

## PARSHAT VAERA, year 3

EXODUS 8 <sup>16</sup> And ADONAI\* said to Moses, “Early in the morning present yourself to Pharaoh, as he is coming out to the water, and say to him, ‘Thus says ADONAI: Let My people go that they may worship Me. <sup>17</sup> For if you do not let My people go, I will let loose swarms<sup>†</sup> against you and your servants and your people and your houses; the houses of the Egyptians, and the very ground they stand on, shall be filled with swarms. <sup>18</sup> But on that day I will set apart the region of Goshen, where My people dwell, so that no swarms shall be there, that you may know that I am ADONAI in the midst of the land. <sup>19</sup> And I will make a distinction<sup>‡</sup> between My people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall come to pass.”

<sup>20</sup> And ADONAI did so. Heavy swarms invaded Pharaoh’s palace and the houses of his courtiers; throughout the country of Egypt the land was ruined because of the swarms. <sup>21</sup> Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Go and sacrifice to your God within the land.” <sup>22</sup> But Moses replied, “It would not be right to do this, for the abomination of Egypt<sup>§</sup> we shall sacrifice to ADONAI our God. If we sacrifice the abomination of Egypt before their very eyes, will they not stone us?! <sup>23</sup> A three days’ journey into the wilderness we shall go. and sacrifice to ADONAI our God as He has said to us.” <sup>24</sup> Pharaoh said, “I myself will let you go, that you may sacrifice to ADONAI your God in the wilderness; only you must not go far. Plead, then, for me.” <sup>25</sup> And Moses said, “I am leaving you now. I will plead with ADONAI that the swarms depart tomorrow from Pharaoh and his servants and his people; only let not Pharaoh continue to toy with us, not letting the people go to sacrifice to ADONAI.” <sup>26</sup> So Moses left Pharaoh’s presence and pleaded with ADONAI. <sup>27</sup> And ADONAI did as Moses asked: He removed the swarms from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; not one remained. <sup>28</sup> But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and would not let the people go.\*\*

9 <sup>1</sup> ADONAI said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says ADONAI, the God of the Hebrews: Let My people go to worship Me. <sup>2</sup> For if you refuse to let them go, and continue to hold them, <sup>3</sup> then the hand of ADONAI will strike your livestock in the fields – the horses, the asses, the camels, the cattle, and the sheep – with a very severe pestilence. <sup>4</sup> But ADONAI will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of the Egyptians, so that nothing shall die of all that belongs to the Israelites. <sup>5</sup> ADONAI set a fixed time: tomorrow ADONAI will do this thing in the land.’” <sup>6</sup> And ADONAI did that thing the next day: all the livestock of the Egyptians died, but of the livestock of the Israelites there died not

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\* The name of the God of Israel was commonly used and spoken aloud in ancient Israel, however by the third century BC it was no longer spoken aloud. In English texts the name is sometimes written with consonants only, YHVH. When the Torah is read in Hebrew and we come to the divine name, the ancient custom is to read the word “ADONAI” (“LORD”) instead. Therefore when the Bible is translated into English, the name YHVH is usually rendered by the English “LORD.” I find that using the Hebrew word ADONAI honors the prohibition against pronouncing the divine name while at the same time reminding us that the Hebrew text contains the *name* of a deity, not a title.

† Hebrew *‘arov* probably refers to swarms of insects, although some older interpreters understand “wild beasts.”

‡ Meaning of *peduth* uncertain, more literally, “ransom”

§ “The most likely meaning is that the Hebrews will sacrifice cattle or other beasts considered taboo by the Egyptians and so infuriate them. There is some evidence that Egypt in the late Bronze Age was in fact quite tolerant about different kinds of sacrifice. The Hebrew writer could well be reflecting the awareness of a later age . . . by the time of Herodotus, the Egyptians had developed a reputation for rigid sacrificial restrictions.” (Alter)

\*\* “Pharaoh is presumably manifesting his own character: callousness, resistance to instruction, and arrogance would all be implied by the toughening of the heart. God is not so much pulling a marionette’s strings as allowing, or perhaps encouraging, the oppressor-king to persist in his habitual harsh willfulness and presumption.” (Alter)

one. <sup>7</sup>And Pharaoh sent to inquire, and lo, not a single one had died of the livestock of Israel. But the heart of Pharaoh remained hardened, and he would not let the people go.

<sup>8</sup>And ADONAI said to Moses and Aaron, “Take you handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw it toward the sky in the sight of Pharaoh. <sup>9</sup>It shall become a fine dust all over the land of Egypt, and cause a burning rash breaking out in boils on man and beast throughout the land of Egypt.” <sup>10</sup>So they took soot of the kiln and appeared before Pharaoh; Moses threw it toward the sky, and it caused a burning rash breaking out in boils on man and beast. <sup>11</sup>The magicians were unable to confront Moses because of the burning rash, for the burning rash afflicted the magicians as well as all the other Egyptians. <sup>12</sup>But ADONAI hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he would not heed them, just as ADONAI had told Moses.

<sup>13</sup> ADONAI said to Moses, “Rise early in the morning and station yourself before Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says ADONAI, the God of the Hebrews: Let My people go to worship Me. <sup>14</sup>For this time I will send all My plagues<sup>††</sup> upon your heart, and your servants, and your people, in order that you may know that there is none like Me in all the earth. <sup>15</sup>For by now I could have sent out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been effaced from the earth. <sup>16</sup>Nevertheless I have spared you for this purpose: in order to show you My power, and in order that My fame may resound throughout the earth. <sup>17</sup>Yet you continue to thwart My people, and do not let them go! <sup>18</sup>This time tomorrow I will rain down a very heavy hail, such as has not been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. <sup>19</sup> So now, send, gather in your livestock and everything you have in the field. All men and the beasts who are found in the field and have not been taken indoors, the hail shall come down on them and they shall die.’” <sup>20</sup> Whoever feared ADONAI’S word among Pharaoh’s servants sheltered his slaves and his livestock indoors. <sup>21</sup>But whoever paid no mind to ADONAI’S word left his slaves and his livestock in the field.

<sup>22</sup> ADONAI said to Moses, “Hold out your arm toward the sky that hail may fall on all the land of Egypt, upon man and beast and all the grasses of the field in the land of Egypt.” <sup>23</sup>So Moses held out his rod toward the sky, and ADONAI sent thunder and hail, and fire streamed down to the ground, as ADONAI rained down hail upon the land of Egypt. <sup>24</sup>The hail was very heavy — fire flashing in the midst of the hail — such as had not fallen on the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. <sup>25</sup>Throughout the land of Egypt the hail struck down all that were in the open, both man and beast; the hail also struck down all the grasses of the field and shattered all the trees of the field. <sup>26</sup>Only in the region of Goshen, where the Israelites were, there was no hail.

<sup>27</sup>Thereupon Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron and said to them, “I have sinned this time. ADONAI is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. <sup>28</sup>Plead with ADONAI! Enough of this godawful thunder and hail! I will let you go; you shall stay no longer.” <sup>29</sup>Moses said to him, “As I go out of the city, I shall spread out my hands to ADONAI; the thunder will cease and the hail will fall no more, so that you may know that the earth is ADONAI’S. <sup>30</sup>But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the God ADONAI.” — <sup>31</sup>Now the flax and barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud; <sup>32</sup>but the wheat and the emmer<sup>‡‡</sup> were not hurt, for they ripen late. — <sup>33</sup>Leaving Pharaoh, Moses went outside the city and spread out his hands to ADONAI: the thunder and the hail ceased, and no rain came pouring down upon the earth. <sup>34</sup>But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he continued to sin and hardened his heart, he and his servants. <sup>35</sup> Pharaoh’s heart hardened, and he would not let the Israelites go, just as ADONAI had spoken through Moses.

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<sup>††</sup> From a root meaning “to strike a blow”

<sup>‡‡</sup> An ancient variety of wheat known in Italy as farro.