

THE KTM DAF PARASHA

BRINGING A TASTE OF ISRAEL TO MONTREAL



WHO'S YOUR GOD?

BY RAV ARI FAUST (ROSH KOLLEL)

The night of Yetziat Mitzrayim is often imagined as a showdown of power: miracles versus magicians, plagues versus palaces, God versus Pharaoh. But the Torah itself insists that this framing is incomplete. The makkot were not merely punishments - they were not even primarily about Pharaoh. They were something far more radical and far more enduring: a systematic dismantling of an entire worldview.

Egypt was not simply a cruel empire; it was a culture with a theology. It possessed a coherent understanding of nature, power, hierarchy, and human worth. That theology made slavery not only permissible, but inevitable. It rendered oppression natural, divine, and unquestionable. And it is that theology - the ideas that justified the enslavement and murder of an entire people - that the plagues come to destroy.

The Torah says this explicitly. In describing the climactic end of slavery, the Torah declares (Shemot 12:12):

וְעָבַרְתִּי בָאָרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בַּלֵּילָה הַזֶּה, וְהִכֵּיתִי כָל בְּכוֹר בָּאָרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם מֵאָדָם וְעַד בְּהֵמָה, וּבְכָל אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם אֶעֱשֶׂה
'שְׁפָטִים אֲנִי ה'.

For that night I will go through the land of Egypt and strike down every [male] first-born in the land of Egypt, both human and beast; and I will mete out punishments to all the gods of Egypt, I am Hashem

This is not incidental. The plagues are directed not only at Egypt, but at Egypt's gods. This theme returns at the end of the journey through the desert when the punishment exacted upon the Egyptian deities is noted alongside that of the firstborn (Bamidbar 33:4). Strikingly, the Haggadah itself elevates this dimension. In Dayenu we proclaim: "If He had carried out judgments against their gods, and not killed their firstborn - Dayenu." The destruction of Egyptian theology is presented as, in some sense, even more decisive than the death of the firstborn.

Rabbi Joseph Hertz captures this powerfully:

The contest was far more than a dramatic humiliation of the unrepentant and infatuated tyrant. It was nothing less than a judgment on the gods of Egypt. The plagues fell on the principal divinities that were worshipped since times immemorial in the Nile valley...

The Nile, worshipped as the source of life, turns to blood. Animals revered as divine become instruments of chaos. The sun itself, Ra, the ultimate

symbol of Egyptian order and permanence, is plunged into darkness. Pharaoh - considered semi-divine - is revealed as helpless. One by one, the pillars of Egypt's understanding of reality collapse.

This is not incidental theology. It is the Torah's central claim about how cultures work.

A culture is shaped by its outlook. Its laws, institutions, and behaviors flow from deeper assumptions about what is sacred, who matters, and how the world is ordered. To change a society, one must refine - or dismantle - the ideas that form its bedrock. Slavery cannot be abolished unless human beings are understood as possessing inherent, inviolable dignity. Peace cannot be achieved so long as the "other" is imagined as essentially evil or subhuman. Perverse ideas inevitably lead to perverse actions.

Chazal make this point with poignant clarity. The midrash (Shemot Rabbah 15:15) describes the final plague:

When they were struck by the plague of the firstborn, what did the Egyptians do? They took their children and hid them in their houses of idol worship... The Egyptians sought ways to escape the plague but could not... What caused them to be struck by every plague? Because they trusted in their idolatry. What did the Holy One do? He struck their gods along with them...

The Midrash is ruthless. Even as Egypt is collapsing, the people run *toward* their idols, not *away* from them. They cling to the very ideas that are killing them. And so God does not merely overpower Egypt - just like Avraham did, He shatters its gods. The false sanctities are exposed as empty.

This dynamic has been observed far beyond the Torah. In the modern era, political thinkers have repeatedly noted that injustice is sustained not merely by force, but by belief. Notably, Alexis de Tocqueville, in his study of democracy, argued that societies are governed less by laws than by what he called "mœurs" - habits of the heart, moral intuitions, and shared assumptions about human nature. Laws can change overnight; worldviews do not. Coercion may produce submission, but only a change in moral imagination produces transformation.

Tocqueville observed that systems of oppression endure because they feel normal to those who inhabit them. Redemption requires more than



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liberation from chains. It requires liberation from lies. Before Israel can leave Egypt physically, Egypt's gods must fall. And before Israel can become free, they must be taught a new worldview: time sanctified by God, power limited by morality, and every human being bearing divine dignity.

This is why the story of the makkot is not ancient history. It is an enduring warning. Cultures that sanctify power will produce tyrants. Cultures that deny human dignity will justify cruelty. And cultures that refuse to confront their false gods will repeat their sins under new names.

This is why the story of the makkot is not ancient history. It is an enduring reminder that cultures rise or fall on the ideas they choose to sanctify. When power is treated as sacred, it deforms; when human dignity is obscured, cruelty can take root. Redemption, then, begins not only with changed circumstances, but with clarified moral vision.

In Parashat Bo we are taught that Hashem is concerned not only with what people do, but with what they believe - because that will ultimately shape how we behave. By confronting false gods, the Torah challenges us to examine the assumptions that shape our own worlds - and to replace them with ideas that affirm dignity, responsibility, and freedom. In doing so, we become partners in building societies worthy of the divine image.



אין כמו שנה בארץ

BY NAOMIE VAS, MIDRESHET TORAH VA'AVODAH

I love the family aspect of MTVA. It's really a perfect amount of girls. I find everyone feels

so close and comfortable. In addition everyone's apartments are really close together. And you can just hang out in anyone's apartment.

Another great thing is everyone is able to have a really close connection with the teachers. I never feel intimidated going to a teacher to ask them to learn together. It's just a great dynamic.

I think MTVA is really special for the girls they attract and the experiences we have. MTVA's tiyulim are amazing, and frequent. A highlight of mine was definitely our trip to Eilat. It was so special. We all were so close and connected. The trip was a no phone tiyul, which enhanced the experience

overall. Being "phone-less" for the extended weekend meant that we just were present with one-another. Over Shabbat we were in a yurt, and everyone was together, which was really cute.

There are a variety of classes and teachers. There are a lot of tanach classes, history classes like war ethics or holocaust, and there are inspirational classes. My favourite class is "The Spiritual Revolution of Rav Kook" where we covered such interesting topics like developing character traits and how even our negative traits stem from a good place, and each trait can either be used for the good or bad. We've learnt about the purpose of life, how doing mitzvot is to enhance this world (and not just for some future reward in Olam Haba). And we also learnt the correct way one should perceive God. Overall I am always very engaged in this class,

and uncover a lot about myself through Rav Kooks writings.

I feel that over the few months I've been at MTVA, I've grown so much spiritually and intellectually I feel like I've definitely been able to redefine my values. I am definitely aligned way more with Hashem. I try to put Hashem before every decision I make and I don't think He was as present in my everyday life before coming this year.

I also feel like I've become way more independent, needing to cook my own food, buy groceries, clean my apartment, and more.

All this is credit to the well-rounded program at MTVA, the incredible educators and the exceptional group of girls! Overall I am really happy about my experience.

Naomie Vas is an alumnus of Hebrew Academy High School.



SHABBAT'S GREATEST HITS: "HABIBI"

BY EVYATAR KERNER

When we sing "Ya Habibi," it's easy to get carried away by the melody, the smile, the lively rhythm. But if

we pause between the words, we discover something surprising: the kind of change that can teach us about all the struggles we face - the change we secretly wish for deep in our hearts - is hidden right here, in our song. The words are simple, but turning them into reality? Much harder.

"Send the son of David and redeem us" - send the Messiah and redeem us. "We will return to Zion, our holy city" - we will return to Jerusalem.

But wait. Do we really ask for this? Do we truly want it to happen? Or are we just singing pretty words?

Here's a truth no one says out loud: it's not that we don't believe in the Messiah or in redemption. The problem is that we are comfortable with the current situation. We know how to live in it. We know the rules, the routines, the challenges. And even if it's not perfect - at least it's familiar.

Change? Change is scary. It's not knowing what tomorrow will bring. It means giving up the security of the familiar. So we sing "Send the son of David and redeem us" every Shabbat, but deep down, we're not sure we

really want it right now. Maybe someday. Maybe in the future. But now? Now I have to go to work on Monday. Now I have plans. Now my life feels stable.

The painful truth is we don't feel something is missing. When something is truly missing, you live it all the time. When you're hungry, you think about food. When you're thirsty, you think about water. When someone you love is absent, you think about them constantly. Lack is part of life.

But the Messiah? Redemption? The Temple? Let's be honest - how often do we really think about these things? How often do we feel that absence? If the answer is "almost never," it means we're not truly living with that sense of lack. It means the current situation is good enough for us.

We pray three times a day, "May our eyes behold Your return to Zion in mercy," but do we really want to see it with our own eyes? Or is it just text we repeat?

So why is it so hard to want change?

There's something deep in human nature - we love stability. Even if things aren't perfect, at least they're predictable. True change? Change that upends everything? That means everything we've built, everything we've planned, every bit of security we've created - can be transformed.

One reason redemption doesn't happen is that we don't ask for it enough. It's not that we don't believe - it's that we don't really ask, and it's barely on our minds.

Maybe the solution isn't outside us. True change begins with a small step: listening to the words, truly feeling the longing, letting it reach our hearts - and from there, action can emerge. If we start to ask sincerely, think sincerely, feel sincerely - then the words might actually begin to change reality. Between words and deeds, between desire and action, courage to change comes when we don't settle for words alone but give them the power to move our hearts.

This Shabbat's challenge:

Pause for a moment and reflect: how much holiness am I bringing into my life? Do I mean it in my prayers? Am I giving charity? Take a sincere resolution for the week ahead, and together, let's bring the world a little closer to redemption.





HALACHIC Q&A

BY RABBI YOSEF ZVI RIMON - NASI, WORLD MIZRACHI

Question: What are the rules of ma'aser kesafim?

Answer: As part of the general mitzvah of tzedakah, Chazal instituted that one should give 10% of their income. The Gemara in Ta'anit (9a) relays a story where Rebbe Yochanan met the son of Reish Lakish and asked him to share a passuk that he had learned that day. The boy quoted the passuk of "Aseir te'aser" (regarding the general laws of ma'aser). Rebbe Yochanan responded by explaining: "Tithe (aseir) so that you will become rich (shetit'asheir)."

After the child asked Rebbe Yochanan where he got this from, Rebbe Yochanan told him to go try. While one generally may not test Hashem, Rebbe Yochanan brings a proof from Malachi that this is the one exception.

This teaching of the Gemara is surprising! It appears as though giving ma'aser is a piece of advice, and Rebbe Yochanan even says one can test Hashem in this respect!

The Ba'alei Tosafot explain this concept. They begin by mentioning that the laws of ma'aser not only apply to produce, fruit, etc., but also to money. Tosafot then brings a story about a rich man whose field yielded 1000 kor a year, and he gave 100 as ma'aser each year. Before he died, he gave the field to his son, telling him to continue giving ma'aser. The son did not listen to his father, and the field yielded only 100 kor. His relatives told him: when you gave ma'aser, you were the owner and God was like the kohen taking the ma'aser. Now that you have stopped giving ma'aser, Hashem has become the owner and you are receiving the ma'aser.

This story of Tosafot teaches the main idea of ma'aser: making Hashem a partner. When one gives ma'aser, it is, so to speak, beneficial for God to increase your produce so the sum of the ma'aser is greater! From here, we see

that ma'aser is part of the Jewish economic framework.

The logic is as follows: The Torah allows you to make as much profit as you would like on the condition that an appropriate amount is given to the poor. If you give, then the Torah not only maintains this structure but even helps you! If you do not give, the entire economic basis in which you made money dissolves and Hashem will not continue to give.

We see clearly that ma'aser kesafim is part of the economic framework of the Jewish people and not just an appeal to do chesed.

It is noteworthy that not everyone agrees that ma'aser kesafim is mide'oraita. Some hold that it is miderabbanan (Shu"t Maharil) and others hold that it is a minhag (Shu"t Maharam). Nevertheless, all agree that one should try hard to give ma'aser kesafim and that doing so will benefit the economy, himself included.

Therefore, as a general rule, it is proper for all to give ma'aser kesafim. However, somebody who is in a difficult financial situation can give a smaller amount. If one's financial instability stems from excessive spending, the individual should try to create a healthier balance while giving ma'aser as well.

As we saw, one makes Hakadosh Baruch Hu a partner when giving ma'aser kesafim. It is worth mentioning an additional element of the religious significance of ma'aser. While a person may work hard for income, the money remains physical in nature. When a person gives money to tzedakah, for Torah or chesed, he is uplifting the nature of all of the money from chulin (secular) into money of kedushah, chesed, and Torah.

Specific laws pertaining to ma'aser kesafim:

- Lechatchila, one should separate 10% of all profits. One should say "bli neder" before the first time one gives, in case one struggles financially in the future and cannot give the entire amount.
- One should deduct ma'aser from the sum of profits before deducting expenses. However, if the expense is necessary for the sake of the profit, it may be deducted (e.g. paying for a babysitter in order to go to work, money for gas to go to work).
- In a case of need, there is room to deduct the following from the total sum: half of social security; money spent for limud Torah of children above the required amount (especially for a child over 13 and certainly over 18); and sefarim which one allows others to use.
- One should give ma'aser on money received as a gift. However, money given for a specific purpose (e.g., parents gave money to buy something specific) may be excluded, though it is best to give at least a portion.
- It is proper to give half of the ma'aser to the poor and the other half to other chesed or Torah organizations.
- It is recommended to maintain a separate bank account for tzedakah so that each month 10% of one's income is automatically transferred, making it easier to give.
- If one has family members who are struggling financially, giving to them should come first.

Translated from Hebrew and abbreviated by Yaakov Panitch.

PARNESS HAYOM :: SHEVAT

2 Shevat I The Drazin Family in memory of Gertrude Drazin z"l

9 Shevat I Russell and Steven Samuels in memory of their grandfather, Aron Eichenbaum z"l

11 Shevat I Drs. Rochel and Hyman Schipper in memory of her grandfather, David Jacob Rubinstein z"l

14 Shevat I Susan Lieberman and family, in honour of the Yahrzeit of Susan's mother, Esther Eisenstein - Esther bat Shia Zelig z"l.

28 Shevat I Joan Lieberman in memory of her father, Zalman Singer z"l

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Problems with Listening



Paraoh was warned again and again by Moshe, but he kept saying "later" and "no." Each time Paraoh didn't listen, the problem didn't go away - it got worse. Waiting and not listening is called "procrastinating", and it usually makes things harder instead of easier. Parashat Bo teaches us that listening the first time can prevent bigger problems later.