



Shabbat Shalom

28 Tevet 5776
January 9, 2016

Parashat Vaera

This Week at Beth El Synagogue

Saturday, January 9:

Havdalah—6:01 pm

Shabbat Mishnah Study	8:45 am
Orthodox Kehillah Services	9:00 am
B'nai Mitzvah Peer Tutoring	9:00 am
Chavurah Minyan	9:30 am
Main Sanctuary Services,	9:30 am
Simchat Tot Havdalah in Pajamas	5:00 pm

Sunday, January 10:

Weekly Sunday Minyan/Shiva Minyan	9:30 am
Talmud Torah	9:30 am
Hebrew Level II with Donna Goldstein	9:30 am
Pancake Ploozza	10:00 am
Knitting Chevra	10:00 am
Hebrew Level I with Donna Goldstein	10:30 am
B'nai Mitzvah Peer Tutor Refresh Session	3:00 pm
Community Midrasha	4:00 pm

Monday, January 11:

Sisterhood Board Meeting	7:00 pm
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Tuesday, January 12:

Wednesday, January 13:

Weekly Wednesday Minyan	8:00 am
Talmud Torah (2-6)	4:15 pm
Board Meeting	7:30 pm

Thursday, January 14:

Friday, January 15:

Candle Lighting—5:06 pm
NC-wide Shabbaton

Upcoming Events:

- ✧ Sat. 1/16 NC-wide Teen Shabbaton
- ✧ Sat. 1/16 Shabbat Mishnah Study
- ✧ Sat. 1/16 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Service
- ✧ Sat. 1/16 NO B'NAI MITZVAH PEER TUTORING
- ✧ Sat. 1/16 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Sat. 1/16 I.L.Peretz Course with Sheva Zucker
- ✧ Sun. 1/17 NC-wide Teen Shabbaton
- ✧ Sun. 1/17 Weekly Sunday Minyan
- ✧ Sun. 1/17 NO TALMUD TORAH
- ✧ Sun. 1/17 Hebrew with Donna Goldstein
- ✧ Sun. 1/17 MLK Day of Service
- ✧ Mon. 1/18 SYNAGOGUE OFFICE CLOSED
- ✧ Mon. 1/18 MLK Day of Service
- ✧ Wed. 1/20 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Wed. 1/20 Talmud Torah (2-6)
- ✧ Thu. 1/21 Sulam Session #1
- ✧ Fri. 1/22 Sisterhood Shabbat
- ✧ Sat. 1/23 Shabbat Mishnah Study
- ✧ Sat. 1/23 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 1/23 B'nai Mitzvah Peer Tutoring
- ✧ Sat. 1/23 Monthly Parsha Study
- ✧ Sat. 1/23 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Sat. 1/23 Healing Yoga
- ✧ Sat. 1/23 I.L. Peretz Course with Sheva Zucker

Gabbai Schedule

Contact the scheduled gabbai if you'd like to request an *aliyah*, other honor, or to volunteer to lead a service in the Main Sanctuary. Gabbaim will try to accommodate requests made on Shabbat morning (by 10:15am, before the Torah service) but we ask for your understanding if all honors have been previously claimed during the week.



1/9 Vaera
Jon Wahl
jmwahl@email.unc.edu 919-942-3827

1/16 Bo
David Kirsch
dkirsch@dm.duke.edu 919-286-4516

1/23 Beshalach
Diane Markoff
diane.markoff@earthlink.net 919- 969-8953

1/30 Yitro
Bernie Fischer
Bernie.fischer@duke.edu 919-493-0306

This weekend's Kiddush lunch is sponsored by:
Carla Fenson & David Bronstein, Susi Lieff & Artie Axelbank, Cheryl Marcus & Roy Schonberg, Susan Morris, Sue & Ron Strauss, and Laura Svetkey & Charlie Van der Horst

Beth El is a welcoming community of members with diverse backgrounds, ideas, levels of knowledge, and observance. We are an egalitarian Conservative congregation, and a member of the Southeast Seaboard district of United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ), and the Orthodox Union.

Parashat Vaera

Adapted from <http://www.learn.jtsa.edu>

Words fail me.

This common idiom—so casually tossed off in a moment of surprise—expresses a deep truth. Words do indeed fail us, sometimes to tragic effect.

That is the way the Zohar (the foundational text of Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism) understands our exile in Egypt: as the exile of speech, a failure of words. In this reading, the breakdown of speech is both cause and effect of our enslavement, while healing and redeeming speech—finding our voice—is both the process and hallmark of redemption.

How does the exile of speech—failed, unredeemed language—manifest itself? Most commonly, it is what we call lashon hara (literally, negative or evil speech), typified by Pharaoh:

false language, from outright lies to more nuanced falsehoods like partial truths and oversimplifications; (e.g. Exod. 5:8)

language used to advance evil ends, such as words that are hurtful and destructive, or that incite fear, hatred or violence; (e.g. Exod. 1:9-10, 16, 22)

words that limit possibility and prevent growth, or demoralize rather than inspire; (e.g. Exod 5:2, 4-5) or unreliable language, such as empty speech and unfulfilled promises. (e.g. Exod. 8:4)

But the Zohar's notion of the exile of speech points also to a deeper failure of language—not only the presence of lashon hara, but the impossibility of positive speech, what we might call lashon hakodesh (holy language, words of hope, healing and redemption). This failure manifests as a kind of muteness, as language that will not or cannot be spoken—exemplified by Moses's famous reluctance or inability to speak in God's name (see Exod. 4:1, 4:10, 5:22-23, 6:12, 6:30). And it may also manifest as a kind of deafness: redemptive language going unheard or unheeded. In other words, failing.

It is this failure that opens our reading this week. God appears with a sweeping promise of redemption, to be communicated to the people by Moses:

I have now heard (shamati) the moaning of the Israelites because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. Say, therefore, to the Israelites: I am YHWH. I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you . . . And I will take you to be My people and I will be Your God . . . I will bring you into the land . . . and I shall give it to you for a possession, I YHWH." (Exod. 6:5-8)

But where God has heard the cry of the Israelites, the Israelites are unable or unwilling to hear the word of God:

So Moses spoke accordingly to the Israelites, but they did not listen (velo shame'u) to Moses, because of crushed spirits (mikotzer ruah) and oppressive labor (u-me'avodah kashah). (Exod. 6:9)

On the surface, we might empathize with a people so beaten down and demoralized by oppression and fear that they are unwilling to take seriously a message of hope. After all, they have listened and trusted Moses once and the result was a worsening of their condition. Their refusal to listen further might be understandable.

But the Zohar's notion of the exile of speech pushes us to a deeper, more timely meaning. The Exodus narrative is not merely historic but paradigmatic, representative of an ongoing search for lashon hakodesh, Godly language with the potential to free and to heal. Notably, the Hebrew word "pharaoh" is comprised of the letter peh (mouth) followed by the word ra'ah (evil). Thus, we can read Pharaoh as a symbol of lashon hara itself. And our exile is thus emblematic of the danger of physical and metaphorical enslavement and exile whenever a society becomes dominated by such negative, evil speech, and redemptive speech is silenced, drowned out, or dismissed.

On this level, the people's failure to hear is shockingly tragic, and understanding that failure is essential to our own liberation. So how and why did Moses's message fail?

The verse itself is susceptible of multiple meanings. Velo could mean "did not" (a simple failure) or "would not" (a willful failure). And velo shame'u might mean that they actually did not hear Moses speaking, that they heard him speaking but did not listen to what he had to say, that they heard Moses' words but did not understand or take in their meaning, or that they understood but did not heed.

The cause of the failure is similarly open to interpretation. The Torah gives us two reasons. The latter, avodah kashah, refers to the hard and oppressive labor imposed upon the people. The former, kotzer ruah, is less transparent.

Some commentators translate ruah as "breath," and the failure to hear as a physiological response. Rashi (11th century, France), for example, comments that "one who is under stress is short of wind and breath, and is unable to breathe deeply." In a remarkably contemporary reading, the Netziv (19th century, Volozhin in present-day Belarus) notes that the physical impact of stress (shallow breathing) limits our attention span: "it becomes difficult to tolerate longer speech, which demands both explanation and an extended period of focus and concentration."

Alternatively, ruah might refer not to a physical but to an emotional, intellectual or spiritual limitation. Ramban (13th century, Spain) translates kotzer ruah as "impatience of spirit" resulting from fear, and avodah kashah as lack of time to hear and consider resulting from the pressure of Pharaoh's demands.

Especially rich is the commentary of the Or Hahayyim (18th century, Morocco), who writes:

Perhaps because they had not yet been given the Torah they were unable to hear, and this is called kotzer ruah, because the Torah expands a person's consciousness.

Here, the study of Torah—both in its content and in its methodology, its use of words—is seen as offering training in how to hear and understand more deeply, more expansively, more generously, more hopefully.

Taken together, we see some striking and disturbing parallels to our own culture. Stress, overwork, impatience, narrow self-concern, and lack of intellectual and emotional discipline often prevent us from listening deeply, from taking the time to hear and attend to the voices that elevate, and offer genuinely constructive paths forward.

And perhaps it is our growing inability to listen that is silencing the very voices our world most needs to hear. The Torah text suggests that the people's failure to hear, Moses' difficulty speaking, and the empowerment of Pharaoh/Peh-Ra'ah are all interconnected and mutually causative (See, for example, Exodus 6:12 and 6:30). Speech enables hearing, but the reverse is also true: it is deep listening that makes healthy and meaningful speech possible. And the absence of either amplifies the voice of Pharaoh.

Lashon hakodesh (holy, healing language) is a demanding and courageous act. Words do indeed fail, and speech is always in danger of going into exile. But as the Torah teaches (Exod. 2:24), redemption begins with listening: "God heard."

Refuah Shleymah רפואה שלמה

Adelah bat Avrom v'Chenya (Adele Abramowitz)	(Ovadya Fleishman)	Lydia Cowan Davis
Aharon ben David u'Miriam (Alan Goldman)	Reuven ben Chanoch v'Dinah (Robert Feurst)	Elinor Fleishman
Aliza Chana bat Leah	Rifka bat Idel v'Elka	Ilene Jacobson
Baracha bat Sarah	Rut bat Sarah (Suzanne Furst)	Jennifer Krunkosky
Bedonna Riva bat Sara	Sara bat Hinda (Sylvia Dante)	Inez McFarling
Ben-Zion ben Sarah	Sarah Gittel bat Rut (Sue Perlo)	Ezra Rapport
Chana bat Malkah	Sarah Gittel bat Rut (Sue Perlo)	Jack Reich
Daronit Esther bat Tuvia v'Leah (Jennifer Greyber)	Shira Batya bat Meirav	Michael Rockman
David ben Sarah (David Leitner)	Shmuel ben Shoshana	Pearl Rohde
Eliyahu Chanan ben Sarah (Ed Gagnon)	Springya Simcha bat Yehudah v'Chana (Susan Rosefielde)	Richard Roth
Gershon Yonah ben Teyva haKohen v'Chanah Leah haLevi	Tuvia ben Shmuel v'Tziporah (Tovia Lebovich)	Carmen Sadowsky
Hannah Leah bat Sarah (Anna Crollman)	Tziporah bat Esther	Lauren Schiro
M'cor Eyshel bat Esther Tzvia	Yehudit bat Rachel	Susan Tolchin
Malka Hannah bat Basha Rachel	Lee Ballen	Christine Walters
Miriam Shifra bat Issur (Margaret Sachs)	Lucretia Bell	Sharon Welensky
Ovadya ben Elinor	Sonia Berman	Orrie Wilner
	Anne Boyd	Amy Wolf
	Cynthia Brown	
	Anna Crollman	

Please contact the synagogue office with any additions or changes to this list.

Yahrzeits יארצייט

Yetta Brandt	Yehuda Ohayon
Hanah Landau	Edwin Price
Barbara Lipp	Miriam Zucker
Barry Margolin	
Sam Margolis	
Rolfe Moulder	

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Rabbi: Daniel Greyber

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