



Jewish Community Center of Paramus  
Congregation Beth Tikvah  
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## A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday, January 15, 2021 ~ Parsha: VaEra

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

I want to inform the community that based on your suggestions, I have established a blog which contains past my Shabbat messages to the congregation. Soon, I will also add past sermons and other writing over the years. You can see it at: <https://rabbiarthurweiner.blogspot.com>. It will soon be available on the website and our Facebook page. This new blog is truly a work in progress. I look forward to your feedback.

Rabbi Avram Kogen, our esteemed High Holiday Guest Rabbi and Shabbat Torah reader of many years will present the Shabbat message this week. Please see below for his message to us. Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Weiner

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*This week's Torah portion, Parshat VaEra, narrates the first seven of the Ten Plagues visited upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians. We see a repeating cycle of Pharaoh's defiance, followed by a disabling plague, to which Pharaoh reacts with contrition, but then Pharaoh's heart is hardened (or self-hardened). Even though each plague is preceded by a warning, Pharaoh fails to learn from his experience during the previous plagues. How could an experienced monarch miss so many opportunities to shield his kingdom from harm?*

*We can gain some insight by taking a deep dive into one plague. Let's look at the second plague: frogs. We are told that Aaron held out his arm over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. Pharaoh's response was twofold. Initially he asked his resident magicians to replicate the "trick" of making frogs come forth. (Apparently Pharaoh wanted to show Moses and Aaron that this maneuver was not unique to their God; it was also within the Egyptians' repertoire. Of course, this defiant move also had the undesirable effect of further increasing the frog infestation.) In a short time, it became clear that the unnatural proliferation of frogs was harmful to Egypt (and the magicians were powerless to curtail the plague). Pharaoh, who wished to present himself as an all-powerful god, thought that the only challenge was to manipulate the number of frogs in the kingdom.*

*Soon it became evident that the frog infestation threatened to overwhelm the kingdom. The problem had quickly grown beyond fine-tuning the number of frogs. Pharaoh, who was accustomed to dictating the course of events in Egypt, was forced to ask Moses to intercede with God to put an end to the runaway proliferation of frogs (despite Pharaoh's steadfast refusal to recognize God).*

*Each one of the plagues was presented as an opportunity for Pharaoh to recognize that there is a God more powerful than the earthly monarch. Yet Pharaoh chooses to view each plague as a technical problem in search of a technical solution. He refuses to concede the larger point, that he is "out of his league" when competing with God, and that a show of humility would be much more effective than a flexing of his royal muscles.*

*The stymied Pharaoh has no choice but to ask Moses and Aaron to end the plague, and he offers to let the Israelite slaves spend some time worshiping God. Moses responds by telling Pharaoh to request a particular time when the plague should terminate. (This removes the plague from the realm of tricks that Moses and Aaron might have up their sleeves. The termination of the plague at a time designated by Pharaoh would be an indication that God has the power to meet any schedule that might be devised.) Moses prays to God, and the frog infestation ends at the time that Pharaoh had requested.*

*Pharaoh feels that his problem has been solved. The closing verse of this episode tells us: When Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he became stubborn and would not heed them. Pharaoh learns the wrong lesson, and so the cycle recurs (more or less) for eight more plagues.*

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Avram Kogen