

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Vaera
January 25, 2020 *** 28 Tevet, 5780

Kol Rina – An Independent Minyan, is a traditional egalitarian community. We are haimish (homey/folksy), friendly, participatory, warm and welcoming. We hold weekly services in South Orange as well as holiday services and celebrations which are completely lay led. We **welcome all** to our services and programs from non-Hebrew readers to Jewish communal and education professionals.

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Vaera in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3242/jewish/Vaera-in-a-Nutshell.htm

G-d reveals Himself to Moses. Employing the “four expressions of redemption,” take out the Children of Israel from Egypt, deliver them from their enslavement, redeem them, and acquire them as His own chosen people at “Mount Sinai”; He will then bring them to the land He promised to the Patriarchs as their eternal heritage.

Moses and Aaron repeatedly come before Pharaoh to demand in the name of G-d, “Let My people go, so that they may serve Me in the wilderness.” Pharaoh repeatedly refuses. Aaron’s staff turns into a snake and swallows the magic sticks of the Egyptian sorcerers. G-d then sends a series of plagues upon the Egyptians.

The waters of the Nile turn to blood; swarms of frogs overrun the land; lice infest all men and beasts. Hordes of wild animals invade the cities; a pestilence kills the domestic animals; painful boils afflict the Egyptians. For the seventh plague, fire and ice combine to descend from the skies as a devastating hail. Still, “the heart of Pharaoh was hardened and he would not let the children of Israel go, as G-d had said to Moses.”

Haftarah in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/619492/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftarah begins with a mention of the ingathering of the exiles, echoing G-d's promise mentioned in the Torah portion: "I will take you out of the suffering of Egypt." The prophet then goes on to discuss the decimation of Pharaoh and Egypt, reminiscent of the primary theme of the Torah portion—the devastation G-d wrought upon Egypt.

Ezekiel begins with a description of what will occur during the ingathering of the exiles. "When I gather in the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they have been scattered, and I have been sanctified through them in the eyes of the nations, then shall they dwell on their land that I gave to My servant, to Jacob. And they shall dwell upon it securely..."

The prophet then proceeds to convey a prophecy regarding Pharaoh and Egypt, foretelling the fall of the Egyptian empire. Egypt merited this punishment for two reasons: a) They had reneged on their promise to come to Israel's aid against the attacking Babylonians. b) They had incredible arrogance, considering themselves un-reliant on G-d, instead attributing their success to the bounty their deified Nile afforded them. Therefore, Ezekiel warns: "And the land of Egypt shall be desolate and in ruins, and they shall know that I am the Lord! Because he [Pharaoh] said, 'The river is mine,

and I have made it." G-d warns that the land of Egypt will be empty and desolate for forty years, after which G-d will return the people to the land to reinhabit it, but it will no longer be an important nation to be reckoned with.

The haftorah ends with another prophecy wherein G-d informs Ezekiel that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, will be the one to conquer Egypt and take its spoils. This as a reward for his effort in defeating the wicked nation of Tyre.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Weighing of the Heart (Vaera 5780) by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

<http://rabbisacks.org/vaera-5780/>

In this week's parsha, before even the first plague has struck Egypt, God tells Moses: "I will harden Pharaoh's heart and multiply My miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt." (Exodus 7:3)

The hardening of Pharaoh's heart is referred to no less than twenty times in the course of the story of the Exodus. Sometimes it is Pharaoh who is said to harden his heart. At other times, God is said to have done so. The Torah uses three different verbs in this context: ch-z-k, to strengthen, k-sh-h, to harden, and k-b-d, to make heavy.

Throughout the ages, the commentators have been concerned with one problem. If God hardened Pharaoh's heart, how could he have been to blame for not letting the Israelites go? He had no choice in the matter. It was God's doing, not his. That he and his people should be punished seems to flout the fundamental principle of justice, that we are guilty only for what we have freely chosen to do.

However, the commentators noted that for the first five plagues, Pharaoh is said to harden his own heart. The obstinacy, the refusal, the intransigence are his. Only with the sixth plague is God said to have done so. This led to several explanations.

Rashi says that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in the last five plagues was a punishment for the first five, when it was Pharaoh's own obstinacy that led him to refuse to let the people go.[1] Maimonides interprets God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart as meaning that "repentance was withheld from him, and the liberty to turn from his wickedness was not accorded to him." [2] Albo and Sforno offer the opposite interpretation. God hardened Pharaoh's heart precisely to restore his free will. After the succession of plagues that had devastated the land, Pharaoh was under overwhelming pressure to let the Israelites go. Had he done so, it would not have been out of free choice, but rather under force majeure. God therefore strengthened Pharaoh's heart so that even after the first five plagues he was genuinely free to say Yes or No.[3]

It may be that all three are right and are simply responding to the different verbs. K-sh-h, "hardening," supports Rashi's reading. Pharaoh was hard on the Israelites, so God was hard on him. K-b-d, "making heavy," supports Maimonides. Pharaoh lacked the energy, the strength, to repent. Ch-z-k, "to strengthen," supports Albo and Sforno. The text allows for all three possibilities.

However, part of the truth may lie in a completely different direction.[4] The Egyptians – Pharaohs especially – were preoccupied by death. Their funerary practices were astonishingly elaborate and were meant to prepare the person for life after death. The tombs of the Pharaohs were among their most lavish creations. Tutankhamun's, discovered in 1922, is a dazzling example. One of the greatest literary works of ancient Egypt was The Book of the Dead.

The Torah notes the attention the Egyptians gave to death. At the end of Bereishit, we read of how the Egyptians accompanied Joseph and his family in the funeral procession to bury Jacob. The Canaanites witnessed this and said, "The Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony of mourning." They named the place, Abel Mizraim (Gen. 50:11). Note: they called it "the place of Egyptian mourning," not Israelite mourning, despite the fact that it was for Jacob, a non-Egyptian. Then we read of how Joseph himself was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt. In the Torah, only Joseph, and Jacob at

Joseph's request, are embalmed. So we have already been forewarned about the significance of death to the Egyptian mind.

However, there is one specific aspect of Egyptian belief that opens up an entirely new perspective on the references to Pharaoh's heart. According to Egyptian myth, the deceased underwent a trial to establish their worthiness or otherwise to enjoy life after death in Aaru, the Field of Reeds, where souls live on in pleasure for eternity. They believed that the soul resides in the heart, and the trial consisted of the ceremony of The Weighing of the Heart. Other organs were removed after death, but the heart was left because it was needed for the trial.

On one side of the scales was a feather. On the other, was placed the heart. If the heart was as light as the feather, the dead could continue to Aaru, but if it was heavier, it was devoured by the goddess Ammit (a combination of lion, hippopotamus and crocodile), and its owner was condemned to live in Duat, the underworld. An illustration, on papyrus, in The Book of the Dead shows the ceremony, undertaken in the Hall of Two Truths, overseen by Anubis, the Egyptian God of the dead.

It follows that the root k-v-d, "to make heavy," would have had a highly specific meaning for the Egyptians of that time. It would imply that Pharaoh's heart had become heavier than a feather. He would fail the heart weighing ceremony and therefore be denied what was most important to him – the prospect of joining the gods in the afterlife.

No one would have been in any doubt as to why this was so. The feather represented Ma'at, the central Egyptian value that included the concepts of truth, balance, order, harmony, justice, morality, and law. Not only was this fundamental to Egyptian culture. It was the task of the Pharaoh to ensure that it prevailed. This had been an Egyptian principle since a thousand years before the Exodus, found in Pyramid texts dating from the third millennium BCE. Ma'at meant cosmic order. Its absence invited chaos. A Pharaoh whose heart had become heavier than the Ma'at feather was not only endangering his own afterlife, but threatening the entire people over whom he ruled with turmoil and disarray.

One of the things the deceased were supposed to do as part of the trial was to make a series of negative confessions, 42 in all, declaring themselves innocent of the kind of sin that would exclude them from paradise. These are some of them:

I have not done injury to men.

I have not oppressed those beneath me.

I have not murdered.

I have not commanded murder.

I have not caused suffering to men.[5]

If the "heavying" of Pharaoh's heart is an allusion to the Weighing of the Heart ceremony, it allows us to read the story in a completely new way.

First, it suggests that it is directed to Egyptians as well as Israelites; to humanity as a whole. The Torah tells us three times that the purpose of the signs and wonders was "so that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord" (Ex. 7:5; 14:4; 14:18). This is the core of monotheism. It is not that the Israelites have their God, and the Egyptians their pantheon, but rather that there is one sovereign power in the universe.

That is the point of at least three of the plagues: the first, directed against Hapfi, the god of the Nile; the second, frogs, directed against Heqet, the Egyptian goddess of fertility and childbirth, represented in the form of a frog; and the ninth, the plague of darkness, directed against Ra, the sun god. The message of these plagues would have been clear to the Egyptians: there is a power greater than those they have worshipped until now. The God of Israel is the God of the world and of all humanity.

The religion of Israel is not intended to be the religion of all humanity. Nowhere in the narrative does God imply that He wants the Egyptians to adopt Israelite religious practices. The point is quite different. Religion is particular. Morality is universal. If the story of the "heavying" of Pharaoh's heart does allude to the Book of the Dead, then the

story of the Exodus is not simply a partisan account from an Israelite point of view. It is telling us that certain things are wrong, whoever does them and whoever they are done against. They are wrong by Egyptian standards too. That was true of Pharaoh's decision to kill all male Israelite children. That was an unforgivable sin against Ma'at. Justice is universal. That is the point made plainly by the Torah's three stories of Moses' early life. He sees an Egyptian hitting an Israelite and intervenes. He sees Israelites hitting one another and intervenes. He sees Gentile shepherds behaving roughly to Jethro's daughters and intervenes. The first was a case of non-Israelite against Israelite, the second was Israelite against Israelite, the third was non-Israelite against non-Israelite. This is the simplest way of telling us that Moses' sense of justice was impartial and universal.

Finally, and most deeply, the Torah is hinting at a self-contradiction at the heart of the Egyptian concept of Ma'at. The most generous interpretation of Pharaoh's refusal to let the people go is that he was charged with maintaining order in the Empire. A successful minority like the Israelites could be seen as a threat to such order. If they stayed and thrived, they might take over the country as the Hyksos had done several centuries earlier. If they were allowed to leave, other enslaved groups might be tempted to do likewise. Emigration is a bad sign when the place people are trying to leave is a superpower. That is why, for many years, the Soviet Union forbade Jews to leave the country.

Pharaoh, in his repeated refusal to let the people go, doubtless justified his decision in each case on the grounds that he was securing Ma'at, order. Meanwhile however, with each plague the country was reduced to ever greater chaos. That is because oppressing people, which is what Pharaoh was doing, was a fundamental offence against Ma'at. On this reading, the whole issue of Pharaoh hardening his heart was not so much psychological as political. In his position as semi-divine head of state of an empire that practised forced labour on a massive scale, Pharaoh could not let the Israelites go free without creating the risk that other groups would also challenge the Corvée, the unpaid, conscripted semi-slave labour that was part of Egyptian society from the building of the pyramids and abolished only in 1882.

For the first five plagues, Pharaoh could tell himself that he was enduring minor inconvenience to protect a major principle. But as the plagues became more serious, reducing Egypt to chaos, Pharaoh's room for manoeuvre grew ever less. Having five times said "No" to the Israelites, he could not now back down without making himself look ridiculous, forfeiting his authority and damaging his standing. Pharaoh was a prisoner of his own system, held captive by his own decisions.

Seeking to protect order, he created chaos. That is because the order he was seeking to protect was built on a foundation of injustice: the enslavement of the many for the benefit of the few. The more he tried to defend it, the heavier his heart grew.

I believe that justice is universal. The Exodus story of how the supreme Power entered history to liberate the supremely powerless, is not just for Jews. It is the world's greatest metanarrative of hope. [1] Rashi to Exodus 7:3. [2] Mishneh Torah, Hilchot 6:3

Teshuva[3] Albo, Ikkarim, 4:25; Sforno to Exodus 7:3. [4] My thanks to Rabbi Dr Rafi Zarum for suggesting this line of thought. [5] Negative confessions are rare in Judaism, but one exists: Vidui Bikkurim, the confession to be made over first-fruits: "I have not turned aside from Your commands nor have I forgotten any of them ...I have obeyed the Lord my God; I have done everything You commanded me" (Deut. 26:13-14).

[Finding Freedom – Va'era by Joel Pitkowsky](http://www.jtsa.edu/finding-freedom)
<http://www.jtsa.edu/finding-freedom>

A moment of great tragedy occurs in this week's Torah reading, although it is not a moment that many people focus on when they read these chapters. There is so much drama in this story, so many scenes that we can visualize either because we've seen

them acted out on stage or in a movie (or perhaps in our dining room during a Passover Seder), or because they are powerful moments that speak to our connection with one of the pivotal Jewish moments, that many people pass over (pun intended!) the quieter elements of the story.

And yet, near the beginning of the Torah reading, immediately following God telling Moses about the eventual redemption from Egypt, we read the following, “But when Moses told this to the Israelites, they would not listen to Moses, their spirits crushed by cruel bondage (Exod. 6:9)”. The tragedy is not that the Israelites did not listen to Moses, the tragedy is why they would not listen to Moses. Slavery had beat them down to such an extent that they could not imagine what freedom looked like. Slavery had damaged them so greatly that when freedom was dangled in front of them, they could not for the life of them understand what it truly meant.

At this moment in their collective lives, the Israelites were struggling with an issue that many of us can recognize—they could not see what was right in front of them. Have you ever had that experience? Have you ever finally left a job or ended a painful relationship and then realized that everyone around you saw the truth of the situation long before you could see it? More amorphous than any physical object and yet infinitely more important, freedom is difficult for many of us to grasp, especially those of us who have never lived without it.

In our Torah reading, the ability to not see what is right in front of you is illustrated by the dilemma of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. The Torah tells us that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart during the saga of the ten plagues. If this is so, then how can Pharaoh be held responsible for not letting the Israelites go and forcing his country to undergo undue suffering at the hands of the Israelite God? Why couldn’t Pharaoh see early in the story (after the first or second plague) that the situation was futile and that he should just give up and let the Israelites go?

The Torah provides us with one answer to this question. If you pay close attention to the wording of the plagues, you will see that for the first five plagues, Pharaoh hardens his own heart. God only hardens his heart with plagues six through 10. How does this fact provide us with an answer? In this transition from Pharaoh hardening his own heart to God hardening his heart, maybe we are seeing the ancient equivalent of cognitive dissonance, of Pharaoh going so far down a path of thought and behavior (as evidenced in his choosing to act a certain way following plagues one through five) that he caused himself to lose his free will!

As Rambam wrote in his introduction to Pirkei Avot, “In other words, they sinned of their own free will, till they forfeited the opportunity of repentance.” (Shemonah Perakim, Ch. 8) Have you ever felt that you had gone so far down a road of behavior, making certain choices, that you honestly could not see a way out, that you could not see an alternative? Maybe that is what happened to Pharaoh.

A second answer is supplied by Rashi, who understands plagues six through 10 (in which God hardened Pharaoh’s heart) as being punishment for Pharaoh and the Egyptians. God needed to show Pharaoh that God was in charge. God needed Pharaoh to see that, contrary to Egyptian culture and religion, Pharaoh was not a god, and that the Israelite God, our God, had all of the power.

It is difficult to imagine a world that is different from the world we are currently living in. It must have been extremely painful for Pharaoh to realize that the worldview on which he was raised, the worldview that allowed Israelite slavery and that understood Egyptian power, and especially the prestige of the Pharaoh, to be absolute, was crumbling to the ground. And yet, we still wonder how he could not see the truth. In next week’s Torah reading, Pharaoh’s courtiers say this to him in words that ring out thousands of years later, “Are you not yet aware that Egypt is lost? (10:7)”

He did not realize that all was lost; because Pharaoh could not see what was in front of him, he could not see the truth of the situation that was staring him in the face because it

was too difficult to do so, too painful, too harsh a reality for him to face. When Moses told the Israelites that God would free them, they did not believe him because they had been slaves for so long they could not imagine a reality any different from the one they were living. And yet, courageous people throughout history remind us that freedom is a state of mind that we can grasp on to even when our bodies cannot experience it.

Perhaps we think of the great Jewish hero, Natan Sharansky, who told the story many times of how he felt free many years before he was released from solitary confinement because he had decided that he would be free in his mind, even though his body was held captive by the KGB. Or perhaps we find inspiration in the story of the late Senator John McCain, who was held captive by North Vietnam for several years during the Vietnam War. Senator McCain held on to his sanity, at least in part, by repeating to himself these words from his favorite poem, "Invictus," by William Ernest Henley, "It matters not how strait the gate, how charged with punishments the scroll, I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul."

We must never allow ourselves to fall victim like Pharaoh, victim either to our own evil or to losing sight of what is around us. With effort and with the constant search for clarity and understanding, we will hold on to the great human gift of freedom, and decide for ourselves, hoping to have the strength of Sharansky and McCain, to use our freedom for good, and to inspire truth and liberty for ourselves and for those around us. (*Joel Pitkowsky is Adjunct Lecturer of Professional and Pastoral Skills at JTS*)

[Vaeira by Rabbi Berel Wein](https://www.rabbiwein.com/blog/post-2260.html)

<https://www.rabbiwein.com/blog/post-2260.html>

This week's Torah reading contains the four famous words of redemption that signal the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt. Much has been made over the centuries as to the meaning and implication of each of these four Hebrew verbs. The fact that there are four such words used in the narrative of redemption fits the pattern that we find in the Hagaddah of Pesach – four sons, four questions, four cups of wine.

None of this is naturally random chance. That is not the way of the Torah or of the tradition of Rabbinic commentary and understanding of the words of the Torah. Since there are 70 facets to all Torah words and thoughts, the use of these four verbs contains different messages, all of them valid and important, that can be experienced and understood by different generations of the Jewish people.

Every era has its own circumstances and its own necessities. The eternity of Torah is that it is able to address each and every one of these differing times and circumstances in a meaningful fashion. The Torah speaks to our generation in a way that could not necessarily have been so clearly understood by a past generation which experienced different circumstances than the ones that we face today.

It is one of the extraordinary features of Torah study that it is applicable to so many different times and situations. The Rabbis of the Talmud implied this in their statement that the words of Torah sometimes seem to be poor and without meaning in one place and time while they are rich and of enormous value in another.

The use of different verbs to indicate the advent of the promised deliverance from Egyptian bondage indicates a process of redemption – a series of events and understandings and the development of a relationship between the Jewish people and the God of Israel that will fulfill the promise of redemption made to Abraham.

I have always felt in reviewing the events of the past century in Jewish life that we were in the midst of a process engineered by Heaven and accomplished by humans to restore us to our homeland and to our independence and greatness. Anything that is a process takes time and very rarely has immediate general impact. People view events and circumstances as they occur, one by one, and with the passage of time and constantly changing circumstances, rarely are able to discern the general process that is unfolding

before their very eyes.

This process of redemption outlined for us in this week's Torah reading, a process which was not instantaneous in its result, but most gradual in its unfolding, is a harbinger of much of what is happening today in the Jewish world. The Jewish State in the Land of Israel is flourishing against all odds and Torah and Jewish life are strengthened daily within its borders. Even though the Jewish situation in the diaspora is of a very mixed quality, the strength of Torah and its resilient quality is being proven once more in front of our gaze. We are still in the middle of the process but I think there is little doubt regarding the actuality of the process itself. (Rabbi Wein is a graduate of the Hebrew Theological College and Roosevelt College in Chicago. He received his Juris Doctor Degree from De Paul University Law School and a Doctor of Hebrew Letters from Hebrew Theological College.)

[Living in the Double Exposure \(Parashat Va'era 5780\) by Rabbi Tali Adler](https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/living-double-exposure)

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I was eight years old in Basel, Switzerland the day I learned about the way places have layers. It was a chilly, autumn shabbos, and my father and I were on a walk by the river. My father pointed out different sights as we walked: there is the house where his elementary school friend lived. There is the gate they walked through to get to school, there is the shop run by the woman rumored to be a witch. And there, he said, pointing to a small, shady area, is the place where they burned the Jews in the 14th century. The rest of the afternoon was like a double exposure: there are the roasted chestnuts, there is the witch, and there is the place where they burned the Jews. For the first time, I began to understand what it is like when something so beautiful becomes, while retaining all its magic, something terrible as well. Egypt, in the book of Shemot, is a place caught in a double exposure. For the Jews, Egypt has long been a nightmare, a place of slavery and oppression, of beatings and cold-blooded murder. One imagines that for the Jews in Egypt, every place must have a secret meaning: beautiful houses as places of servitude, cool bathing spots in the river as the place where baby boys drown. The first plagues in this parashah begin to do the work of making that double exposure visible to the rest of the population. Both of the first two plagues begin in the Nile where Jewish boys were drowned. The first, blood, makes it clear that the Nile, the source of life for the Egyptian people—the place where even Bat Paroah, the woman who saved Moshe bathed—is actually a site of mass murder. All of Egypt, suddenly, is forced to confront the truth that what is life-giving and sustaining for them has been the locus of unbearable suffering for the people they oppress. The second plague, the frogs, exposes the horror even more explicitly. The frogs, we are told, emerge from the Nile itself—still, presumably, filled with blood. In picturing the image of the frogs—small, slimy creatures crawling out of the river used as a mass infant grave—it is easy to imagine that as the frogs started to emerge, people thought that they were seeing thousands of ghosts emerge from their watery graves. In picturing the frogs as they emerged, it becomes easy to read the first two plagues as a reminder to the Egyptians of their crimes. Read this way, the first two plagues are a way of exposing the hidden underbelly of Israelite suffering to the Egyptians, of making explicit and raw what denial and callousness may have disguised. They are a way of bringing the Egyptians out of their day-to-day understanding of their country and of making the other, blurry side of the double exposure unbearably clear. But as the Egyptians begin to see the Egypt that the Jews have experienced for so many years, we are given a glimpse, in Rashi's reading, of a different perspective on the Nile. Rashi notices that for the first three plagues Moshe is commanded to inform Aharon to perform the action that will begin the plague rather than being told to do it himself. Rashi explains the reason for the first two plagues as follows: רש"י שמות ז: יט אמר אל אהרן: לפי שהגין היאור על משה כשנשלך לתוכו, לפיכך לא לקה על ידו לא בדם ולא בצפרדעים, ולקה על ידי אהרן. Rashi on Shemot 7:19 Say to Aharon: Since the Nile protected Moshe when he was cast into it, it therefore was not smitten by him, neither with blood nor with frogs, but was

smitten by Aharon. While we, the readers, have identified with the Jewish people's vision of Egypt—the Egypt of violence, of oppression, and of cruelty—in this moment, Rashi reminds us that there is another Egypt that exists, one in which the Nile is life-giving and protective. This other Egypt, this other Nile, Rashi reminds us, should not feel completely foreign to us: it is the Egypt and the Nile that Moshe, our redeemer, has experienced, and the one to which he still owes Divinely-affirmed gratitude.

With Rashi's comment, the tables are turned: while until now this story was one in which the Egyptians are made to see the truth about their land, in this moment, we, the readers and inheritors of the Torah and the narrative of slavery, are forced into the dizziness of double exposure. In this moment, however briefly, we are forced to recognize that there are aspects of Egypt to which Moshe Rabbeinu himself owed gratitude. In this moment, it is we who are forced to learn that the multivalence of places does allow us to neatly cordon off the beautiful and ugly: we are touched by the meanings of other people and groups. It is impossible, in this reading, to fully separate the memory of nightmarish tragedy from miraculous safety. While in Va'era this realization is fleeting, hidden in a Rashi, later, in Devarim, it becomes glaringly apparent. In Devarim 23:8, we are commanded: "You may not hate an Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land." In memory of the time we spent there as strangers, we are commanded never to hate them, and to allow Egyptians, after several generations, to join the Jewish people. Most of our associations with Egypt and the Jewish people are images of suffering. Rashi, in his comment on this pasuk, highlights this suffering in the starkest possible terms: You may not despise an Egyptian, even though they threw your babies into the Nile. Even though you endured terrible suffering there, even though it is the paradigm for persecution. Why? Because you were a stranger in his land. Because, Rashi explains, they hosted you in a time of a dire need. Once, generations earlier, Egypt was a place of safety for Ya'akov and his family in a time of famine. And so despite the years of persecution we are commanded to remember that initial hospitality. We are commanded to remember the good beginning of what became the darkest story we know, and we are commanded to let that memory guide our treatment of Egyptians in the future. The Torah resists the temptation to tell a single story about Egypt. It is not the place of dreams we might have expected from Yosef's brief reign, but the Torah is still unwilling to overwrite those parts of our story in order to create a single narrative. In Rashi's reading in Va'era and in this mitzvah in Devarim, we are reminded that our story is one of beauty mixed with pain, gratitude mixed with deep resentment. We are commanded to give room to both, to treat our stories with the integrity and nuance they deserve.

We are commanded, in this mitzvah, to remember the past in all its complexity: not to forget the suffering that we endured, but at the same time, not to allow our memories to become exclusively dark. We are commanded to remember honestly. We are commanded to remember moments of beauty and kindness even as we remember suffering, persecution, and darkness. We are commanded to live in the only truly honest way: in the double exposure. *(Rabbi Tali Adler, a musmekhet of Yeshivat Maharat, received her undergraduate degree from Stern College, where she majored in Political Science and Jewish Studies. A Wexner Graduate Fellow, during her time at Yeshivat Maharat, Tali served as the clergy intern at Kehilat Rayim Ahuvim and Harvard Hillel. Tali has studied in a number of Jewish institutions, including Drisha and Midreshet Harova.)*

Yahrtzeits

Craig Miller remembers his mother Roberta Miller (Riva bat Henka & Shmulick) on Sun. Jan. 26 (Tevet 29)

Lisa Vernon remembers her grandmother Rose Rosenfeld on Mon. Jan. 27

Blossom Primer remembers her mother Esther Rappaport on Tue. Jan. 28th (Shevat 2)

