

**Bo** **Come**  
**Torah:** Exodus 10:1-13:16  
**Haftarah:** Jeremiah 46:13-28  
**Brit Chadashah:** Romans 9:14-29

During the time when the plagues were devastating Egypt, Moses made several declarations to Pharaoh. At the beginning of this week's portion, Moses said that one of the reasons YHVH is performing these signs and wonders is so that Pharaoh and the Egyptians could tell them to their children, who would also tell them to their children too. Moses rebukes Pharaoh for not humbling himself before YHVH and not letting Israel go free so that they could serve YHVH.

There have already been seven plagues, one each month of the Egyptian sacred calendar. Many Egyptians freely acknowledged that YHVH was a mighty G-d, but even though he had lived through the same catastrophes, he does not want to submit to a foreign god. He probably felt that he could not risk appearing weak before his people. He needs some more convincing before he is ready to humiliate himself before YHVH.

Grasshoppers are endemic to the drier parts of Africa and certain climatic conditions had to be in place before the enormous population explosion occurred. It was not the right time of year, so Pharaoh and his leadership were not really concerned. Not only was the arrival of this plague something that future generations would speak of, nothing like this has ever happened in Egypt, ever since it became a country.

They were everywhere and got into everything and they devoured every plant that had survived the hail. There were even so many of them that the people could no longer see the earth. They even stripped the trees, so there likely would not be much of a fruit harvest. They ate all the vegetation until there was not anything else to eat. Pharaoh's servants came to him and said that he should let the people go, because Egypt was perishing before their eyes.

Pharaoh calls Moses back and asks him who would be going with the people who were going to make a sacrifice. Moses answered that everyone and everything would be leaving to make the sacrifice. He is beginning to cave, but he is only willing to let the men go. Their families and the livestock must be left behind. This exchange took place before the grasshoppers were unleashed and before all the greenery of Egypt was devoured.

Pharaoh again calls for Moses and admits that he has sinned against YHVH and against Moses and he asks Moses to intercede with YHVH so that this fatal plague would be removed. A great wind arose and blew all the grasshoppers into the Red Sea. Pharaoh again had a change of heart and refused to let the Children of Israel go.

The next plague is one that has always scared me: there were to be three days of complete darkness. People could only find each other by physically touching the ones which they could not see. No one was able to get around during these three days of complete darkness. There was, however, light in the places where the Children of Israel dwelt. He is both our light and we all called to be a light for the world. How is your light doing?

Pharaoh is making concessions and hopes to bargain with YHVH so that what He wants is not as complete as He wants it to be. Do not fall into that trap. Once the darkness is over, he calls Moses to stand before him. Moses goes from being the uninvited guest to become a guest of honour. Pharaoh is now prepared to let all the people go, but not their livestock. This would be a guarantee that they would be coming back.

Moses asks who will give them the animals to sacrifice and we assume no one was the answer. Moses insists that all their livestock should go, because they did not yet know which animals they would be asked to sacrifice. This infuriates Pharaoh and he shuts down the bargaining and threatens Moses' life if he ever dares to appear in Pharaoh's presence again. Moses agrees that he will no longer appear before Pharaoh and his court.

The last plague is about to strike Egypt and many Egyptians are taking notice. These same people may be the mixed multitude who left Egypt with the Jews. Moses is again before Pharaoh and because he is the spokesman for YHVH, Pharaoh knows better than to try and harm him.

The last plague is the most chilling. Because Egypt refuses to let go the Children of Israel, who are YHVH's first born, all the first born of Egypt, both among the people and among the animals, will be struck dead. Now if you have had time to think things through, you would realize that the death of the first born would happen, whether those concerned were children living at home, or adults who had set up their own homes. It is generally considered that only the first born sons died, but there is no indication in the text that first born girls survived.

After having delivered this terrible ultimatum to Pharaoh, Moses tells the people to pack up and prepare to leave. This is because when the plague strikes they will immediately be chased out of the country, without having any time to make preparations. Two stipulations applied to the first Seder which do not apply to memorial Seders. Only those people who had converted and entered into a covenant relationship with YHVH could participate in the meal as the angel of Death passed overhead. He does not pass overhead every time we observe the Seder and the first born of the current inhabitants of Egypt are not struck dead.

Circumcision was a way of protecting the people from partial converts, who just wanted to escape losing their first born, but had no interest in serving YHVH. It is traditional with modern Seders to invite your non Jewish friends and neighbours. Being circumcised is no longer required for any man who wants to participate in the ritual meal.

Next, after the initial Seder, no blood is put on the doorposts of the houses where the Seder is celebrated. The people were taking shelter under the blood of the Lamb and they were not to be touched by the destroyer who was going to strike all the unprotected households. This radical action and quick exit is to be celebrated every year as a reminder of the goodness which the Lord showed to His people Israel.

He had apparently gathered the leaders of the people together and after hearing about the instructions they all went home and did what they were told to do. The grieving Egyptians sent them away loaded with treasure as a kind of sin offering. They left exactly 430 years to the day, after they came in. All first born among the people and the animals would now belong to YHVH and this stipulation would be a sign on their hands and as frontlets between their eyes. How good are you at celebrating the goodness which YHVH has brought into your life?

## **Sermon: Second Winter Series: Setting Our Whole Life Free. Matthew 11:28-30**

**Passage: “Come to Me all of you who are exhausted and over burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yolk upon you and receive my instructions, for I am gentle and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is gentle and my burden is light.”(Matthew 11:28-30)**

When I came to faith at 19, I was quite zealous and was so relieved to be set free from my old life, that I practised a strict set of disciplines which bordered on legalism. Everything had to have a spiritual purpose and all my responses and life choices needed to be directly based on the Bible. I only listened to Christian music and would not go to the movies or to a concert which did not have a biblical theme or tell a story from the Bible.

Soon after I met the wonderful lady who became my wife, there was a presentation of Handel's Messiah and I did not want to go because I considered it secular music. When Patti told me that over 70 Bible passages were set to music, I agree to go and spent the whole performance looking up the Bible verses. She was quite amused.

I have done some growing since then and really desire a deep personal spirituality, but when I came to faith I was considerably broken. I did not think I could really be of service to the L-rd, except to share my great joy and peace that daily flooded my soul. He does not call us to Himself when we are not broken, He is in the business of healing the broken hearted and setting the captive free. Our passage in Matthew was instrumental in bringing Patti to faith and even today Messiah still fills my heart and life with abundant rest and peace.

The Messiah is not a cruel slave master and He does not resemble a Marine drill sergeant. He wants to build His disciplines into our lives, but He is never rough and never uses guilt as a means to control us. I have heard preachers yelling at their flock and belittling them if they did not do all that they were told. You get the impression that nothing is ever good enough for them and they appear to be driving their people into exhaustion. They are full of tough exhortations and want to impose military discipline over the flock.

This not how the Messiah wants to relate to His flock. He wants us to be glad when we enter His presence and not afraid of what else He is going to be asking us this time. I know He wants us to be armed with all the armour of G-d and to walk the bumpy straight and narrow. But He wants to remove our burdens and not add to them. He wants to give us rest and not always be just a few steps from falling apart.

Because of my abusive background and the strictness of the campus group which led me to the Messiah, at first, peace and rest were not real staples in my heart and my life. In Messiah, we do not exchange one set of burdens for another. He puts our fears to rest and makes His inner peace the place He wants us to dwell. His call is firm, but it is always gentle.

Just before I came to faith, I was slipping back into a negative hippy lifestyle and because of some of the people I met, I was not in the least impressed with Christianity (or with many other religions too). He had to get my attention with a waking vision and a sign. He did not give me a slap down and He did not have to convince me of how bad I was. He did not make me feel stupid and He seemed to be looking through my brokenness and seeing the real me. I did not have cringe in the darkness anymore, full of pain and anger.

Before I came to faith, I loved a good argument and when the Christians on my floor in the dorm were sharing their faith, sometimes I would agree with them and sometimes I tried to poke holes in their presentation. It was more of a game to me than anything else. I was in bad shape and just wanted to make it to the end of term, though it did not seem to be possible. I was not studying and was taking lots of drugs and alcohol, so I was always looking for ways to distract me from the misery I was wallowing in.

One of the two Christian guys living on my floor came to my room with the story of a Hindu mystic who gave his heart to Yeshua. At the time I was sort of a Buddhist and he must have figured that the two were close enough for the story to touch me. I was furious. I read the pamphlet, collected my Hindu and Buddhist books and prepared to show him how wrong his religion was. He was in bed already, but let me into his dorm room anyway. I sat cross legged on the floor and was prepared for a battle royal between the forces of good (Hinduism and Buddhism) and evil (Christianity).

At first it appeared that we were evenly matched. I could think very quickly on my feet and was able to give as good as I got. Gradually, I began losing steam. He knew his Bible much better than I knew my holy books. My answers were fewer and far between. He had me whipped and I just wanted to survive long enough to escape from the conversation. He had spoken to most of my objections, but I was not really prepared to listen to what he had to say.

As I was trying to pick holes in his arguments, he spoke up with a clear, loud voice and said: "Mike forget about all those other things. When you stand before G-d, the only thing He is going to ask you is 'What have you done with my Son' ". At that moment a vision of a cross came down out of the ceiling and hit me right between the eyes. I lost the ability to speak and my friend knew that G-d had spoken to me. He loaded me up with Christian Literature and showed me out.

I went back to my dorm room and felt that I had barely escaped from Christianity's clutches. One night, towards the end of the week, on Maundy Thursday, I was working on homework that was due the next day. Who gives homework that is due on Good Friday? The exercise involved reading a sentence in English and then translating it into French. My Christian friend knocked at my door and I answered. I had stopped around number 5 of the exercise.

He was going away over the weekend and wanted to make another try to lead me to the Messiah. It was late and I was tired, but I listened. He quoted Rev. 3:20 to me and said that Jesus was knocking at the door of my heart and that I shouldn't keep Him waiting but should let Him come in. I thought it was a nice story, but I was not prepared for the sign He was about to give me.

I went back to my homework and number six read: "Don't keep him waiting, let him come in". I was stunned and went for a long walk around the sleeping campus. Back in my room, I admitted that I had not really given the Judaeo-Christian G-d much of a try, so I prayed the following prayer: "G-d, if you are real, come into my heart. If not, I will go somewhere else." I opened my eyes and was stunned. An overwhelming peace was flooding into my heart. I shed tears of joy and got the first good sleep I had had in a long time. When I woke up, the peace was still there and 53 years later, even though storms have come screaming through my life and enemies have repeatedly tried to end my life, that same peace is still there. The Messiah promises it will never go away and it remains one of my heart's favourite safe places.

G-d did not have to make me feel bad or stupid or even stubborn, once He got my attention He offered me that which was lacking my life: peace. I was heavy burdened and exhausted. To have a good testimony, you do not have to experience all the brokenness and confusion which He brought me out of. This world is often a sad, bad place to live and rather than letting it continue to weigh us down, He wants to help us with our burdens so that we can find rest. Even a life without abuse and brokenness can be painful and confusing and wounds do not have to be deep and large to hurt. He wants to set all of our life free.

Some people claim to be happy, and they are not lying. They are just missing the bigger picture. You know I tell lots of very good jokes and one of my Facebook/Sauna friends said that humour heals. Comedy may come from a dark place, but it brings relief and maybe even a little bit of light. But living life as a sitting duck or struggling against the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and not expecting much joy and rest from life, is no way to live. It makes more sense to come to the Messiah and let Him give you rest.

G-d is not some kind of celestial bully and He is not going to make you feel like a worthless lump of mud, just because He can see every part of you – even the things you are trying to keep hidden. If you want to grow in the Messiah there are at least two staples which He wants to build into our lives: rest and yoke learning.

The yoke is of course the Torah of G-d and the rest of His marvellous Word, and it is only when we dive into this resource that we really learn about the Saviour. The yoke is given to harness the oxen so they will not hurt each other and are better equipped to pull the load. The Torah is both the yoke and the burden. There are a clearly defined set of doctrines we have to believe and a large number of spiritual values and disciplines which we have to build into our lives. He is not going to accomplish all of this by using guilt or punishment because He wants to heal us and not break us more than we are already broken.

All of the teachings of the Bible and of the Messiah are firmly based on the Ten Commandments and blessed are those who teach them fully and with nothing subtracted. Partial spirituality means that in some of our lives, the yoke is not functioning the way He wants it to and our rest is liable to dry up on us or be greatly diminished. I John 5:3 says that His commandments are not grievous, even when legalism and false teaching come creeping in. They describe a man who is right with his Creator, his family and his community.

The sinful works of the flesh may bring a certain kind of carnal satisfaction, but they are extremely corrosive and will eventually cause your life to self destruct. On the other hand, the fruit of the Spirit will enrich your life and give you an abundant satisfaction which is out of this world.

We are on a lifelong learning curve, with lots of bumps and rabbit trails to slow us down or derail us. But if we are letting Him teach us and we are learning about how amazing and wonderful He is, then He will repair the tarnished image of G-d and the inner Torah which our lifestyle has shredded. He will cause our reflection of His image to shine brightly and in a state of rest and satisfaction, we will have a very salty impact on a dying and darkening world.

This is not because of the effort we are expending, but because of the grace and peace which He is causing to flow through us so that other lost, hungry and broken souls will get the scent of the Kingdom and come running to put on His amazing yoke, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Our Saviour is beautiful beyond description and more worthy than all the praises that could be offered to Him. But He is also gentle and humble of heart. His fiery presence on the mountain terrified the people because they did not yet know what He was really like and they had to be shown that He was real and more powerful than any false gods the nations served. During the time Moses was in the presence, Joshua lingered just outside and soaked up the rest and peace of the only true G-d.

When it says that Messiah is humble and gentle, it does not mean He is weak or uncertain about Himself. It means that He wants to open Himself up to us so that we can share the rest and the peace He won for us when He died on the cross. He wants to show us how to walk with YHVH and how to both defeat sin whenever it attacks and be healed of any wounds we incur along the way. He wants us to know that He both our L-rd and Saviour and the One who wants to fill us with rest, comfort and love.

Sometimes we will have to fight hard just to stay afloat and sometimes our heart will be broken into a million little pieces of pain. This is what He allows into our lives, as long as it does not diminish either His rest or His peace in our hearts and lives. In the midst of the storm, He wants us lie down in green pastures and let Him prepare us a meal in the presence of our enemies. Even in periods of great spiritual and personal drought, He wants our cup to be overflowing as He leads us beside quiet waters.

Even the valley of the shadow of death can no longer terrify us because we live under the provision and the protection of YHVH, which is what His rod and staff mean. In our restless world, He wants us to be at rest in Him. While others are running around screaming that the sky is falling, He wants us to sit in the shade and watch how He handles things.

When it says that His burden is light and that His yoke is easy, it means that all that He wants to do in our lives will be for our good and our healing and will never damage us or hurt us. When we examine the tumultuous life of the Apostle Paul (Rav Shaul), we see that he took it up a notch from dangerous life David lived. Paul was betrayed, beaten, misunderstood and falsely accused of many horrible crimes and yet He never stopped resting in the Messiah. It was the yoke of the Torah and the Gospel that kept him going and prevented any of the painful experiences from sinking him or destroying him.

As someone who is legally disabled, I often wonder how I can continue to serve the Messiah when I have no energy, no balance and am battling high blood pressure and heart failure. Then I remember that Paul was handicapped and that YHVH used these weaknesses to strengthen Paul and his impact. They never went away and though the Messiah used Paul to perform any number of healings (and signs and wonders), his thorn in the flesh was never removed. We know this is referring to his poor eyesight which meant he had to dictate everything he wanted to write. When the L-rd leaves us with any handicap or any disability He always provides us with the means to serve Him, even if that means limping a little.

Diminishing sight and hearing loss do not have to stop us or even slow us down and as long as we dwell under the wings of the Almighty, His rest and His peace will be what's really going on in our lives. Have you let Him help you find rest for your soul? Are you letting Him put the yoke of His Torah into your heart and your life? We should never let this life exhaust us because that is never His will for our lives, even when they lock us into camps and shovel us into ovens. Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov.