a god**. For this reason it is **emphasized** in this **prophecy**, too:

*Ezekiel 29:9 "And the land of Egypt shall become desolate and waste; **then they will know that I am יהוה**, because he said, 'The River is mine, and I have made it.'*

It is therefore no wonder that the **first two plagues** are the only ones that involve the **river**, the **source of Pharaoh’s pride**: the **first plague strikes the river itself** – the same river over which **Pharaoh claims** to have **complete control** – while the **second plague emanates from within the river**:

Shemot 8:3 "So the river shall bring forth frogs abundantly, which shall go up and come into your house...

The **third plague**, which spreads “**throughout the land of Egypt**” (8:12), demonstrates that **God’s dominion is not limited only to the river**, but rather His **actions are felt throughout the land**.

➤ The **goal of the second set of three plagues** – to **prove He is a God involved in human affairs**

Following the **demonstration** of the **actual existence of a transcendental God** through the first set of plagues, the **second set** has as its aim – as emphasized at the outset:

Shemot 8:22 "... in order that you may know that I am יהוה in the midst of the land.

This group is meant to prove that **not only does God exist, but He is involved in “the land” – in worldly, human affairs**, and that **He watches over those who fear Him**. How can **God’s involvement in “the midst of the land,”** in worldly affairs, be **proven**? This set of **plagues highlights the distinction** – as yet unmentioned – **between the Egyptians and the sons of Israel**. Thus we find in the **introduction** to the plague of gnats:

Shemot 8:22 "... I will set apart the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell, that no swarms of gnats shall be there...

Once again there is a **recognizable progression** in the **internalization** of the message **when we reach the next plague**, which afflicts the cattle. Here, too, **Moshe emphasizes** in his warning:

Shemot 9:4 "And יהוה will make a difference between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt. So nothing shall die of all that belongs to the children of Israel."

Pharaoh is indeed **curious to know the outcome**:

Shemot 9:7 Then Pharaoh sent, and indeed, not even one of the livestock of the Israelites was dead....

The plague of **boils**, representing the **third plague** of this group, **comes without warning**, and therefore there is **no mention** of a **division** between the children of Israel and the Egyptians. We **might still have expected Pharaoh to conduct an investigation**, as he did in the case of the previous plague, **to find out** whether once again the **children of Israel had survived the plague unscathed**. No such investigation is explicitly mentioned, but it would seem that this is **precisely the intention** of the text in its description:

Shemot 9:11 And the magicians could not stand before Moshe because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians and on all the Egyptians.

This is the **first plague** where **Pharaoh and the sorcerers are completely passive**, and for this reason they are **physically prevented** from **assessing the situation** among the children of Israel.

➤ The goal of the **third set of the three plagues** – יהוה's uniqueness

Two messages have been conveyed so far to the Egyptians – the **existence of God**, and **His guidance over the world**. Now the time has come to express another message: the **uniqueness of God**. The **third group** of plagues gives special expression to the idea that **God is the only God**, for **His actions are without precedent** in anything that has ever happened in the world.

Once again, we see a **progression** from **one plague to the next**. In the **first plague** of this group, hail, we read:

Shemot 9:14 "for at this time I will send all My plagues to your very heart... that you may know that there is none like Me in all the earth..."¹⁸ "Behold, tomorrow about this time I will cause very heavy hail to rain down, such as has not been in Egypt since its founding until now.

In the **second plague** – that of locusts – it is once again **emphasized in the warning that the punishment will be unprecedented**:

Shemot 10:6 'They shall fill your houses, the houses of all your servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians -- which neither your fathers nor your fathers' fathers have seen, since the day that they were on the earth to this day.'

But in the **description** of the plague itself we see an **escalation**:

Shemot 10:14 And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt and rested on all the territory of Egypt. They were very severe; previously there had been no such locusts as they, nor shall there be such after them.

We sense here that not only was this an **unprecedented phenomenon**, but that it was a **unique, one-time event** – like the great flood – that would **never be repeated**.

The **third plague** is an **exception** to its **predecessors**. It describes **not a natural phenomenon**, whose principal message turns on its timing and scope, but rather a **completely unnatural phenomenon** – “**a thick darkness throughout the land of Egypt for three days.**” This plague demonstrated **God's absolute and exclusive control over the entire world**.

In conclusion, the **plagues that befell the Egyptians** had a **dual purpose**: they were meant **both to persuade the stubborn Pharaoh to send out the sons of Israel**, as well as **to teach him something of the nature of the God whom he presumed to challenge**. The **final plague** – the **killing of the firstborn** – had a special purpose, **illustrating the nature of the conflict between God and Pharaoh**. The other plagues conveyed **three messages**, expressed in the **three groups of plagues**: the **existence of God, His providence and His uniqueness.**” (end quote)

Egypt (Mitzrayim - מִצְרַיִם) comes from a word which means to be “**in distress.**” Generally the Bible casts the land of **Egypt** in a very **negative light**. It is the **oppressor of His people, refusing to give Israel her liberation. Egypt** wants **control** over **Israel** because it fears her **power. Egypt** pictures the **world** in which **we live**, and the **world** we must **set ourselves apart from**. We must lose the **mentality** that **enslaves us** to its **system**. We also need to learn the **lessons** of the **plagues...the Almighty’s existence** and that **He will again move on behalf of His people and gather them out of Egypt.**

Shabbat Shalom!

Ardelle