

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Va'era
January 21, 2023 *** 28 Tevet, 5783

Va'era in a Nutshell

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

The name of the Parshah, "Va'era," means "and I appeared" and it is found in Exodus 6:3.

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."

Va'era in a Nutshell: Ezekiel 28:25-29:21

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

This week's *haftorah* 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

Spirits in a Material World by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vaera/spirits-in-a-material-world/>

The Torah sometimes says something of fundamental importance in what seems like a minor and incidental comment. There is a fine example of this near the beginning of this parsha.

In the previous parsha, we read of how Moses was sent by God to lead the Israelites to freedom, and how his initial efforts met with failure. Not only did Pharaoh not agree to let the people go; he made the working conditions of the Israelites even worse. They had to make the same number of bricks as before, but now they had to gather their own straw. The people complained to Pharaoh, then they complained to Moses, and then Moses complained to God.

"Why have You brought trouble to this people? Why did You send me?"

Exodus 5:22

At the beginning of Va'era, God tells Moses that He will indeed bring the Israelites to freedom, and tells him to announce this to the people. Then we read this:

So Moses told this to the Israelites but they did not listen to him, because their spirit was broken and because the labour was harsh. Exodus 6:9

The italicised phrase seems simple enough. The people did not listen to Moses because he had brought them messages from God before which had done nothing to improve their situation. They were busy trying to survive day by day. They had no time for utopian promises that seemed to have no grounding in reality. Moses had failed to deliver in the past. They had no reason to think he would do so in the future. So far, so straightforward.

But there is something more subtle going on beneath the surface. When Moses first met God at the Burning Bush, God told him to lead, and Moses kept refusing on the grounds that the people would not listen to him. He was not a man of words. He was slow of speech and tongue. He was a man of "uncircumcised

lips” (Ex. 6:30). He lacked eloquence. He could not sway crowds. He was not an inspirational leader.

It turned out, though, that Moses was both right and wrong, right that they did not listen to him, but wrong about why. It had nothing to do with his failures as a leader or a public speaker. In fact, it had nothing to do with Moses at all. They did not listen “because their spirit was broken and because the labour was harsh.” In other words: If you want to improve people’s spiritual situation, first improve their physical situation. That is one of the most humanising aspects of Judaism.

Maimonides emphasises this in *The Guide for the Perplexed*. The Torah, he says, has two aims: the well-being of the soul and the well-being of the body.^[1] The well-being of the soul is something inward and spiritual, but the well-being of the body requires a strong society and economy, where there is the rule of law, division of labour, and the promotion of trade. We have bodily well-being when all our physical needs are supplied, but none of us can do this alone. We specialise and exchange. That is why we need a good, strong, just society.

Spiritual achievement, says Maimonides, is higher than material achievement, but we need to ensure the latter first, because “a person suffering from great hunger, thirst, heat or cold, cannot grasp an idea even if it is communicated by others, much less can he arrive at it by his own reasoning.” In other words, if we lack basic physical needs, there is no way we can reach spiritual heights. When people’s spirits are broken by harsh labour they cannot listen to a Moses. If you want to improve people’s spiritual situation, first improve their physical conditions. This idea was given classic expression in modern times by two New York Jewish psychologists, Abraham Maslow (1908–1970) and Frederick Herzberg (1923–2000). Maslow was fascinated by the question of why many people never reached their full potential. He also believed – as, later, did Martin Seligman, creator of positive psychology – that psychology should focus not only on the cure of illness but also on the positive promotion of mental health. His most famous contribution to the study of the human mind was his “hierarchy of needs.”

We are not a mere bundle of wants and desires. There is a clear order to our concerns. Maslow enumerated five levels. First are our physiological needs: for food and shelter, the basic requirements of survival. Next come safety needs: protection against harm done to us by others. Third is our need for love and belonging. Above that comes our desire for recognition and esteem, and higher still is self-actualisation: fulfilling our potential, becoming the person we feel we could and should be. In his later years Maslow added a yet higher stage: self-transcendence, rising beyond the self through altruism and spirituality.

Herzberg simplified this whole structure by distinguishing between physical and psychological factors. He called the first, Adam needs, and the second Abraham needs. Herzberg was particularly interested in what motivates people at work.

What he realised in the late 1950s – an idea revived more recently by American-Israeli economist Dan Ariely – is that money, salary, and financial rewards (stock options and the like) is not the only motivator. People do not necessarily work better, harder, or more creatively, the more you pay them. Money works up to a certain level, but beyond that the real motivator is the challenge to grow, create, find meaning, and to invest your highest talents in a great cause. Money speaks to our Adam needs, but meaning speaks to our Abraham needs.

There is a truth here that Jews and Judaism have tended to note and live by more fully than many other civilisations and faiths. Most religions are cultures of acceptance. There is poverty, hunger, and disease on earth because that is the way the world is; that is how God made it and wants it. Yes, we can find happiness, nirvana, or bliss, but to achieve it you must escape from the world, by meditation, or retreating to a monastery, or by drugs, or trance, or by waiting patiently for the joy that awaits us in the world to come. Religion anaesthetises us to pain.

That isn't Judaism at all. When it comes to the poverty and pain of the world, ours is a religion of protest, not acceptance. God does not want people to be poor, hungry, sick, oppressed, uneducated, deprived of rights, or subject to abuse. He has made us His agents in this cause. He wants us to be His partners in the work of redemption. That is why so many Jews have become doctors fighting disease, lawyers fighting injustice, or educators fighting ignorance. It is surely why they have produced so many pioneering (and Nobel Prize-winning) economists. As Michael Novak (citing Irving Kristol) writes:

Jewish thought has always felt comfortable with a certain well-ordered worldliness, whereas the Christian has always felt a pull to otherworldliness. Jewish thought has had a candid orientation toward private property, whereas Catholic thought – articulated from an early period chiefly among priests and monks – has persistently tried to direct the attention of its adherents beyond the activities and interests of this world to the next. As a result, tutored by the law and the prophets, ordinary Jews have long felt more at home in this world, while ordinary Catholics have regarded this world as a valley of temptation and as a distraction from their proper business, which is preparation for the world to come. [2]

God is to be found in this world, not just the next. But for us to climb to spiritual heights we must first have satisfied our material needs. Abraham was greater than Adam, but Adam came before Abraham. When the physical world is harsh, the human spirit is broken, and people cannot then hear the word of God, even when delivered by a Moses.

Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev said it well:

“Don't worry about the state of someone else's soul and the needs of your body. Worry about the needs of someone else's body and the state of your own soul.”

Alleviating poverty, curing disease, ensuring the rule of law, and respect for human rights: these are spiritual tasks no less than prayer and Torah study. To be sure, the latter are higher, but the former are prior. People cannot hear God's message if their spirit is broken and their labour harsh. ^[1] Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III:27. ^[2] Michael Novak, *This Hemisphere of Liberty* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1990), p. 64.

[Reckoning with Climate Change in Egypt and Today by Rabbi Frederick Reeves](https://truah.org/resources/frederick-reeves-parshat-vaera-moraltorah2023/)
<https://truah.org/resources/frederick-reeves-parshat-vaera-moraltorah2023/>

Have you noticed that there are more extreme names for weather events these days? Bomb cyclone, polar vortex, thunder-snow — these are just a few of the names that have been coined to express the unprecedented weather that has occurred because of man-made climate change. And yet, I have noticed people complaining about a weather event as it is happening and then returning to life as usual when it is over.

Are we surprised by this behavior? It is as old as our biblical story of the plagues. In Parshat VaEra, the first plague is a climate catastrophe. The waters of the Nile are polluted and all of the fish die, the water stinks, and the people have to dig wells to find water to drink. The most important natural element for sustaining life in ancient Egypt is polluted by blood, but when the plague eases up, Pharaoh easily dismisses the catastrophe. We read, “But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he became stubborn and would not heed them, as the ETERNAL had spoken.” (Exodus 8:11)

It is easy to compare Pharaoh to climate change deniers. Pharaoh hardens his heart, just as people today ignore science. Pharaoh turns from the commitments that he has made when there is relief, just as our leaders back out of commitments to reduce carbon dioxide emissions when gas prices come down. Pharaoh even has charlatans presenting their magic as being equal to the miracles of God, just as there are faux scientists who write papers pretending to be as scientific as actual climate science.

Since this story is so old, and it is repeating today, we have to ask: Do people change? We all know what happens to Pharaoh. He stubbornly refuses to see what is plain until his own son is killed by the tenth plague. Only when he has suffered personal, irreparable harm does Pharaoh let the people go. Will we have to suffer irreparable climate harm in order to change?

Our tradition tries to direct us towards change before we reach that catastrophic level through two approaches. The first is a broad warning. In the midrash, we read a story about God speaking to Adam just after he is made. God says,

“See My creations, how beautiful and exemplary they are. Everything I

created, I created for you. Make certain that you do not ruin and destroy My world, for as if you destroy it, there will be no one to mend it after you.” (Kohelet Rabbah 7:13)

Here, the onus is placed on us — the buck stops here — and the focus is the whole world. It’s not clear what exactly the rabbis were imagining, since they could not possibly have conceived of climate change on the present scale, but they clearly understood that no one is coming to clean up after us.

Then we get a warning on a more micro scale. When I think specifically of the mass extinction of species caused by climate change, I am drawn to Sefer HaChinuch, a 13th century Spanish work that comments on each of the 613 commandments. On the commandment to shoo away the mother bird before taking her eggs (shiluach haken), the author writes,

“The root of this commandment is to put into our hearts that the providence of blessed God is upon all of [God’s] creatures ...meaning to say that [God’s] desire, may [God] be blessed, is for the existence of the [particular] species. And therefore, no species will ever become extinct from all of the species of creatures, as it is due to the providence of the Blessed One Who Lives and Endures Forever that their existence is found.” (Sefer HaChinuch 545)

We know today that species can become extinct, that they do so all too easily and tragically. But even when this author thought that was impossible, he still directed our attention to the individual. One bird at a time. One species at a time. Perhaps the extinction of millions of species we have never heard of is too mind-boggling for us to comprehend, but surely we can focus on the single bird before us and see how she might suffer.

We are stiff-necked, like Pharaoh. But, as we say on Yom Kippur, we are not so stiff necked as to say that we have not done wrong. Judaism exists because we believe in the power to change human behavior. We have enough warning signs, enough extreme climate names. Let us not be Pharaohs on the way to deaths in every household. Rather, let us change our practices so that we can put away our thesauruses and enjoy rain in its season (Ezekiel 34:26).

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[Why Did Moses Have a Speech Disability? By Sarah Wolf](https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/why-did-moses-have-a-speech-disability/)

<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/why-did-moses-have-a-speech-disability/>

Moses is the quintessential prophet in the Jewish tradition. Moses’s job, like the task of all other prophets, is to convey the word of God to the people. He fulfills this role, the Torah tells us, in exemplary fashion: “Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses” (Deut. 34:10). Moses is not just the paradigm for all

prophets that follow, he is the best in the business. But if Moses is supposed to serve as the first and foremost prophet—that is, to be the expert at telling people what God wants from them—why would God choose a mouthpiece who has a speech disability?

Moses wonders about this himself when faced with his first task as a prophet, which is to beseech Pharaoh to release the Israelites from bondage: “How then should Pharaoh heed me—who gets tongue-tied!” (Exod. 6:12). Moses has already pointed this issue out a few chapters earlier, protesting that he has “never been a man of words” and is “slow of speech and slow of tongue” (4:10). And in verse 6:30 he again repeats that he is tongue-tied and wonders how he can get Pharaoh to listen to him.

As surprising as it is for God to choose a prophet who has difficulty speaking, God’s response to Moses after the third time he points out his disability is perhaps even more surprising: God promises Moses, “See, I place you in the role of God to Pharaoh, with your brother Aaron as your prophet” (Exod. 7:1). What does it mean for Moses to be in the role of God? And why is this God’s response to Moses’s concerns?

Most classical commentators believe that “in the role of God” refers to some position of power that Moses will hold in Pharaoh’s eyes—for instance, that he will be seen as a judge, according to Rashi, or even as a kind of god or other heavenly being, per Ibn Ezra. I would like to offer an alternative read, however, and suggest that God mentions “the role of God” not because Pharaoh is going to be impressed by Moses, but rather in order to reassure Moses by offering a useful analogy. “The role of God” here, in the context of the verse taken as a whole, is the role of someone who needs assistance with speaking. Just as God is a being who speaks through a prophetic agent, so too will Moses have his own mouthpiece, his brother Aaron. God is thus simply explaining to Moses that just like God can’t and doesn’t speak directly to most people, so too Moses does not have to do all the speaking himself.

God not only reassures Moses that he will have support, but also admits to Moses that God’s own role is one that requires assistance, too. God’s response to Moses is thus a demonstration of true empathy. Consider the difference between a child asking for help and the parent saying “Sure, you can have help,” as opposed to a parent saying “Sure, everyone needs help sometimes—I know I do!” God understands what Moses needs because God needs the same things. In fact, God seems to suggest that, astonishingly, to require assistance is part of what it means to be in the role of God!

This radical theological idea also fits with an earlier exchange between God and Moses. The first time Moses mentions his worries, God responds: “Who gives humans speech? Who makes them dumb or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, God?”

(4:11). Again, we might wonder: How is this statement meant to assuage Moses's concerns? God may have made Moses the way he is, but how does that help Moses feel better about being asked to step into a role that will publicly highlight his speech disability? There is even something potentially disturbing about this verse, in its gesturing at a theology in which people should simply "accept their lot" and not complain or ask for help, as well as its use of categories that do not reflect the experiences of people with disabilities themselves. (The category "dumb" is typically considered to be offensive as well as inaccurate.)

Again, however, I would like to offer an alternate reading of this verse. We know that God reveals God's glory by making humans who are physically different from one another, as the Mishnah states: "When a human stamps several coins with one seal, they are all similar to each other. But the supreme Ruler of Rulers, the Holy One, Blessed be God, stamped all people with the seal of the first human, and not one of them is similar to another. Therefore, each and every person is obligated to say: The world was created for me" (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5). And we also know that God made humans *betzelem elohim*, in the image of God. Perhaps, then, God is reminding Moses of that: all humans are created by God, humans are physically diverse, and therefore all humans in all their differences are created in God's image.

Being created in God's image, then, does not mean that humans are endowed with some kind of divine perfection, but rather that humans are granted both abilities and disabilities, and that this mirrors something essential about the divine as well. It may seem strange to consider God as having a disability, perhaps even a kind of speech impediment. Yet this is also a potentially powerful way to conceptualize a God who gave the Torah through a revelation that was incomplete and in need of human interpretation. To be godly, then, as well as to be human, is to have both power and limitations, to be both abled and disabled. In that case, a prophet with a speech impediment is not a person with a flaw to be overcome, but rather the truest representation of the divine voice. *(Sarah Wolf is Assistant Professor of Talmud and Rabbinics at JTS)*

[Voices and Lips by Bex Stern-Rosenblatt](#)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Vs-lVA-nlXNEUivDx1uuQT046XVvQ-Bu/view>

Smack in the middle of an otherwise very exciting parashah, we get a long list of names. Before God continues telling Moses what to say to Pharaoh, the parashah presents us with something that looks like a genealogy, taking us for a 14-verse detour down the generations. The story would still make sense, perhaps even more sense if the genealogy were not there.

Without the intervening genealogy, the story would read like this: God tells Moses to tell Pharaoh to send away the Israelites. Moses demurs saying, "Look, the

Israelites did not heed me, and how will Pharaoh heed me, and I am uncircumcised of lips?” And God doubles down, commanding Moses and Aaron about getting Pharaoh to let the people go. We skip the genealogy and continue: “And it happened on the day the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, that the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘I am the LORD. Speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I speak to you.’ And Moses said before the LORD, “Look, I am uncircumcised of lips, and how will Pharaoh heed me?”

Both before and after the genealogy, Moses protests, saying he has uncircumcised lips. The genealogy seems to have no effect on him. His fear is the same after as it was before. It is strikingly similar to another story of a prophet having second thoughts. In the story of Elijah, in 1 Kings 19, God commands Elijah to appear before kings and to step outside his comfort zone. Elijah defines himself to God, saying, “*kanno kaneti l'haShem*, I have been zealously zealous to God.” God then causes a number of miracles to occur, a great wind, an earthquake, a fire. These are followed finally by a “*kol demama daka* a still small voice” which Elijah seems to recognize as the presence of God. Yet still, even having encountered God, Elijah is unchanged. Once again, Elijah defines himself, using identical language, saying “ I have been zealously zealous to God.” God’s response to Elijah is to have Elijah anoint someone to succeed him, to prepare to take his place.

Reading our parashah in light of the Elijah story, we find Moses also not changing his mind, not deviating from his declaration that he is unfit to lead. We find God providing a successor or helpmate to Moses, just as God will do for Elijah. If Moses and Elijah are too stuck in their ways to succeed in God’s mission, God finds other human agents to assist them, to unstick them.

Reading these stories together also brings an interesting comparison of the genealogy with the display of miracles in front of Elijah. The genealogy does not follow the usual format of genealogies in the Tanakh. We trace only Reuben, Shimon, and Levi out of all of Jacob’s sons. Furthermore, most of the expected names are excluded - only Levi has his grandchildren named and not all of them are mentioned. We detail Aarons’s children, and Korach and his brothers, but no mention is made of the children of Moses. Maimonides suggests that the names mentioned are to set up the stories to come. These names belong to the big stories of the Torah - the rebellion of Korach, swallowed by the earth, and the killing of Aaron’s sons, consumed by fire. These are the moments of God displaying awesome and terrible power. These moments correspond precisely to Elijah’s earthquake and his fire. And perhaps, they invite Moses to listen for a still, small voice instead. Perhaps, that still, small voice is Moses’s own voice, coming even from uncircumcised lips.

But for the moment, just as Elijah was unable to change, Moses too doubles down on his stuckness after the genealogy. He says once again that he has

uncircumcised lips, that he is unfit. The idea of being stuck, of being fixed in outlook and unable to change one's mind, features most prominently in our parashah in the character of Pharaoh and his heavy, hardened heart. Even as he seems to approach a change of heart, even when he can temporarily entertain the idea of changing his mind, Pharaoh always comes back to his initial position of refusal to let the Israelites go. The story told by the plagues is the story of how that fixedness breaks Pharaoh and Egypt with him. The story told by the Exodus is how Moses will learn to change, and will learn to find his own still, small voice.

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Abra Cadabra: The Halacha in the Parashah by Joshua Kulp

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Vs-lVA-nlXNEUivDx1uuQT046XVkJ-Bu/view>

Our parashah introduces us to one of everyone's favorite topics—magic. When Moses and Aaron first appear in front of Pharaoh, God tells them to perform the impressive sign of turning the staff into a serpent. Moses and Aaron produce the miracle, assumedly expecting Pharaoh to be amazed by the marvel. Pharaoh however calls his own magicians and sages and they produce the same results. This part is well-known from movies and popular culture. Perhaps a little less known is that Pharaoh's magicians also turn the Nile into blood (7:22) and are also able to produce frogs (8:3). Only at the third plague, lice (8:14) do we learn that there are powers that God has (or perhaps our God has) that the Egyptian magicians do not—"It is the finger of God," the magicians exclaim. Overall this framework leads to the conclusion that magic is effective, but that the really good tricks are reserved for God.

Classical rabbis were deeply ambivalent about magic. This is a topic I addressed in the first volume of *Reconstructing the Talmud*, where my co-author and I discuss a passage in which the rabbis exhibit awareness that magic is effective, and yet at the same time insist that God is the only true power in the world "אין עֵד מלבדו"—"there is no [power] but God." Jewish tradition and history is full of magicians, demons and spirits and one does not have to look far in sources to find rabbis acknowledging such forces, engaging with them and from time to time manipulating them (see here for an excellent treatment of the subject).

The question I want to briefly look at here is the permissibility of a Jew who wishes to practice magic. Exodus 22:17 dictates that a sorceress must not be allowed to live. Deuteronomy 18:10 warns, "Let no one be found among you who consigns a son or daughter to the fire, or who is an augur, a soothsayer, a diviner, a sorcerer, one who casts spells, or one who consults ghosts or familiar spirits, or

one who inquires of the dead.” Clearly, the Torah strongly prohibits magic workers. But what exactly is a magic worker?

Mishnah Sanhedrin 7:11 notes that a “*mekhashef*” (a sorcerer—the Mishnah reverses the gender) whom the Torah mandates be executed is one whose magic is not an illusion but is effective. R. Yehoshua refers to people who pick cucumbers using magic—if it's real magic, the punishment is strict (stoning), but if it is just an illusion, the practitioner is exempt. The Mishnah recognizes that most magic is not really “magic” it is only an illusion and pretending that one has the power to pull a rabbit out of a hat, cut a woman in half, or pick cucumbers is not a threat to God's sovereignty. Abaye (Sanhedrin 67b) compares the laws of magic with the laws of Shabbat, creating a tripartite system: Real magic, meaning effective magic, is punishable by the death penalty. Creating illusions is forbidden but is not punishable by death. But there is a type of magic that is permitted, as in the following remarkable story: “Rav Hanina and Rav Oshaya: Every Shabbat eve they would engage in the study of the halakhot of creation, and a third-born calf would be created for them, and they would eat it.” Rashi explains that Rav Hanina and Rav Oshaya's creation of their Friday night dinner was permitted because it was not they who created the calf but rather God.

This story encapsulates well the threat the rabbis felt from certain forms of magic. As R. Yohanan says on the same page of Talmud, magic contradicts God's entourage. Paradoxically, magic would be more problematic for those who believe in its efficacy. Again, on that same page of Talmud we read a story of a woman who was trying to take dust from under the feet of R. Hanina (in our book, we suggest that this was a love potion type of act). R. Hanina is completely unconcerned— “If you succeed, go and do it. [I am not concerned about it], as it is written: ‘There is none else besides Him.’” As long as the act does not contradict God's sole power in the world, the notion that the world is structured in a unified matter, and each person cannot manipulate the world against the rules through which the world was created, then there is no problem with practicing magic and enjoying the performance of others' practicing it. But when our acts assume Godly powers, bending the unified forces of the world to behave according to our interests, we must begin to question their legitimacy. It is a question to be asked about ancient science, which we today call magic, and perhaps about the type of magic we practice as well, which we today call science. (*Dr. Joshua Kulp has been teaching rabbinic literature at the Conservative Yeshiva for twenty years. He received his PhD in Talmud from Bar-Ilan University.*) *****

Yahrtzeits

Craig Miller remembers his mother Roberta Miller on Sun.Jan.22

Blossom Primer remembers her mother Esther Rappaport on Tues. Jan. 24.

Rabbi Lisa Vernon remembers her grandmother Rose Rosenfeld on Fri.Jan. 27

Educational Programs Coming Up At Kol Rina
(Open to Everyone)

Cantor Riki Lippitz: Music, Memory, and Small Miracles

Using music to enliven friends and loved ones who suffer from dementia
Sunday, January 29, 7:00 PM on Zoom

Sharing her inspiring research and experiences, Cantor Riki will demonstrate how to use music as an effective tool – a tool already in our hands via our phones. She will share why and how music can awaken the spirit of those who may otherwise appear unreachable or unresponsive. Based on over 30 years working with ailing elders, she will show how music can be transformative in stimulating memory and creating connection and joy.

Use this link to register for this program via Eventbrite:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/music-memory-and-small-miracles-tickets-506565871157>

Art History with Janet Mandel

via Zoom, Thursday evenings, February 2 and February 9, 2023 at 7:30 pm

Back by popular demand: Janet Mandel will be offering two more exciting lectures on topics in art history with a Jewish angle. These programs are sponsored by the Susan Marx Fund for Adult Education at Kol Rina, and are presented to the public free of charge. Details and registration information will be forthcoming; mark your calendar now, and watch these notices.

Language courses

Kol Rina proudly announces a winter semester of language classes on Zoom. These classes are a gift from the Susan Marx Fund for Adult Education at Kol Rina, and are offered free of charge with a nominal registration fee. For further information or to register for any of these courses, contact Treasure Cohen at treasurehope65@gmail.com

Hebrew for Absolute Beginners

Wednesday evenings, 8-9 pm Teacher: Natasha Cooper-Benisty 10 sessions starting 1/25

Join our ongoing class in which we literally start from scratch. If you have never learned Hebrew or want to refresh your memory, this class is for you. We concentrate

on reading and sprinkle in some simple conversational Hebrew. (The first few sessions will review material from our Fall semester.)

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Hebrew Conversation and More

Thursday evenings, 8-9 pm Teacher: Nikki "Mora Nehama" Pusin 9 sessions starting on 1/19

Great opportunity to immerse yourself in the Hebrew language, while growing as a Hebrew speaker at your own level and your own pace. For an hour every week, you will schmooze with friends, read stories, sing songs, explore contemporary vocabulary, and get up and running in Hebrew conversation.

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Yiddish for Advanced Beginners

Tuesday nights, 7:30-8:45pm Teacher: Ellen Muraskin 10 sessions starting on 2/14

If you have a little experience speaking, reading, or writing Yiddish and a desire to learn more, this course is for you! Through serious study, homework and fun conversations, you will grow in your knowledge and facility of the "mamaloshen"/mother tongue.

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For further information or to register for any of these courses, contact Treasure Cohen at [treasurehope65@gmail.com](mailto:treasurehope65@gmail.com)