

THE KTM DAF PARASHA

BRINGING A TASTE OF ISRAEL TO MONTREAL



AUTOPILOT AND ANCESTRY: TRADITION, CHANGE, AND THE COURAGE TO BECOME

BY RAV ARI FAUST (ROSH KOLLEL)

Modern society is deeply divided over a deceptively simple question: Should we trust what we have inherited, or should we try to remake the world?

Conservatives tend to answer: *trust what came before.*

Progressives tend to answer: *the past should not define the future.*

Conservatives find moral authority in what has been handed down, while progressives tend to locate it in what could be. Both intuitions are powerful. But both are incomplete. And Parashat Va'era - read closely - offers a vision that neither side can afford to ignore.

One of the most powerful modern defenses of tradition comes from economist and philosopher Friedrich Hayek, who argued that societies survive not because their members consciously designed their traditions, but because those traditions quietly accumulated wisdom across generations. We live inside systems that know more than we do. Discarding the system risks shifting society in ways that not only are undesirable but often outright dangerous.

Discarding traditional systems can erode identity. Psychologists Marshall Duke and Robyn Fivush found precisely this in their work on the "Do-You-Know Scale." Children who know their family stories - where their grandparents came from, what struggles their parents overcame, how their family faced crises - are more resilient, less anxious, and more capable of handling stress. There is something deeply intuitive about this. We see it in families, communities, and even in ourselves: familiarity breeds confidence. Stability breeds the emotional strength to face uncertainty. Identity, it turns out, is not a luxury. It is a survival tool.

But the strengths of tradition do not come without their potential moral pitfalls; if traditions are so powerful, they can also be powerfully unjust. The political theorist James C. Scott has argued that traditions do not merely encode wisdom; they also encode power. Practices endure not only because they work, but because they benefit those who already hold authority. The fact that something has survived does not mean it is fair, or moral. And the economist Amartya Sen insists that true development must be measured not by the preservation of systems, but by the expansion of real human freedom.

In other words: stability can become stagnation. Continuity can become captivity.

Parashat Va'era opens with a moment of spiritual crisis. Moshe has confronted Paroh, and things have only gotten worse. The people are angry. Paroh is crueler. And Moshe turns to Hashem in despair: *"Why have You harmed this people? Why have You sent me? Since I have come to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has harmed this people, and You have not saved Your people."* (Shemot 5:22-23)

God's response at the start of our parasha is strange. He does not offer reassurance. He does not explain strategy. Instead, He gives Moshe a genealogy (Shemot 6:14-27):

אלה ראשי אבות כלום למשהותם. הוא אהרן ומשה,
אשר אמר ה' לך והוציאו את בני ישראל מארץ מצרים
על צבאותם. הם המדרים אל פרעה מלך מצרים ליהוּנָה
את בני ישראל מארץ מצרים, הוא משה ואהרן.

This is Aharon and Moshe, to whom the Lord said, "Take the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt with their legions." They are the ones who spoke to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to let the children of Israel out of Egypt; they are Moshe and Aharon.

On the surface, it is a dry list. But psychologically and spiritually, it is explosive. God is telling Moshe: Before you try to change the world, remember who you are. You are not an isolated revolutionary. You are the product of a story. A lineage. A covenant.

This is exactly what Duke and Fivush discovered about children. In moments of crisis, facts don't stabilize us - narratives do. It is not grand ideology that re-inforce our confidence, but our identity. Knowing "this is where I come from" is what makes it possible to face "this is where I must go."

And now comes the great twist. Once Moshe is grounded in his identity, what does God do?

He unleashes the plagues. He shatters Egypt's entire social order. He destroys one of the most ancient and powerful civilizations on earth. In other words, God uses tradition not to preserve the status quo - but to give Moshe the courage to overturn it.

This is where both conservatism and progressivism are incomplete.

Conservatism is right that people need continuity, inherited meaning, and social memory to survive chaos. But it is wrong to assume that whatever survived deserves to survive. Egypt was stable. It



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was ancient. It was powerful. It was also evil.

Progressivism is right that people must be freed from unjust structures. But it is wrong to think that people can flourish without roots, without story, without belonging. Revolutions that erase identity create not liberation, but fragmentation.

This is the third model the Torah offers.

I once heard the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks compare Judaism's relationship to change to a plane on autopilot: it constantly adjusts to turbulence, but it never loses sight of its destination. Judaism changes - but it changes in the service of a covenant, not in rebellion against one. We do not reject the past, we find our strength in it. But this does not mean that we reject the future. This is the secret of Judaism - an ancient faith that is eternally youthful; at once dedicated to the traditions of the past, while remaining contemporary and relevant.

This is the message of our parasha: Moshe is not told to forget Levi. He is told to remember Levi so that he can challenge Pharaoh. Identity does not prevent transformation; it makes transformation possible without self-destruction.

This is the deepest Jewish response to the modern culture war. We do not have to choose between tradition and justice, between memory and moral growth. We need both. We need the stability of story and the courage of critique. We need roots that hold us steady and wings that let us fly.



ENCOUNTERING THE GIANTS: RAMCHAL

BY CHAGAI SHREM

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (Ramchal, 1707–1746), born in Padua, Italy, was one of the most

profound Jewish thinkers and kabbalists of the modern era. He was a rare figure who combined deep kabbalistic insight, systematic philosophical thought, and a practical program of ethical and spiritual refinement. Ramchal sought to illuminate the path of serving God with clarity, structure, and moral responsibility, building a comprehensive vision of faith and character aimed at the perfection of both the individual and the world. Despite intense opposition in his lifetime, he continued to write and teach with remarkable dedication, producing a unified system that addresses the purpose of creation, Divine providence, and the spiritual growth of the soul. Over time, his major works—including Mesillat Yesharim, Derech Hashem, and Da'at Tevunot—have become foundational texts in the study of Jewish ethics, faith, and Kabbalah, known for their intellectual precision and their relentless drive toward holiness and redemption. Ramchal made Aliyah in 1743 and is buried in Tiv'erya.

Question: Why did God create the human being?

Answer: “Man was created solely to delight in God and to enjoy the radiance of His Presence, for this is the true pleasure and the greatest delight that can exist.” (Mesilat Yesharim)

At its core, the greatest possible good is closeness to the ultimate Good - God Himself. God wished to bestow upon

humanity the highest form of goodness imaginable (Da'at Tevunot §18):

“The most that can be grasped in this matter is that the Blessed God is certainly the ultimate good. And it is the nature of the good to do good. Therefore, His will was to create beings so that He could bestow good upon them—for if there is no recipient of goodness, there is no act of bestowal.”

God created human beings so that they could delight in His goodness.

Question: But if the goal is to enjoy the radiance of God's Presence, wouldn't it have been simpler to leave us in a purely spiritual realm? Why place us in the physical world at all?

Answer: For the gift of Divine goodness to be complete, God, in His profound wisdom, determined that it should be earned rather than simply received. Only then can the recipient truly “own” the good, without the shame that accompanies unearned gifts—like someone who lives off charity. As the Yerushalmi famously puts it:

“One who eats what is not his is ashamed to look the giver in the face.”
(Yerushalmi, Orlah 1:3)

We were therefore placed in a world of effort, challenge, and moral choice so that, through our own striving, we would merit closeness to God with dignity and integrity—fully deserving the ultimate delight that He wishes to bestow.

Question: How does God guide the world in order to bring it to its purpose?

Answer: “God intentionally set up everything to function as a series of steps and sequences. He wanted this system to function from the beginning and to continue on from there... and He uses it to maintain everything and to influence their circumstances and connections to each other... Nonetheless it's God alone who's ultimately responsible... He alone enables things to continue to exist and to develop in their own way.”

Hashem guides the world through a system that preserves human free will and justice while ensuring, through deeper and often hidden providence, that creation inevitably reaches its destined state of redemption and the full revelation of His unity.

KEEPING UP WITH KTM

- Rabbi & Rabbanit Fendel:** Our community was privileged to hear from Rabbi and Rabbanit Fendel this week. We are grateful to all our partners in the various speaking events across the schools and in the community, and are of course appreciative of the impactful *Torat Eretz Yisrael* we learned!
- FAMILY LEARNING:** We had another incredible season of Family Learning, which concluded before winter break. *Yishar Koach* to all the children who brought their parents and grandparents to the fun and engaging learning! And thank you to our series sponsors!
- Bekiut Club** is back! Each week students come after school for an immersive and interactive learning program with the Bachurim and B'not Sherut.
- Night seder** continues: Join R' Moshe Rozenbaum's Hebrew Gemara shiur on Tuesday (8:00-9:00pm), or English Gemara shiur on Thursday (8:00pm-9:00pm). Rav Ari's “Life Insights from the Parasha” shiur is also on Thursday (8:00pm-9:00pm). To arrange a chavruta with one of our bachurim, please contact ravari@ktmmtl.org.
- KTM on Campus:** Lunch & Learn at Dawson, with Chabad of Dawson and FCJA, resumes on January 26th, with more campuses to come!
- This Shabbat, Rav Ari is serving as guest Rabbi at Hillel Canada's Elevate Shabbaton with over 300 students from across the country!
- Kindly note that Maariv at Hebrew Academy has been moved to 9:30pm, except for Thursdays when it is still 9:00pm.** (KTM holds night Seder on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:00pm)



HALACHIC Q&A

BY RABBI YOSEF ZVI RIMON - NASI, WORLD MIZRACHI

Question: Does flour need to be sifted?

Answer: The concern with flour is that a few days after the grinding process, worms will be found in the flour. These worms are very small, around 2 mm. There is a major discussion about the degree to which these worms are problematic and the topic of "tola'at sheloh pirsha" (worm that never left) but we will not relate to these topics at the moment. There are different names for different sifters. The names given relate to the number of holes per square inch. A 40 sifter means that it has 40x40 holes per square inch. Many try to use a 70 which is the best type of sifter. It is not necessary to have a 70, but one cannot use a sifter with less than 50 (and if really needed 40). Once it is lower than this, even the worms can make it through.

Question: Can I sift a lot at once and use the flour for many days?

Answer: After sifting, it takes about 24 hours for the presence of worms to return. In the winter, it takes even longer. Therefore, one can sift and use the same flour the next day without resifting. If one places the sifted flour in the fridge, we can assume it is clean for a week without needing to sift again. If one puts it in the freezer, it does not need to be resifted even after an extended period of time.

Question: Can I buy flour that does not need to be sifted?

Answer: As we mentioned, it takes 24 hours after grinding before there is a concern for worms. Therefore, one may buy flour within 24 hours of its grinding (assuming the mill is clean)

without sifting. Flour that was refrigerated after grinding or put in a sealed bag also retains its status as clean, and the bags say that no sifting is necessary. One should keep these in the freezer to retain its status. It is important that the flour has a legitimate hechsher to prove its status as "pre-sifted."

Question: Can I eat baked goods at the home of a family that does not sift their flour?

Answer: Seemingly, this is an issue as there may be worms in the cake. However, the Rashba has an important ruling that may impact this case:

In order to understand the rule, we must first understand that there are different halachic categories to define the probability of worms. One level is called "muchzak." We refer to this in cases where in most cases there will be worms. For example, vegetables with leaves such as lettuce, cabbage, brussel sprouts, dill, celery, etc. are considered "muchzak" with worms. There is a lower category in which we do not assume it is "muchzak," but we say there is a "miyut hamatzui" (substantial minority), and therefore still required checking. For example, rice and unsifted flour fall into this category.

While checking is required in both categories, there is a substantial difference once the food is cooked or baked. The Rashba says that if a food with a probability of "miyut hamatzui" is cooked or baked without checking, we can permit it to be eaten because there is sfeika (double doubt):

There may be no insect at all (because it is not considered "muchzak").

If there was a worm, it may have been destroyed in the process of cooking/baking.

Once the worm is not complete, it can be considered nullified within the mixture.

Therefore, assuming this is a home that keeps flour guarded in a normal fashion, then the probability of insects without sifting is "miyut hamatzui." Once the food was baked, believed we can allow you to eat the baked goods based on the Rashba (SA YD 84:9).

Translated from Hebrew and abbreviated by Yaakov Panitch.

(Note: These answers were written as part of a teshuva concerning insects/worms in produce in Eretz Yisrael)

PARNES HAYOM :: TEVET

5 TEVET | Edith Zukor, in honour of the Yahrzeit of her brothers, Laszlo Schwartz z"l and Ervin Schwartz z"l

11 TEVET | Sari and Shlomo Drazin, in honour of the Yahrzeit of her father, Joe Polansky z"l

21 TEVET | Stanley Yetnikoff, in honour of the Yahrzeit of his father-in-law, Isaac Babad z"l

21 TEVET | Susan Lieberman and family, in honour of the Yahrzeit of her father-in-law, Laizer Lieberman z"l

22 TEVET | Adrienne and Shlomo Drazin, in honour of the Yahrzeit of her grandmother, Bertha Segal z"l

22 TEVET | Philip Cola, in honour of the Yahrzeit of his father, Lemel Cola z"l

23 TEVET | Susan Lieberman and family, in honour of the Yahrzeit of her father, Moses Eisenstein z"l

23 TEVET | Susan Lieberman and family, in honour of the Yahrzeit of her mother-in-law, Raizel Lieberman z"l

23 TEVET | Alain and Susan Matarasso, in honour of the Yahrzeit of his father, Israel ben David Matarasso z"l

27 TEVET | The Drazin family, in honour of the Yahrzeit of Samuel Drazin z"l



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Below the Surface



Even when nothing seems to be happening, important things may still be growing beneath the surface. In our story, the seed is quietly putting down roots long before the sprout appears, reminding us that progress is not always visible. Parashat Va'era teaches the same lesson: even when Moshe felt nothing was changing and Paraoh only became harsher, Hashem was already setting the geula in motion. Just like the seed, Bnei Yisrael's freedom was growing long before anyone could see it.