



GEULAS YISRAEL

RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN

RAM YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

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Broken Boundaries, Bonds of Hate

All the makkot were dramatic disclosures of the power of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Ten relentless blows bent a mighty empire to its knees and shattered the resolve of a stubborn, unyielding tyrant. By the time *makat bechorot* tore through Egypt—turning its cities into rivers of death—the Egyptians were pleading with Pharaoh to release the Jews. Pharaoh himself raced through the silent, stricken streets of Mitzrayim, frantic to find Moshe and Aharon and hasten the departure of the slaves he had once guarded so jealously. It was a display of divine presence that unraveled nature, empire, and the inner certainty of a ruler who believed power could not be taken from him.

Of the ten makkot, some were thunderous and overt, others quieter and more elusive. *Barad* and *tzefardeia* were loud and unmistakable; *dever*, by contrast, was a silent killer. *Dam* was dramatic because it came first, while

arbeh felt almost anticlimactic after the crashing hailstorms of *barad*.

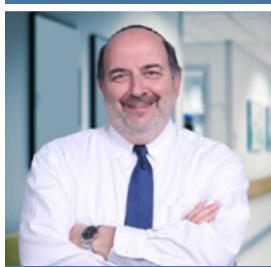
Yet perhaps the most frightening of all the plagues—at least until midnight would strike and the firstborn would be torn from their homes—was the onslaught of wild beasts. They came from everywhere: fields, jungles, and deserts. They entered homes and attacked Egyptians in their beds. *Arov* left no escape—inside the house or outside it. Fear spread in a way Egypt had never known.

The first three makkot could be managed. When the Nile turned to blood, alternate water sources were dug. *Tzefardeia* was repulsive and disruptive—perhaps even lethal if it included dangerous predators—but it could still be contained. The *arov* avalanche of wild beasts, attacking from every direction, could not. For the first time, Pharaoh himself summons Moshe and offers partial liberation. He did not understand what had struck him—and something in his inner world never fully recovered.

Yet intriguingly, the plague is called *arov*, not *chayot*. The Torah chooses a word that means mixture rather than the more natural term for wild animals. Why was this dramatic assault described as a mixture instead of simply an attack of beasts?

A MIX OF TERROR

The Midrash explains that the name *arov*



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captures the unnatural character of the onslaught. Wild animals normally hunt alone or within narrow groupings. Each species has its own territory, its own rhythms and schedule, and its own prey. Even when animals hunt in packs or prides, they do not hunt alongside other species. Nature maintains clear boundaries.

During the nightmare of *arov*, those boundaries collapsed. Snakes and lions, wolves, leopards, and bears surged together in a single assault. According to some midrashim, even domesticated animals turned on their masters and joined the attack. This was not predation as the natural world knows it, but a coordinated blitzkrieg of disparate forces that should never have converged.

The terror lay not only in the violence, but in the collapse of order. *Arov* was frightening because it was a mixture—a convergence of dangers Egypt had never faced. The name does not merely describe the attackers; it signals the unraveling of the natural patterns that once contained fear.

CREATION UNRAVELED

When human beings betray basic moral responsibility, nature itself becomes unstable and the boundaries set at *ma'aseh bereishit* begin to give way. The world was fashioned to sustain human life and to allow humanity to find God and live before Hashem. When that mission is violated, the limits that make human life possible begin to collapse.

This pattern—moral collapse triggering the breakdown of creation—had appeared before. Eight hundred years earlier, an entire generation descended into moral chaos. During the *mabul*, the boundaries Hashem set at creation fell apart. The upper waters, once held apart from the world below, poured down upon the earth. Dry land, separated from the seas on the

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third day of creation, disappeared beneath the flood. Moral collapse did not remain moral; it reshaped the physical world and suspended the terms of *ma'aseh bereishit*.

This is exactly what happened during *arov*. For human life to endure, boundaries must exist—between jungle and city, between wilderness and home. Hashem placed fear of human beings within animal instinct. Kayin was granted this human imprint to protect himself from beasts, and Hashem later institutionalized it for all humanity in His covenant with Noach. Over time, human beings learned how to build cities, to create protected spaces, and to hold the wild at bay.

By enslaving millions, the Egyptians shattered a basic moral law woven into creation: that free human beings, endowed with the image of Hashem, are not meant to be degraded and treated like animals. When they violated that code, they ruptured the system itself. Once the



system broke, its boundaries collapsed. The line between jungle and city vanished. The distinction between domesticated animals living alongside humans and predatory beasts dissolved. Even the internal boundaries of the wild—separating species from one another—fell away.

Nature turned into an all-against-all frenzy. Wild animals surged everywhere, bedrooms became forests, and the ordered streets of Egypt were transformed into teeming, dystopian jungles. The word *arov* captures this breakdown—the mixing across boundaries, the collapse of limits, both human-made and God-given. What Egypt unleashed through moral cruelty returned as disorder in the natural world, mirroring the chaos it had imposed upon humanity.

THE BOND OF HATRED

Yet beyond this moral lesson of collapsing boundaries, *arov* carried a second message embedded in the mixture itself. Wild creatures do not merely hunt separately; they are often natural rivals, competing for the same territory or the same prey. When one animal intrudes into the domain of another, the encounter usually ends in violence.

Here, those rivalries vanished. Predators that would normally clash acted in concert. That unity among enemies was both ironic and punitive—a distorted harmony born not

of peace, but of shared aggression.

The Egyptians united in their hatred across many different lines in order to persecute us. The Midrash describes a summit convened to address the “Jewish problem”—the population surge and the fear it provoked. That gathering included Pharaoh, Bilam, Iyov, and Yitro. It was an awkward coalition with little in common. Midyan and Egypt were natural rivals, and Iyov’s presence in Egypt remains puzzling.

Of course, the Midrash need not be read as a historical record. It may be a metaphor, describing a reality in which forces that share no natural alliance—and no shared interests—nevertheless converge. These disparate groups were united by a single element: hatred.

HATRED ACROSS GENERATIONS

Jewish history repeatedly confirms this pattern. Hatred is a powerful unifier. When it is directed at the people of Hashem—and, by extension, at the presence of Hashem in this world—it can bind together sworn enemies. What cannot be achieved through shared values or shared interests is often achieved through shared animosity.

Jewish history unfolds in cycles, and certain patterns of antisemitism recur with unsettling consistency. Across generations, religious and ideological factions with little shared ground have united in their hatred of our people. Sunnis and Shiites have warred for centuries, yet they converge—violently or rhetorically—in opposing Jewish presence in the land of Hashem. In the past century, fascists, communists, and global capitalists despised one another and fought bloody battles for Europe’s future, yet they shared a common enemy: the people of Hashem. As history advances, it curiously remains the same.

What are we to make of Islamic fundamentalists shouting at protests against the Jewish

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state alongside hyper-liberals? What are we to make of white supremacists and hard-left wokists—sworn enemies—joining voices in hostility toward Jews? What are we to make of members of the LGBTQ community protesting Israel's existence shoulder to shoulder with murderers who would kill them if they set foot in their countries of origin? We have seen this scene before. It is not new.

Hashem sent the plague of *arov* to Egypt to expose the madness of hatred—and the madness of antisemitism. The Egyptians hated us so intensely that they were willing to ally with their sworn enemies. They did then, and others do now. Hashem punished those who assaulted us with a mixed assault of His own, and He continues to respond measure for measure—to demonstrate the folly and self-destruction of using hatred as a unifying force. ■



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