



Escape From the New Mitzrayim

The economic collapse has left many of us feeling powerless and despondent. The world, it seems, has drifted into a new Mitzrayim, a term that refers geographically to the land of Egypt, but literally means a narrow or constricted place.

It is not easy to escape from Mitzrayim. According to the Torah, the ancient Israelites endured slavery for hundreds of years before summoning the strength even to pray for liberation. Frightened when freedom comes, the people continue to long for a return to the security of slavery.

At one point, God comments, “They will know that I am Adonai their God who brought them out of Mitzrayim to dwell among them.” (Exodus 29:46) Rashi, an eleventh century scholar reads this verse conditionally: “On the condition that I dwell among [the people], I have brought them out of Egypt.” ▶

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▶ That is – as long as the people allow the divine presence to dwell among them, they will remain free from Mitzrayim. But the moment the people stop actively trying to make the divine presence manifest, they will metaphorically return to the constricted space of Mitzrayim.

By giving tzedakah, by working for policies that will create opportunity for everyone, and by helping to create a more just society, we too can make the divine presence evident among us, even – or especially – in difficult times, and will lift ourselves collectively out of the narrowness of Mitzrayim. ■

— Jill Jacobs, Rabbi-in-Residence for Jewish Funds for Justice and author of *There Shall Be No Needy*, is a leading expert on Jewish perspectives on economic and social justice.

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