

Torah Portion Preview for Va-eira

Shabbat beginning January 20, 2023

Va-eira (God appeared) describes God instructing Moses to persuade Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. The text shows Moses as so humble that he found his own voice uninspiring. God allowed Moses' brother Aaron to help and armed them both with magical powers. Egyptian magician-priests so readily duplicated the first few of their artifices that Pharaoh failed to believe that Moses' God had extraordinary power. Va-eira describes only four generations of Israelites in slavery while other Torah portions describe four centuries.

Consistent scholarship since the nineteenth century has concluded that people from several traditions wrote the Torah. Accepting multiple traditions, we can resolve the discrepancy in the durations of slavery by concluding that different traditions had different standards of description. Both literary epics and social science exist to teach, but only the latter insists on accurate description. As Rabbi Joshua Mikutis discerns in *The Mussar Torah Commentary*, Va-eira teaches us the humility to find the “divine in this moment” despite our inherently capricious world. Moses failed ten times to persuade Pharaoh, but our Passover seders celebrate ultimate success. Despite inaccurate description, we get the inspiring instruction that accomplishing goals of historic or personal significance might require even ten failures.