



Shabbat Shalom

2 Kislev 5776
November 14, 2015

Parashat Toldot

This Week at Beth El Synagogue

Saturday, November 14:

Havdalah—5:50 pm

Shabbat Mishnah Study	8:45 am
Orthodox Kehillah Services	9:00 am
B'nai Mitzvah Peer Tutoring	9:00 am
Main Sanctuary Services	9:30 am
Healing Yoga	10:00 am

Sunday, November 15:

Weekly Sunday Minyan	9:30 am
Talmud Torah	9:30 am
Simchat Tot	9:45 am
Hebrew I with Donna Goldstein	10:00 am
Chanukah Bazaar	10:00 am
"Men of Oil"	10:15 am
Hebrew II with Donna Goldstein	11:00 am
Tutor Refresh Session	3:00 pm

Monday, November 16:

Sisterhood Board Meeting	7:00 pm
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Tuesday, November 17:

Va'ad Meeting	7:00 pm
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Wednesday, November 18:

Weekly Wednesday Minyan	8:00 am
Talmud Torah	4:15 pm

Thursday, November 19:

Lunch and Learn with Rabbi Greyber	11:30 am
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Friday, November 20:

Candle Lighting—4:46 pm

Kabbalat Shabbat Services	6:00 pm
Community Shabbat Dinner	7:00 pm
Shiur with Rabbi Spitz	8:15 pm

Upcoming Events:

- ✧ Sat. 11/21 Shabbat Mishnah Study
- ✧ Sat. 11/21 Orthodox Kehillah Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Sat. 11/21 B'nai Mitzvah Peer Tutoring
- ✧ Sat. 11/21 Shabbat Morning Services with Dvar Torah by Rabbi Elie Spitz
- ✧ Sat. 11/21 Children's Shabbat Services
- ✧ Sat. 11/21 Shiur with Rabbi Elie Spitz
- ✧ Sun. 11/22 Sunday Minyan
- ✧ Sun. 11/22 Talmud Torah (PreK-7)
- ✧ Sun. 11/22 Final Shiur with Rabbi Elie Spitz
- ✧ Sun. 11/22 Monthly Durham Community Café Dinner
- ✧ Wed. 11/25 Weekly Wednesday Minyan followed by Shiur
- ✧ Wed. 11/25 NO Talmud Torah (2-6)

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.



11/14 Toledot
Jon Wahl
jmwahl@email.unc.edu 919-942-3827

11/21 Vayetze
Shula Bernard
shulabernard@gmail.com 919-967-9393

11/28 Vayishlach
Roger Perilstein
rperilstein@hrc-pa.com 919-286-9814

12/5 Vayeshev
Isaac Price
isaac@isaacprice.org 919-886-5453

This weekend's Kiddush lunch is hosted by:

Sally and Steve Brown, Adam and Beth Goldstein, Kevin and Ann Leibel, Michelle Shrott and Jeff Krolik, Sharon Van Horn and Steve Lerner, Abby and Gary Zarkin

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 Toldot

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

Some stories are rich with visual imagery, while others resound with song. But it is fragrance, specifically the smell of savory food, which infuses Parashat Toledot. Food plays an essential role in several pivotal scenes. It is with a pot of lentil stew that Jacob purchases Esau's birthright, and it is with a steak dinner that he secures the senior blessing from his father. The first story is simple—Esau is famished and ready to trade away anything for a bowl of soup. But the second story is enormously complex.

Isaac's announcement that he requires Esau to hunt an animal and feed his father from the kill before blessing him is baffling. As a literary device, this delay in the action creates narrative space for the collusion between Rebecca and Jacob to transpire. While Esau is out hunting they will quickly kill two goats from the herd and feed Isaac. Rebecca and Jacob take advantage of Isaac's blindness in order to trick him into making a false blessing. True, Rebecca had received a divine oracle saying that Jacob was destined for primacy, and Jacob had after all purchased the birthright. However, it seems that old Isaac had not been filled in on these details, so he is literally and figuratively in the dark. And he is hungry, waiting for his boy to bring him dinner.

But why does Isaac need to eat meat before blessing Esau? Why can't he simply call his son in for his blessing, just as other biblical characters do? Indeed, we bless our children on Friday night before dinner, not after enjoying our meal. What is different about Isaac?

In fact, a great deal is different about Isaac. When you think of Isaac, can you imagine him smiling? Although he was named for laughter (Yitzhak—"he will laugh"), few biblical characters lead a sadder life. Rivalled by his brother, nearly killed by his father, and left bereft at the death of his mother, Isaac never has it easy. He loves Rebecca, but her initial barrenness causes them sorrow, and starting with her pregnancy there is constant strife in their home. Isaac ends up alone, betrayed by his wife, despised by his elder son ("may the days of mourning my father come soon"), and abandoned by Jacob, who takes his blessings and flees for his life. Even before the dreadful deception plays out, Isaac is not in a good state to give out blessings, and so he needs some assistance. Isaac requires a luxurious dinner of meat and wine before he can act the patriarch and transmit the blessings of Abraham.

Rabbinic literature discusses the importance of feeling sated and happy before summoning the spiritual energies needed to bless another person. A person who is hungry may not have the ability to focus intention upon the recipient and to phrase the blessing appropriately. In the Talmud (BT Bava Batra 12b) Rav Avdimi from Haifa plays on a verse from Job (11:12), which discusses the "heart" (or perhaps "hearts") of a "hollow man." Rav Avdimi explains that before a person eats and drinks, his or her heart is divided, but once they have eaten, they become able to focus.

While we recite blessings before eating, this is considered to be a form of permission-taking before enjoying God's bounty. The greater obligation is to bless God after we have eaten in fulfillment of the verse, "you shall eat, be satisfied, and then bless the Lord. . ." (Deut. 8:10). The experience of satiety is essential to the activity of offering blessing.

The great halakhist Rabbi Yosef Karo says, "It is appropriate for one who offers blessing to be in a state of joy, as we find with Isaac." (Beit Yosef to Orah Hayim 128). After recalling our story, Rabbi Karo gives a second biblical example from 1 Kings chapter 8. There King Solomon feeds the people, who "returned to their tents, happy and in good spirits, and they blessed the king." There is nothing like a feast to put people in a good mood, and there is nothing like a good mood to elicit a beautiful blessing.

Looking ahead, when Joseph presents his father Jacob to Pharaoh, the king asks the patriarch for his age. Jacob gives a bitter answer: "Few and hard have been the years of my life," and it is in this sad state that he blesses Pharaoh. (Gen 47:7-10) Remember that it was only a severe famine that brought Jacob's sons and then the aged patriarch himself down to Egypt. I sense that even a sumptuous Egyptian feast would not have inspired him to give Pharaoh an enthusiastic blessing.

I was asked recently whether a person who has suffered the loss of a parent may offer a Shabbat blessing to his own child before the funeral. Jewish law considers a person in this painful moment to be an onen—exempt from all positive commandments. But may an onen offer such a blessing nonetheless? I did not find a prohibition, but based on the texts above I concluded that he should not do so. A blessing should come from a place of abundance and joy, not from sorrow.

Why then do parents bless their children before eating on Friday night? Shouldn't we wait until the meal is over, or at least underway? I can answer only from personal experience. The moment when family and friends are gathered around a table to sing and feast together is a moment of exceptional joy. At the Shabbat table it feels like the divine presence is shining, causing us to well up with a spiritual satisfaction that far exceeds the pleasure of a full stomach. And so we offer blessings from the heart, right at the start of the meal.

Reading the story of Isaac and Rebecca with their divided home and hearts, it is hard not to sense the anxiety and sorrow that hang over these blessings. Indeed, the blessings are not received in a spirit of gratitude and tranquility, but of anxiety and fear. A full stomach is necessary to elicit Isaac's blessings, but it is not adequate to ensure a blessed outcome.

When we have the privilege of offering a blessing to another person, it is our obligation to prepare ourselves to be in a state of joy at that sacred moment. Recognizing the great blessings that have nestled in our own lives, we reach out our hands and open our hearts, allowing the flow of well-being to spill out and connect us to the recipient. May all of our blessings come from a place of joy and be received with love.

Refuah Shleymah רפואה שלמה

Aharon ben David u'Miriam (Alan Goldman)	Rifka bat Idel v'Elka (Suzanne Furst)	Ilene Jacobson Jennifer Krunkosky
Aliza Chana bat Leah	Rut bat Sarah (Sylvia Dante)	Inez McFarling
Baruch ben Shalom v'Raisel (Bernard Leibel)	Sara bat Hinda (Sue Perlo)	Ezra Rapport Jack Reich
Baracha bat Sarah	Sarah Gittel bat Rut (Susan Rosefelde)	Michael Rockman
Ben-Zion ben Sarah	Shira Batya bat Meirav	Pearl Rohde
Chana bat Malkah	Shmuel ben Shoshana	Richard Roth
Daronit Esther bat Tuvia v'Leah (Jennifer Greyber)	Sprinya Simcha bat Yehudah v'Chana (Susan Rosefelde)	Carmen Sadowsky
David ben Sarah (David Leitner)	Tuvia ben Shmuel v'Tziporah (Tovia Lebovich)	Lauren Schiro Susan Tolchin
Eliyahu Chanan ben Sarah (Ed Gagnon)	Tziporah bat Esther	Christine Walters
Gershon Yonah ben Tevya haKohen v'Chanah Leah haLevi	Yehudit bat Rachel	Sharon Welensky
Hannah Leah bat Sarah (Anna Crollman)	Lee Ballen	Orrie Wilner
M'cor Eyshel bat Esther Tzvia	Lucretia Bell	Amy Wolf
Miryam bat Rivkah (May Segal)	Sonia Berman	
Ovadya ben Elinor (Ovadya Fleishman)	Anne Boyd	<small>Please contact the synagogue office with any additions or changes to this list.</small>
Reuven ben Chanoch v'Dinah (Robert Feurst)	Cynthia Brown	
	Anna Crollman	
	Lydia Cowan Davis	
	Elinor Fleishman	

Yahrzeits יארצייט

Ella Bloom	Charlotte Lynn
Louis Gladstein	Frank Marcus
Sally Greene	Lillian Mills
Sarah Kessler	Harry Winner

BE Mazel tov

Mazel tov to Sharon and El Halperin! They are pleased to share the good news of their daughter, Alison, marrying Bryan O'Leary on Saturday, October 31st.

Beth El Synagogue

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Rabbi: Daniel Greyber

Rabbi Emeritus: Steven Sager

Synagogue President: Rachel Galanter