

# Toronto Torah

## Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Vaera

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This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Paul and Chavi Jacobs  
on the yahrzeit and in loving memory of Chavi's mother  
Eva (Maidy) Heller, Finkel bas Shmayahu a"h

### The Apocalypse at the Heart of the Exodus

Rabbi Adam Friedmann

Our parshah begins with G-d apparently reiterating the impetus and plan for taking the Jews out of Egypt. G-d tells Moshe that His name is Hashem, and that this name was not known to the patriarchs. G-d intends to fulfill His covenant with the patriarchs. He therefore tells Moshe to go and tell the Jews that He will take the following steps:

- Free them from the slavery of Egypt;
- Take the Jews to Him as a people so that they know that He is the one who took them out of Egypt;
- Bring them to the land that He swore to give to their forefathers.

Moshe tries to communicate this message, but the nation refuses to listen to him because of "shortness of spirit" and the difficulty of their work.

G-d then tells Moshe to tell Pharaoh to send the Jews out of Egypt. Moshe responds that if the Jews wouldn't listen to his message, all the more so Pharaoh would not. He argues that as a person with a speech impediment, he is ill-equipped for this task.

G-d's response to this argument is to place Moshe and Aharon in command over both Pharaoh and Bnei Yisrael (see Rashi to Shemot 6:13). G-d makes Moshe a lord over Pharaoh and Aharon becomes his prophet. It's here that we first hear about the plan to harden Pharaoh's heart in response to G-d's miracles. The end result: "The Egyptians will know that I am Hashem, when I stretch out My hand over Egypt

and bring Bnei Yisrael out from among them" (Shemot 7:3)

There are two big structural questions to ask about this narrative.

- 1) Firstly, didn't G-d already tell Moshe about His plan in last week's parshah? Why is it repeated? Is there something new in this version?
- 2) Secondly, how does G-d's response of placing Moshe in command over Bnei Yisrael and Pharaoh solve the issue that no one was able or willing to listen? What does this position of 'command' change?

Rashi (Shemot 6:3, 9) answers the first question. In last week's parshah, G-d only spoke about freeing the Jews from slavery and returning them to their land. This week's parshah emphasizes a new element, the revelation of G-d as Hashem, the Creator. As we saw in the synopsis above, by the time the dust settles on the Exodus story, both the Jews and the Egyptians will have gained an acute awareness of Hashem. This plan for mass spiritual enlightenment is a major addition to what we read about last week. It is this broader spiritual vision that the Jews were unable to fathom in their current circumstances (see Ramban to Shemot 6:9), and Pharaoh rejected outright.

The answer to the second question lies in the nature of Moshe's prophetic mission. There are different kinds of prophecy. Sometimes the mission of a prophet is to convince others about the truth of their prophetic vision using rhetoric.

This is what Moshe thought he was being sent to do. His task was to inspire the Jews to hope for freedom and convince Pharaoh to let the Jews go. In this kind of role, a speech impediment is a major obstacle. But by placing Moshe in 'command' of the Jews and Pharaoh, G-d tells Moshe that he has a different prophetic task. Instead of inspiring and persuading, Moshe is to dictate. He is the mouthpiece in G-d's plan to overwhelm the bodies, hearts, and minds of both the Jews and Egyptians. Apparently, the revelation of G-d as Hashem couldn't be accomplished through prophetically inspired rhetoric. It required apocalyptic force.

This understanding of the shifts in both G-d's revealed plans and Moshe's role provides a framework for reading the rest of the story of the Exodus and for the deeper spiritual messages it teaches us.

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#### OUR BEIT MIDRASH

<b>ROSH BEIT MIDRASH</b>	RABBI MORDECHAI TORCZYNER
<b>SGAN ROSH BEIT MIDRASH</b>	RABBI JARED ANSTANDIG, RABBI YEHUDA MANN
<b>AVREICHIM</b>	RABBI STEVEN GOTLIB, IDAN RAKOVSKY
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<b>MEN'S POST-HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM</b>	YEHOSHUA BENDAYAN, NATHAN DIENA, MOISHY KANOFKY, DAVID KROO, ANDER MOSS, DANIEL SHEINIS, ELI WELTMAN
<b>WOMEN'S POST-HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM</b>	ORLY AZIZA, ATARA GASNER, CHAYA JUNI, MAXINE LEE-EWASCHUK, AILEEN MORRIS, HADASSAH NAUENBERG, YEJIDE OMOTOSO, FEIGA WERNER, RIVKA WERNER, KINNERET WITTY



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**Summary**

This chapter has four different sections. In this summary I followed the section divisions identified in the [Herzog Institute Tanach Project](#).

- 1) Chapter 33 opens with the first section, a single verse addressing an anonymous enemy. Yeshayahu threatens the enemy that when he is done with his malicious deeds, G-d will pay him back and will harm him just as he harmed others. (1)
- 2) The second section talks about Am Yisrael reaching out to G-d and asking for salvation. G-d accepts this request, and promises the people that they will collect the loot from their enemies. The nation praises G-d in return. (2-6)
- 3) The third section opens with a description of deep grief over a great destruction, in which Yeshayahu doesn't provide information about the grieving nation or the destruction. He then comforts the nation, and describes the great revenge that G-d will bring upon the nation's enemies. The nation's enemies will be burnt and will be completely destroyed. (7-12)
- 4) The fourth and last section describes G-d's call to distant people to appreciate His actions. The sinners of Jerusalem should fear G-d; just as the fire

of G-d consumed other sinners wherever they were, it will also destroy the sinners of Jerusalem. On the other hand, the pious person need not need worry at all, as G-d will save him. Furthermore, the pious person will also be entitled to view the new and beautiful king who will lead the nation in the days of salvation. In those days, Jerusalem will also be extremely beautiful, and G-d will be accepted by all as the judge of the world. (13-24)

**Insight**

In the Talmud (Shabbat 31a), Reish Lakish linked the sections of the Mishnah with the words of Yeshayahu 33:6, "And the faith of your times shall be a strength of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge":

Reish Lakish said: What is the meaning of: "And the faith of your times shall be a strength of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge? Faith; that is the order of *Zera'im*, Seeds. Your times; that is the order of *Moed*, Festival. Strength; that is the order of *Nashim*, Women. Salvations; that is the order of *Nezikin*, Damages.

Wisdom; that is the order of *Kodashim*, Consecrated Items. And knowledge; that is the order of *Teharot*, Purity. And even if a person studies and masters all of these, „the fear of the Lord is his treasure“. (Koren trans.)

Why is Faith linked to the section of *Zera'im*, which deals with the world of farming? Rav Kook (Introduction to *Ein Ayah*) explains that farming involves a great amount of faith in G-d. When one comes to plant a seed, he puts faith in G-d that all the necessary conditions will apply so that this seed will grow into a plant. According to Rav Kook, the action of the human being, dependent on the Divine, embodies the ideal of Faith.

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**Siddur Insights: A Prayer for Our Environment**

**Rabbi Steven Gotlib**

The Talmud (Berachot 16b) reports that every day following Shacharit, Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi would recite the following personal prayer:

“May it be Your will, Lord our G-d, and G-d of our forefathers, that You save us from the arrogant and from arrogance in general, from a bad man, from a bad mishap, from an evil instinct, from a bad companion, from a bad neighbor, from the destructive Satan, from a harsh trial and from a harsh opponent, whether he is a member of the covenant, or whether he is not a member of the covenant” (Koren Translation).

This meditation is also included in our siddurim (although *nusach Sefard* uses a slightly different variation), just after the Morning Berachot and before reading of Akeidah Yitzchak. In his commentary on the Siddur, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt”l, quoting his predecessor as Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits zt”l, notes that this prayer reflects the “social fabric of faith.” In his own words, “we are social beings, influenced by our environment. Therefore, we pray to be protected from harmful events and temptations.” (Koren Sacks Siddur, page 30).

This focus on one's social environment needs to be unpacked. If that is the core idea of this prayer, then its location is not very intuitive. Both the morning blessings that precede it and the retelling of Avraham Avinu's near-sacrifice of Yitzchak after it are deeply personal; the former is relevant only to the one reciting the prayers while the latter tells the story of Avraham's personal mission. Where does the broader social environment fit in?

A potential answer can be found in the commentary of Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (Bereishit 12:1), who contended that Hashem telling Avraham “*Lech Lecha*” is a command for Avraham Avinu to go his own unique way rather than be pulled by the currents of others. As Rav Hirsch wrote, “every individual is directly responsible to G-d for his [or her] personal conduct. If it becomes necessary, if the principle idolized by the majority is not the one which is truly Divine, then the individual must go ‘alone, his own way, with G-d.’ This conviction was set by Abraham as the starting point for his own mission and that of the people to be descended from him.”

In other words, each and every one of us has an obligation to put ourselves in environments that are conducive to our intellectual development and spiritual growth. Just as Avraham Avinu set himself up for success by ensuring that his environment was conducive to growing in *avodat Hashem*, so too can each of us do the same by making sure that our own environments - physical, social, and spiritual, are conducive to our own intellectual development and spiritual growth.

This prayer then stands as a reminder as we start our day to care about the social environment that we inhabit.

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## Biography

# Rabbi Avraham Elya Kaplan

Rabbi Ezra Goldschmiedt

After studying in the great yeshivot of Telshe and Kelm, Rabbi Avraham Elya Kaplan (1890-1924) eventually found his path of study and growth in Slobodka under the guidance of 'the Alter', Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel. It is said that of the many great Jewish leaders who came from Slobodka, Rabbi Kaplan was the Alter's most prized student.

Throughout his years in yeshiva, Rabbi Kaplan displayed an eclectic mix of interests in both Torah and secular studies. Most striking, however, was his passion for *mussar* and living an examined life. His writings and poetry reflect the spirit of Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, the founder of the *mussar* movement and a man he viewed as the paradigm of leadership and influence.

Rabbi Kaplan invested tremendous efforts in work for the Jewish community, founding the national youth movement of *Tzi'irei Yisrael* and overseeing its educational programs. Ultimately however, his passion for learning took him back to the world of the yeshiva, and at the age of thirty he joined the Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary in Germany, becoming its head two years later. His teachings and guidance excited the yeshiva in new ways, which made his sudden passing at age 34 all the more painful.

In his book "Three Generations", Dayan I. Grunfeld comments that Rabbi Kaplan's death "was a blow which had struck down every one of us and had put an end to a sacred conviction which we all shared; that this man was destined to bring about a revival and renewal of German Judaism."

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## Weekly Halachah: Is Magic Permitted?

Rabbi Jared Anstandig

Moshe and Aharon confront Pharaoh in this week's parshah and perform wonders before him. In accordance with G-d's instructions, the first thing that they do is transform their staffs into snakes. In response, Pharaoh calls in his magicians and sorcerers who, in turn, also transform their staffs into snakes. Ibn Ezra comments (Shemot 7:11) that there is a difference between the two – Moshe and Aharon *actually turn* their staffs into snakes. The Egyptian magicians, however, perform a trick – they don't actually turn their staffs into snakes; they only make it *look like* they did.

Contemporary magic works the same way. A magician doesn't actually see a volunteer in half, it only *looks like* it. The question is: is such magic acceptable according to Jewish law?

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 67b) explains that actual sorcery is biblically forbidden, and one receives lashes for transgressing this prohibition. Tricking someone by sleight of hand (Hebrew: *achizat einayim*), according to this passage, is forbidden, but one who transgresses is not punished with lashes. As an example of this, the sage Rav describes that he once saw an Arab magician cut a camel into many pieces, only to have the camel get up and walk away.

The Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 179:15) rules like this talmudic passage, writing that tricks that are performed by sleight of hand are forbidden. In providing examples of forbidden tricks involving sleight of hand, the *Chochmat Adam* (89:6) describes familiar tricks, such as tossing a coin in the air and then "magically" extracting it from a spectator's mouth. From these sources it would appear that our contemporary magicians are engaging in forbidden activities. Indeed, Rav Ovadia Yosef (*Yechaveh Daat* 3:68) and others prohibit today's magic acts.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Igrot Moshe* Yoreh Deah 4:13), however, limits the prohibitions to the cases when the magician presents himself as though he is *actually* doing something. However, if the magician explains that it is all sleight of hand (and Rav Moshe adds that it is widely known that magicians are not performing *real* magic), there is likely no prohibition. It is worth noting that Rav Moshe concludes that he is unwilling to provide practical guidance to this question, and ultimately defers to the earlier authorities who prohibited it.

Unlike Rav Moshe, Rav Yekutiel Yehudah Halberstam (*Shut Divrei Yatziv* Yoreh Deah 57) does rule in this case. Assuming the magician is performing his or her feats through tricks or quick hands, Rav Halberstam concludes that there is no reason to prohibit. He does add that it may be worthwhile for the magician to state explicitly that the tricks are not "real magic," thereby avoiding any prohibition of magic or misleading the audience.

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## Sefer haChinuch, Mitzvah 10: Eat Matzah, Part 1

By Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Shemot 12:8 instructs us to eat matzah on Pesach night; *Sefer haChinuch* counts this as the Torah's 10<sup>th</sup> mitzvah.

The Talmud (Pesachim 116b) explains that we eat mitzvah because we left Egypt in a rush, and our dough did not have time to rise, as recorded in Shemot 12:39. This explanation is difficult, though; G-d had already instructed us not to have chametz for seven days (Shemot 12:19)! The dough didn't rise because we could not let permit it to rise, and not because of our haste!

Among many who have approached this problem, the 13<sup>th</sup> century sage Rabbi Yeshayah diTrani (*Tosafot Rid* to Pesachim 116b) suggested a simple answer. He noted that when the Jews left Egypt, the prohibition against possessing chametz applied only for the first day of Pesach; the instruction regarding a seven-day holiday was for future generations (as indicated in Shemot 12:14). If so, then the Jews could have permitted their dough to rise if not for their haste, and this haste is what we have commemorated every year since.

*To be continued...*

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All times ET. Classes are free & open to all, unless otherwise noted.

### Shabbat Jan. 20-21

After hashkamah R' Yehuda Mann, Halachah from the Parshah, Clanton Park

After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Ketuvot, BAYT (Milevsky Bais Medrash) (men)

After minchah Idan Rakovsky, Halachah in the Parshah, Shaarei Tefillah

6:00 PM Motzaei Shabbat R' Jared Anstandig, Parent Child-Learning, Shaarei Shomayim (middle school)

### Sun. Jan. 22

9:00 AM R' Zev Spitz & R' Yehuda Mann, Semichat Chaver Program, Clanton Park (men): Niddah

### Mon. Jan. 23 Rosh Chodesh Shevat

9:00 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Halachic Philosophy of Rav Soloveitchik, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university men)

7:30 PM Prielle & Idan Rakovsky, Song of the Week, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklysong> *not this week*

8:30 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Laws of Gerut #3 of 3, Shomrai Shabbos (men)

### Tues. Jan. 24

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Wisdom of King Solomon: Mishlei, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 17), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

8:15 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Shovavim Shiur (Semichat Chaver Chazarah), Clanton Park (men)

8:30 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Women's Beit Midrash, Shaarei Shomayim (university women)

### Wed. Jan. 25

10:00 AM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Icons of Jewish Morocco 3 of 4: The Baba Sali  
There is a fee, Register at <https://torontotorah.com/wednesdays>; On ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

7:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Esther: Week 3 of 5, Shaarei Tefillah Congregation

8:15 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Contemporary Halachah, Clanton Park

### Thurs. Jan. 26

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 29), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women)

8:00 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Beitzah (advanced), for location: [yman@torontotorah.com](mailto:yman@torontotorah.com)

9:00 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Parshah and Cholent, 403-3000 Bathurst St.

### Fri. Jan. 27

9:00 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Parshah, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

10:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, R' Mordechai Torczyner, R' Yehuda Mann, Ketuvot Perek 1 *advanced*  
In-person at Yeshivat Or Chaim, on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/frishiur>

### COMING UP!

7:30 PM Monday February 6

SONG OF THE WEEK: (POST-)TU B'SHEVAT EDITION

On ZOOM with Idan and Prielle Rakovsky at <http://tiny.cc/idanrak>

7:30 PM to 9:00 PM Monday February 13

NUSBAUM FAMILY MEDICAL ETHICS AND HALACHA PROGRAM: THE "SHOTEH"

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/mtethics>

Register at <https://torontotorah.com/cme> / Accredited for CME; Laypeople welcome

Monday February 20

PARENT-CHILD BREAKFAST YARCHEI KALLAH AT BAYT  
IS DONATING BLOOD A MITZVAH?

All Middle School Students and Parents Are Welcome!

Shabbat February 25

SHABBATON AT SHAAREI TEFILLAH CONGREGATION  
"The Mishkan and Human Creativity"