

Parashat Va'era: Help Us Get Out of Egypt!

Dear Friends,

This week's drasha will be somewhat different. Actually, very different! In fact, it isn't really a drasha at all. It is more of a request. Please read on.

Parashat Va'era marks the beginning of the Exodus from Egypt. Its climax will take place in the next parasha, but this week the story heats up, Am Yisrael begins to awaken from its comfortable stupor. The end of the long winter arrives, making way for a new spring - the most momentous spring of nations in human history.

This coming spring Kehillat Ve'ahavta will be celebrating its 17th birthday!! Seventeen!!

Yoseph was 17 when he was taken down to Egypt, and 17 more years passed until he was reunited with his father. 17 must be a significant number.

We, too, have had our Yoseph for 17 years! You!!!

For the past 17 years, you, our good friends overseas have subsidized us and guaranteed our financial existence. Like Yoseph the righteous who was the source of nourishment for Bnei Yisrael, you have been there for us.

Our Israeli friends are asking us, why are they doing it? And we answer: because they know that only organizations/communities such as ours will ensure that the State of the Jewish People will not only be an impressive military power in the Middle East and a leading center of high-tech, but also an open and pluralistic Jewish spiritual center, that cares for the wondrous and fragile human spirit.

We also tell our members that you - our friends overseas - draw great pride and inspiration from us, Israelis, but also tremendous concern.

Since time immemorial - from the days of the Bible, through the era of our Sages, Jewish medieval giants, the great scholars of the Renaissance, the bright thinkers of the Hebrew Enlightenment, and all the way to modern day Zionist visionaries - Jews have flourished when Judaism was open, pluralistic, creative, breathing, and compassionate. Each time a wave of religious extremism or halachic dictatorship took over, destruction knocked at the gates. This is a historical fact.

As long as the words of our Sages “these and (also) these are the words of the Living God,” and “the Torah has seventy faces” we flourished. When attempts were made to reduce human spirit to one single “these” and our inner world to only one “face”, we wilted. Again, this is a historical fact.

The State of Israel, with the tax Shekels we all pay, supports only one Jewish movement, one “face”, and does so generously. Most of those reading these lines do not belong to that movement. Those of you who do - you are a beautiful model of Jewish pluralism! For all kinds of political reasons our beloved Jewish state is unable at this time to recognize the existence of other movements which are, nevertheless, the majority in the Jewish world! Israel, which is dear and precious to me, and I will never stop loving her, cannot, at this time, guarantee the words of our Sages about “these and these” and “seventy faces.”

It is the Masorti movement, along with our sister movements in Israel, that spread the message of Jewish pluralism in Israel.

Kehillat Ve'ahavta is one of the most active congregations in the Israeli Masorti Movement. The scope and variety of our activities expands from year to year, and is unparalleled. Furthermore, over 70% of our budget comes from either revenue for services we provide, or local fundraising. This is all accomplished with a tiny professional staff and a wonderful group of committed volunteers. I'll be candid here, our salaries are very low relative to other organizations (all open for public viewing), while our output and achievements are tremendous and unparalleled.

And it's working! It's working big time - one Bar Mitzvah at a time, one wedding at a time, one Shiur at a time, one encounter at a time. Most importantly, Kehillat Ve'ahavta guarantees that there is a pluralistic Jewish spiritual alternative in this area, one that welcomes every person as he or she is.

In the past two years, three significant, long-time supporters have turned their attention and their financial help towards other important causes both in Israel and overseas. They are all still good friends and their decision is understandable and legitimate. In addition, some of our

continuing donors have reduced their support (while others have increased it, but not enough!).

So, this year I am making a personal commitment, to raise 360,000 NIS - which is \$100,000, or 20,000 "Chai", to replace the three contributions that we lost.

This is a lot of money - a lot of "chai"/life - I know, but it is possible, and we will do it, because we have to and because we seek life!

FYI, my drasha in Hebrew this week is identical to this one, only it is addressed to our Israeli audience, calling on them to wake up and take responsibility.

But this email is addressed to you - our friends and supporters overseas.

I am asking you, personally, to help us in our joint effort to leave Egypt - to leave the narrow Jewish-Israeli straits we are all in. I am asking for your help, so that together we will guarantee Jewish freedom, a Judaism that is loving and accepting of all of Am Yisrael.

Many of you have been very generous with your support. I personally want to thank you! Every additional donation - big or small - will help us continue this vital work. And, of course, it is all tax deductible.

Here's how you can contribute:

1. **Preferred: Online** (tax-deductible in the US) via credit card through the Masorti Movement's US web site: <https://masorti.org/kehillat-veahavta-zichron-yaakov/>
2. A tax-deductible contribution via **check**. ***If you do send a check, please be sure to indicate that you would like your donation specifically directed toward Kehillat Veahavta - Zichron Yaakov**

The address to mail the check is:

The Masorti Foundation for Conservative Judaism
475 Riverside Drive, Suite 832, New York, NY 10115

Please let us know if you have made a donation, by sending a follow-up email to misrad.veahavta@gmail.com so we can verify receipt of the donation, and, of course, thank you!

For further details you can reach me by return email, or by Whatsapp/SMS to my phone, 050-3782541, and I will be in touch with you as soon as I can.

Thank you very much, and may we leave Egypt together!

It won't be easy, I know, but have we ever sought the easy way?

Shabbat Shalom and Chodesh Tov,

Elisha