

The Ninth Plague

Yakov Azriel

And the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch your hand towards the sky, and let there be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that shall be felt.' So Moses stretched his hand toward the sky; and there was thick darkness in all of the land of Egypt for three days. (EXODUS 10:21-22)

Can this be day? Then why do shadows of night
 Invade the morning, conquer the afternoon
 And overwhelm the last few gasps of light
 Coughed from the throat of a pallid crescent moon?

Can this be day? Then why does the trembling sun
 Hide under clouds as black as Death's blind eyes?
 A thousand rays of light converge into one,
 Then none, all blackened and dyed by Pharaoh's lies.

This is the day of our visitation;
 For Jewish babies were thrown into the Nile
 And we Egyptians claimed we did not see.
 This is the day of their vindication,
 Punishing us for our deeds and our denial;
 We who refused to see—no longer see.

Yakov Azriel has published over a dozen poems on Jewish themes in journals and magazines in the United States, England, and Israel. His first book of poems, entitled Threads from a Coat of Many Colors (Time Being Books, forthcoming 2005), is a collection of poems based on Genesis.