



Dear Community,

This Shabbat is Frog Adoption Shabbat.

Those who knew Chazan Stephen Cotsen of blessed memory will recall his love of frogs. His home was always filled with frog ornaments, many of which are now in the custody of NLS. We will be putting said frogs on tables at the back of the Kiddush Hall on Shabbat morning.

They are each free to a good home. Please do consider taking one (or a little family) home in Chazan Stephen's memory.

We chose this Shabbat, Shabbat Va'era, because it is the Torah portion in which we encounter the beginning of the plagues - including, of course, the famous plague of frogs. There is a particular Torah-based image of the frog that always reminds me of Chazan Stephen: the Song of the Frog in Perek Shirah.

Perek Shirah is a gorgeous rabbinic text that travels through over eighty elements of nature and attaches a line from the Tanakh to each of them, displaying how all of creation is engaged in worship of God. Usually, these are verses that directly relate to the object, or they are beautifully crafted puns. For a familiar example: *Tamar omer*: "Tzadik katamar yifrach, k'erez bal'vanon yisgeh." / The palm is saying, "The righteous flourish like the palm tree; they grow like a cedar in Lebanon."

But the Song of the Frog does not directly reference the frog, and it isn't a pun, and it isn't even biblical! The frog says: "Barukh shem kavod malkhuto l'olam va'ed." / "Blessed is the name of God's glorious kingdom forever and ever.

This familiar line is liturgical. It is the phrase that was said when the people heard the High Priest utter the holiest name of God. It's the phrase that we say after the first line of the Shema. We also say it to rectify a mistaken blessing. What an important line in our liturgy to give to the frog!

There is clearly a relationship between the frog's song of declaration regarding God's kingdom and the frog's experience of the kingdom of Egypt. The frog in Exodus 8:3 - strangely singular - rises from the waters of the Nile and covers the land of Egypt. The frogs were to be found in the houses and bedrooms and beds, the ovens and the mixing bowls (Ex. 7:28). One must imagine a persistent croaking sound taking over all of Egypt. Therein is the song of the frog: the persistent reminder that Egypt, in all its glory, was still not the strongest force in the universe.

We look forward to seeing Chazan Stephen's frogs find good homes. And since he was also a lover of song and of praise of God, may they always come to remind us of the Song of the Frog.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Natasha