



Jewish Congregation of Marco Island

## A CLOSE LOOK AT TORAH

Focus on a question in the weekly portion

January 17, 2026



**"Fostering diverse modes of attention to textual details cultivates correlative forms of attention to the world and divine reality"**

Michael Fishbane (1943- ), *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסּוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה:

### "Tachometer Torah"



...read down to the red line

### Parashat-haShavu'a Stats

Weekly Portion: vaEira

Consists of: Exodus 6:2-9:35

Sequence—

in annual Torah cycle: 14<sup>th</sup> of 54

in Exodus: 2<sup>nd</sup> of 11



### A Salient Selection from the Portion -

Exodus 8:1-7

Context: *Exodus, second of the Five Books of the Torah, is an account of how God liberated the Israelites from Egypt and entered into a Covenant with us at Mount Sinai, and a record of the legislations we undertook for the conduct of the society we were to establish in the Promised Land.*

Content: *The great "wizards' duel" is underway, in which Pharaoh pits the agents of the gods of Egypt to confront Moses and Aaron representing The Eternal One.*

8:1] - Then The Eternal One said to Moses, "Tell Aaron 'Hold out **your hand with your staff** over the streams, canals, and ponds, and **bring up** frog-swarms upon the land of Egypt.'" [8:2] - So Aaron stretched out his hand over all the water sources of Egypt, at which the frogs **came up** and covered the land of Egypt.

8:3] - Then the **magician-priests** **did the same**, by means of **their spells**; **they brought up** frog-swarms upon the land of Egypt.

8:4] - Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "**Plead with The Eternal One that He remove the frogs** from me and my people— then I will release the people to sacrifice to The Eternal One."

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה אָמַר אֶל  
אַהֲרֹן נִטָּה אֶת יָדְךָ בַּמֶּטֶד עַל  
הַנְּהָרוֹת עַל הַיְּאֵרוֹת וְעַל הָאֲגָמִים  
וְהָעֵל אֶת הַצִּפְרָדִּים עַל אֶרֶץ  
מִצְרַיִם וַיֵּט אַהֲרֹן אֶת יָדוֹ עַל מִימֵי  
מִצְרַיִם וַתֵּעַל הַצִּפְרָדִּים וַתִּכָּס אֶת  
אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן הַחֹרְטָמִים בְּלִטְיָהֶם  
וַיַּעֲלֻוּ אֶת הַצִּפְרָדִּים עַל אֶרֶץ  
מִצְרַיִם

וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְאַהֲרֹן  
וַיֹּאמֶר הִעֲתִירוּ אֵלַי יְהוָה וְיִסֶּר  
הַצִּפְרָדִּים מִפְּנֵי וַיַּעֲלֵחָה  
אֶת הָעָם וַיִּזְבְּחוּ לַיהוָה

- more over

8:5] - And Moses said to Pharaoh, “I will give you the honor of deciding: **for what time** shall I plead, on behalf of you and your courtiers and your people, that the frogs be removed from you houses, remaining only in **the River**?”

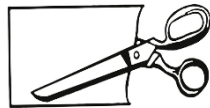
8:6a] - He replied: “**For tomorrow.**”

8:6b] - [Moses] declared: “**Let it be as you say**, in order that you may know that there is none like The Eternal One, our God. [8:7] - [On the morrow] the frog-swarms shall retreat from you and your courtiers and your people; they shall remain only in **the River**.”

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְפָרֹעַ הֲתִפָּאֵר עָלַי  
לְמַתִּי אֶעֱתִיר לָךְ וּלְעַבְדֶּיךָ וּלְעַמֶּךָ  
לְהַכְרִית הַצְּפָרְדַּעִים מִמֶּךָ וּמִבֵּיתֶיךָ  
רַק בַּיָּאֵר תִּשְׁאַרְנָה

וַיֹּאמֶר לְמָחָר

וַיֹּאמֶר כְּדַבְּרְךָ לְמַעַן יָדַע כִּי אֵין  
כִּיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְסָרוּ הַצְּפָרְדַּעִים  
מִמֶּךָ וּמִבֵּיתֶיךָ וּמִעַבְדֶּיךָ וּמִעַמֶּךָ רַק  
בַּיָּאֵר תִּשְׁאַרְנָה




## TORAH Snippet as a warm-up

רַק בַּיָּאֵר תִּשְׁאַרְנָה

8:5 / 8:6 - they shall remain only in **the River**.

↕ ≠  
“river” = נָהָר


proper noun **הַיָּאֵר** “the Canal/Stream/Watercourse” 40x in TaNaCh, **all definite**

a loan-word from Egyptian  **‘itrw** “river; watercourse”

A) Toby Wilkinson (1969- ), *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt* - The nation of Egypt was known affectionately as “The Twin Banks,” underlying the fact that **the country was synonymous with the River Valley**. An alternative, and more familiar, designation was *Kemet*, “the Black Land,” referring to the dark alluvial soil that gave the country its fertility—this in contrast to *Deshret*, “the red land” of the barren and sterile desert. As for the Nile itself, the Egyptians had no need of a special name: it was simply ***Iteru*, “the River.”** In their world, there was no other.



- continued



8:5-6 - לְמַתִּי אֶעֱתִיר לָךְ לְהַכְרִית הַצְּפָרְדִּיעִים

For what time shall I plead on your behalf  
that the frog-swarms be removed?

וַיֹּאמֶר לְמָחָר

[To which Pharaoh] replied: “For tomorrow.”

וַיֹּאמֶר לְמָחָר - ידוע כי מנהג כל האדם לבקש שתסור רעתו מיד  
 B) RaMBaN (Bonastruc da Porta, 1194-1270) - “He replied: ‘for tomorrow’” –  
 certainly everyone knows that it is human nature to wish that afflictions should be  
 removed immediately. . . .



8:3 - the magician-priests did the same

by means of their spells

they brought up frog-swarms

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן הַחֲרָטְמִים

בְּלִטְיָהֶם

וַיַּעֲלוּ אֶת הַצְּפָרְדִּיעִים

WHO/WHAT THEY ARE -

plural noun חֲרָטְמִים from verb ח-ר-ט “engrave; incise; carve on a lathe”

11x in TaNaCh, 8 of them in the Ten Plagues narrative

Saadya-Tafsir RaSaG (c. 930 CE)	scholars	אֲלֵמָא (ألعلماء)
Hirsch-T’rumat Tz’vi (1874)	hieroglyphists	hieroglyphenschreiber
Aryeh Kaplan (1981)	master symbolists	
Targum YoNatan (7 <sup>th</sup> century?)	astrologers	אִיסְטִגְנִין
Robert Alter (2004)	soothsayers	
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Martin Luther (1534), Geneva (1560), Douay-Rheims (1589), King James (1611), Jean-Frédéric Osterwald (1744), Jewish Publication Society (1917), Everett Fox (1995), Jewish Publication Society (1999)		
	magicians	
Septuagint (c. 225 BCE)	enchanters	επαοιδῶν (“repeaters”)
Biblia Reina-Valera (1569)	enchanters	los encantadores
Targum Onkelos (c. 110 CE)	sorcerers	חֲרָשִׁיא
William Tyndale (1525)	sorcerers	
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Jerome-Vulgate (382)	evil-doers	et malefici
John Wycliffe (1383)	witchis	
Mesorah (1993)	necromancers	

- more over

**THE MEDIUM THEY WORK IN -**

plural noun לְטִיְהָם from verb ל-ו-ט “wrap up closely”  
 noun לֵט “secrecy; mystery; magic arts”

4x in TaNaCH, all of them in the Ten Plagues narrative

Saadya-Tafsir RaSaG (c. 930 CE), Jewish Publication Society (1917), Aryeh Kaplan (1981), Martin Luther (1534), Everett Fox (1995)

mysteries; secret/hidden/occult / mystical arts

William Tyndale (1525), Geneva (1560)  
 sorceries

Jerome-Vulgate (382), John Wycliffe (1383), Biblia Reina-Valera (1569), Douay-Rheims (1589), King James (1611), Jean-Frédéric Osterwald (1744)

enchantments

Mesorah (1993), Jewish Publication Society (1999), Robert Alter (2004)  
 spells

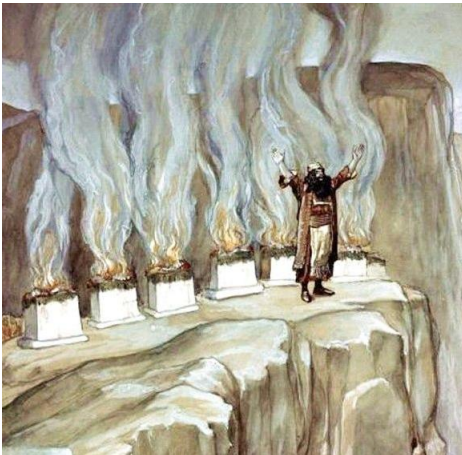
Septuagint (c. 225 BCE)

potion-making φαρμακειαζ

Targum Onkelos (c. 110 CE), and Targum YoNatan (7<sup>th</sup> century?)

burnings

לְחִשְׁיָהוֹן



**Bil'am prophecies at his seven altars**  
 by James Tissot, c. 1895



**The Oracle at Delphi**  
 by Heinrich Leutemann, c. 1870

8:3 - [the Egyptian sorcerers] **did the same**

**וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן**

verb **וַיַּעֲשׂוּ**

“they did”

+

adverb **כֵּן**

“likewise; the same”

“thusly; in this/that manner”

**- continued**



כִּן = “likewise” (having the same <b>outcome</b> )	כִּן = “in this manner” (using the same <b>method</b> )
Exodus 7:11 - the sorcerers, <b>כִּן too</b> , turned their staves into crocodiles.	<p>RaMBaN on Exodus 8:14 -  אמר ויעשו כן - שהכו בעפר הארץ  “They did <b>thusly</b>” - they struck the  ground [as Aaron had done– ]  ואמרו השבעת השדים  [in addition to which] they pronounced  invocations of demonic forces  ועשו לטיהם  and performed their magical gestures,  <b>כאשר עשו בשאר פעמים</b>  <b>just as they had done</b> all the <b>other</b> times  [viz. in 7:11, 7:22, and 8:3].</p>
Exodus 7:22 - the sorcerers, <b>כִּן too</b> , turned river water into blood.	
Exodus 8:3 - the sorcerers, <b>כִּן too</b> , produced frog-swarms.	
Exodus 8:14 – the sorcerers <b>כִּן</b> <b>failed</b> to drive away the lice.	

Egyptian Execration Texts	
c. 2340 BCE -	<b>O Geb</b> , decree that any who speaks evil against the name of Pharaoh Wenos shall be impoverished and homeless.
c. 2250 BCE -	<b>O Ra</b> , wring the neck (like that of a chicken) of any who would defile this, my tomb, by removing its stones or bricks for their own use.
1279 BCE -	To any who disregards this decree: <b>Osiris</b> , pursue him; <b>Isis</b> , pursue his wife; <b>Horus</b> , pursue his children; and[, once he is dead,] may the <b>42 guardians of the underworld</b> pass sentence upon him!

וַיִּשְׁלַח אֱלֹהֵי אֱלִישָׁע מַלְאָךְ לֵאמֹר הֲלוֹךְ וְרַחֲצֵת שְׁבַע פְּעָמִים בִּיְרֵדוֹ וַיֵּשֶׁב  
בְּשָׂרָךְ לֵד וַיִּטְהַר

C) II Kings 5:10-12 - [The prophet] Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying: “Go bathe seven times in the Jordan; your skin shall be restored and healed.”

וַיִּקְצֹף נָעֲמָן וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה  
אֲמַרְתִּי אֵלַי יֵצֵא יְצוֹא

Na’aman became furious, and stormed about declaring: “I intended for him to come out to me in person,

וְעַמַּד וְקָרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו  
“and stand before me while calling on the name of his god Yahu,

וְהִנִּיף יָדוֹ אֶל הַמָּקוֹם וְאָסַף הַמִּצָּרַע  
“and waving his hand at the place to make the affliction go away!”



- more over



Moses uses his staff  
to produce serpents  
(spin on Exodus 7:9-10)

Santa Sabina Church, Rome  
432 CE

contemporary inspirational art  
depicting Moses (or is it Aaron?)  
wielding God's staff of power



8:3 - the magician-priests **did the same**  
**they brought up** frog-swarms

**וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן** הַחֲרָטְמִים  
**וַיַּעֲלוּ** אֶת הַצִּפְרִידִּים

D) Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), *T'rumat Tz'vi* - On consideration, the role of the hieroglyphists in this narrative seems strange. If indeed they were such masters of their magical arts, **they should have used their power to free the land from the plagues, not to increase them.** Surely, they could not have believed there were too few frogs about, so that they needed to produce and “bring up” yet more?



As a matter of fact, it appears that (contrary to the conventional interpretation), their efforts in the case of each plague were directed towards the elimination of that plague. That becomes clear in verse 14, where the words **וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן** לְהוֹצִיא אֶת הַכֶּנֶם וְלֹא יָכֻלוּ clearly means “**they did thusly** to make the vermin go away— but were unable to do so.”

This statement **וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן** has traditionally been interpreted (erroneously, it would seem to us) as “they did **the same thing**,” referring in each case to **the results achieved** by Moses and Aaron. It seems to us that, **to the contrary, it describes only the means**— that is, the motions of hands and staff which Aaron is commanded to make before the plague struck.

It was these motions that the hieroglyphists mimicked, because they believed that by doing so they would immediately counteract the plague. That the word **כֵּן** “**the same**” refers to these motions is quite clear from verse 14, which, while describing what it was that Aaron did, also makes explicit that— **in spite of emulating his gesture** (“**doing the same**”)— **the hieroglyphists could not replicate the outcome.**

- continued

E) Numbers 13:30-32 –

c. 1240 BCE

וְאִם בְּרִיאָה יִבְרָא  
יְהוָה וּפְצָתָהּ הֶאֱדָמָה  
אֶת פִּיהָ וּבָלְעָה אֹתָם  
וַיֵּרְדּוּ חַיִּים שְׁאֵלָה  
וַיִּדְעֶתֶם כִּי נֶאֱצוּ  
הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה אֶת  
יְהוָה

“But if **The Eternal One** creates something unprecedented— so that the earth opens her mouth and swallows them up, and they descend alive to the netherworld— **then you will know** that these men have rebelled against **The Eternal One.**”

וַיְהִי כְכֹלְתּוֹ לְדַבֵּר אֶת  
כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה  
וַתִּבָּקַע הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר  
תַּחְתֵּיהֶם וַתִּפְתַּח  
הָאָרֶץ אֶת פִּיהָ וַתִּבְלַע  
אֹתָם

And **no sooner had he** spoken these words, than the earth beneath them split, opening its mouth and swallowing them up.



F) I Samuel 12:17-18 –

1020 BCE

הֲלוֹא קָצִיר חֲטִים  
הַיּוֹם אֶקְרָא אֶל יְהוָה  
וַיִּתֵּן קָלוֹת וּמָטָר  
וַיִּדְעוּ וַיֵּרְאוּ כִּי רָעַתְכֶם  
רַבָּה אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם  
בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה לְשָׂאוֹל  
לָכֶם מֶלֶךְ

“Now at present it is [the warm dry] wheat-harvest season. I will call on The Eternal One to create lightning and rain, that you may witness and understand the scope of the ingratitude which you have shown to the Eternal One by asking for a king over you.”

וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל  
יְהוָה וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה קָלוֹת  
וּמָטָר בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא  
וַיֵּירָא כָּל הָעָם מְאֹד  
אֶת יְהוָה וְאֶת שְׁמוּאֵל

Whereupon Samuel called on The Eternal One, and The Eternal One sent lightning and rain that day— so that all the people were in great awe of The Eternal One and of Samuel.



G) I Kings 18:37-39 –

c. 865 BCE

עֲנֵנִי יְהוָה עֲנֵנִי וַיִּדְעוּ  
הָעָם הַזֶּה כִּי אַתָּה  
יְהוָה הָאֱלֹהִים וְאַתָּה  
הַסַּבֵּת אֶת לִבָּם  
אֲחֵרָנִית

“Answer me, O Eternal One, so that this people may know that You— The Eternal One— are God, and thereby You turn their hearts around.”

וַתִּפֹּל אֵשׁ יְהוָה  
וַתֹּאכַל אֶת הָעֵלֶה  
וְאֶת הָעֵצִים וְאֶת  
הָאֲבָנִים וְאֶת הָעֶפֶר  
וְאֶת הַמִּים אֲשֶׁר  
בַּתְּעֵלָה לַחֲכָה וַיֵּרָא  
כָּל הָעָם וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל  
פְּנֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ יְהוָה  
הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים

At that the fire of The Eternal One fell from Above to consume not only the offering and the wood, but also the stones of the altar; the dust of the earth beneath; and the water in the trench around it. Seeing which, the people fell face-down and cried aloud: “The Eternal One, Alone, is God!!”



- more over



H) Gary Rendsburg (1954- ), “Moses the Magician” in *Jewish Studies at Rutgers*, 2015 - Consider Exodus 3:13–15, the scene at Mount Horev.

*Moses told God: “Look, I am going to the Israelites, and telling them ‘the god of our forebears has sent me to you.’ When they say to me ‘what is his name,’ what am I to tell them?” God replied to Moses: “I will be whatever I will be. Thus shall you tell the Israelites: ‘The One Who Will Always Be, sent me to you’.”*

אֶהְיֶה	“I will be”
אֶהְיֶה	“he will be”
אֶהְיֶה	“He will always be”

Ancient Egyptian mythology similarly deals with the concept of “the unknown name” of Ra. As narrated in Papyrus Turin #1993 (c. 1300 BCE), when Isis seeks to learn the secret name of Ra, the great god refuses, with the comment:

*my father and mother told me my name. I have hidden it in my body since birth, so as to prevent a magician having power over me* [133:10-12].

The parallel between the two stories is clear: in both cases the great god has a secret name. But the key differences are illuminating.

In the Biblical account, God is not fearful of disclosing His Name— Moses asks, and God divulges— because **in the Biblical conception of the single Deity, The Eternal One has no fear of falling under the influence of magical praxes**. Moreover, in the Biblical story, not only does God reveal “the unknown Name” to Moses, but the reader of the story learns the Name at the same time— again, because **there can be no concern with magical abuse or misuse** of this appellation.

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The presentation of the Egyptian sorcerers [in chapters 7 and 8 of Exodus] accords with the narratives cited earlier in this treatise , in which

Webster	“read out	his magical words,”
Djadjemankh	“said his say	of magic,”
Na-nefer-ka-ptah	“pronounced	a spell,”

and so on. Magical praxes in ancient Egypt were almost always accomplished through the recitation of magical spells, a point clearly recognized by the Biblical author.

By contrast, when Moses (and/or Aaron) engage in such acts, **the Biblical text is mindful never to ascribe the results to the magical arts. The leaders of the Israelites are able to accomplish such tasks because God empowered them to do so**, pure and simple. In the words of Nahum Sarna,

*Moses knows no techniques, recites no spells, utters no incantations or magical formulae.*

Let us recall here the famous passage in Numbers 23:23, uttered by Balaam:

*for there is no magic in Jacob;*      לֹא נִחַשׁ בִּינְעֻקֵּב  
*no sorcery in Israel—*      וְלֹא קֶסֶם בִּישְׂרָאֵל

a point which holds throughout the Bible, including, as we have seen, the Book of Exodus. In short, **while the ends may sometimes be the same, the means are profoundly different**.