



Shabbat Shalom

10 Kislev 5777
December 10, 2016

Parashat Vayetzei

This Week at Beth El Synagogue

Saturday, December 10:

Shabbat Mishnah Study	8:45 am
B'nai Mitzvah Peer Tutoring	9:00 am
Orthodox Kehillah Services	9:00 am
Main Sanctuary Services	9:30 am
Healing Yoga	10:00 am
Children's Services	10:30 am
Havdalah	5:10 pm

Sunday, December 11:

Talmud Torah (Pre-K-7th grade)	9:30 am
Weekly Sunday Minyan	9:30 am
Knitting Chevra	10:00 am
Federation Hanukkah Festival	11:00 am
Kadima Gifts for Giving	12:30 pm
Talmud Torah Faculty Meeting	12:30 pm

Tuesday, December 13:

Ritual Committee Meeting	7:30 pm
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Wednesday, December 14:

Weekly Wednesday Minyan	8:00 am
Lunch and Learn with Rabbi Greybe	11:30 am
Talmud Torah (2nd-6th grade)	4:40 pm
BE Board Meeting	7:30 pm

Thursday, December 15:

Kli Yakar (at JCC)	11:30 am
Interfaith Outreach Meeting	7:00 pm
Shabbaton (Early arrival)	

Friday, December 9:

Candle Lighting	4:10 pm
Shabbaton	

Upcoming Events:

- ✧ Sat. 12/17 Shabbat Mishnah Study
- ✧ Sat. 12/17 NO B'nei Mitzvah Peer Tutoring
- ✧ Sat. 12/17 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 12/17 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Sun. 12/18 NO Talmud Torah
- ✧ Sun. 12/18 Weekly Sunday Minyan
- ✧ Mon. 12/19 Sisterhood Meeting
- ✧ Tue. 12/20 Va'ad HaChinuch Meeting
- ✧ Tue. 12/20 Finance Committee Meeting
- ✧ Wed. 12/21 NO Talmud Torah
- ✧ Thu. 12/22 Seaboard USY Pre Convention
- ✧ Sat. 12/24 Chanukah Starts
- ✧ Sat. 12/24 Shabbat Mishnah Study
- ✧ Sat. 12/24 NO B'nei Mitzvah Peer Tutoring
- ✧ Sat. 12/24 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 12/24 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Sun. 12/25 NO Talmud Torah
- ✧ Sun. 12/25 Weekly Sunday Minyan

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.



12/10 Vayetze		
David Rubin		
David_s_rubin@mindspring.com		919-967-7725
12/17 Vayishlach		
Jon Wahl		
jmwahl@email.unc.edu		919-942-3827
12/24 Vayeshev		
Isaac Price		
Isaac@isaacprice.org		919-866-5453
12/31 Miketz		
David Rubin		
David_s_rubin@mindspring.com		919-967-7725

This weekend's Kiddush lunch is hosted by:

Karen Scher, Susannah Bell, Donna Goldstein and Robin Barth

Be New Members

Jennifer Dubow

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 Vayetzei

Adapted from <http://www.jtsa.edu/jts-torah-online>

Our parashah begins with Jacob's profound, life-changing encounter with divinity: his dream of the ladder; his vision of God promising that his descendants will multiply and be blessed; and his vow that "if God remains with me...the Lord shall be my God" (Gen. 28:20-21). But our parashah includes another profound, life-changing moment of connecting to God—a less famous one—experienced by Leah. After giving birth to three sons and naming each of them in accordance with aspects of her life experience, Leah gives birth again and says *hapa'am odeh et Adonai* (Gen. 29:35)—this time I will praise/thank/acknowledge the Lord—and names her son Judah (*Yehudah*, from *odeh*).

To guess at what Leah might mean, we must examine the larger context of her life. We encounter Leah as the older, unwanted sister with "weak eyes," contrasted with Rachel's beauty (Gen. 29:16-18). Jacob loves Rachel and serves her father Laban to earn her hand, only to be deceived at his wedding: Laban brings him Leah instead. They consummate the marriage and Jacob realizes only the next morning whom he has married. His displeasure is clear: "What is this you have done to me?!" he says to Laban (Gen. 29:25). Jacob marries Rachel a week later and serves another seven years in exchange.

So Jacob gets what he wanted—but let us consider how this event must have affected Leah. Her new husband's response to her would have been horrifying to any bride. "What is this you have done to me?!" *Mah zot asita li?* As if marrying her is some kind of terrible punishment. These words harken back to two similarly distressing episodes in the book of Genesis. When Abram passes off his wife Sarai as his sister, Pharaoh takes her into his palace but then discovers the truth, saying to Abram, *Mah zot asita li?* (12:18) When Isaac does the same with Rebecca in Gerar, she escapes molestation only because the Philistine king Avimelekh realizes who she is—saying to Isaac, *Mah zot asita lanu*, What have you done to us? (26:10) In all three stories, the women are silent, passed between men as objects, without a shred of agency. The narratives focus on the men—whom they own, what they do with them, whom they think they are entitled to, whom they do and don't desire—while the wishes of the women they handle are deemed irrelevant.

With her lot in life defined by men—first her father, then her husband—it seems that Leah comes to measure her self-worth in terms of what benefit Jacob is able to derive from her. This is evident in the few lines that the Torah records of her speech (11 total)—most of which are said to no one in particular, emphasizing her isolation. Many of her statements involve naming her children based on etymologies of pitiful desperation: "Now my husband will love me" (Gen. 29:32); "The Lord heard that I was unwelcomed" (29:33); "This time my husband will become attached to me" (29:34); "This time my husband will exalt me" (30:20). Two other lines involve competition with Rachel for an evening of conjugal rights with Jacob (30:15-16). Almost everything we know of Leah involves her trying to gain her husband's favor by bearing children. After he dismisses her so callously the morning after their wedding, she becomes single-mindedly focused on this futile goal. Finding a loving husband, or living happily on her own, are not options in her world. Her value and her choices are determined by the men who lay claim to her.

Even after the humiliation of her childbearing years is over, Leah is permanently consigned to second-class status in Jacob's eyes. When he faces his brother Esau and fears retribution for having deceitfully stolen their father's blessing, Jacob prepares his company for a possible attack—putting Zilpah and Bilhah and their children first, then Leah and her children, then Rachel and her children last (Gen. 33:2). Each group will serve as a human shield for the group behind them if necessary. Leah's lower status is clear. Not even her death is recorded by the Torah; we learn only after the fact that she was buried in the Cave of Makhpelah, in the family plot next Jacob (Gen. 49:29-31). One wonders if she even would have been accorded this honor had Rachel not died on the journey and been buried by the side of the road.

Leah serves as an archetype of the compromised status of women in biblical times. She is an object, unloved, de-prioritized, with a highly circumscribed role—bearing children, irrespective of whether her husband cares about her physical or emotional wellbeing—and even when she fulfills that role, she remains unvalued by those most important to her. Her lack of agency seems to pervade all aspects of her life. When her daughter Dinah becomes sexually involved with Shekhem (either through rape or consent, depending on the interpretation) and Leah's three oldest sons brutally slaughter the men of Shekhem in revenge, the Torah records no reaction on Leah's part, either to the alleged assault or to the murders (Gen. 34). It is as if she knows that there is no point to her saying anything, because it won't make a difference—or, worse, that her subjugation runs so deep that her own feelings about these events don't even register in her own mind and heart.

In crucial ways, women have come a very long way since then. As we saw when a lewd recorded exchange surfaced during the recent presidential campaign, making light of the objectification of women cost a successful television personality his high-profile new job as co-host of NBC's *Today Show*. And yet, bragging about sexual assault did not stop his interlocutor—the one boasting in such aggressive yet cavalier terms—from winning the election a mere month later. After the recording came to light, writer Kelly Oxford invited women to share via Twitter their stories of sexual assault; more than a million women responded, and over 27 million people engaged in the social media movement spawned by the hashtag #notokay. For the many women who came out of the woodwork to share their stories, and for the countless others who chose to keep their stories secret, it felt like a critical consciousness-raising moment across the country—a long-awaited recognition of what they had suffered. The election result, then, was experienced by many victims of sexual assault and sexual harassment as a distressing national stamp of approval on—or at least an indifference to—what happened to them.

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Our foremother Leah reminds us, in our current historical moment, of how far we have yet to go. But in spite of everything, there is a redemptive moment in her story—an indication that, even just briefly, something emerges as being more important to her than the Sisyphean project of trying to gain Jacob's affection. This is the moment when she gives birth to her fourth child and names him Judah—a name that has nothing to do with her husband but that is inspired, rather, by Leah's own relationship to God. *Hapa'am odeh et Adonai*—this time I will thank the Lord. It is a name of gratitude, of spirituality—a name that asserts the value of her son's life as something more than a marital pawn; that declares the import of her own feelings in her life's story; that acknowledges the presence of divine blessing.

We can't know why her fourth child evokes this unexpected psychological breakthrough for Leah. Rashi and others understand it as an acknowledgement that she has borne more than her "share" of children (i.e. three), and so any child beyond that is a cause for gratitude. But the conception and birth of a child are never guaranteed, and every child is a cause for gratitude, so this explanation is unconvincing to many. Perhaps, after trying and failing three times to win Jacob's love through procreation, she is suddenly able to realize that the birth of a child may have another, higher meaning. She is able to see Judah not for his potential utility vis-à-vis her husband, but as a gift from God in and of himself—and as a cause for joy in her own life, independent of Jacob.

Admittedly, this transcendence is short-lived. After Judah's birth, Bilhah begins to bear children as Rachel's surrogate, and Leah descends quickly back into the fray of the childbearing competition, with Zilpah as her surrogate. Yet this moment of connecting to the deeper meaning of having a child, free from the weight of her husband's indifference to her, seems to have a lasting effect—even beyond the span of Leah's own life. When Jacob blesses his sons from his deathbed at the end of the book of Genesis, Judah's blessing begins *Yehudah, atah yodukha ahekha*—Judah, your brothers will praise you (Gen. 49:8). The word *yodukha* is derived from the same root as *odeh*, the key word in Leah's powerful statement, as is Judah's name.

In a time of fear for women and other disadvantaged populations globally, we pray for moments of spirituality to occur even in the midst of darkness and oppression. Just as God saw that Leah was unloved and came to her aid (Gen. 29:31), may God remember all those who are abandoned or oppressed by the social structures around them, and may they and their children ultimately find a life of agency and blessing.

Refuah Shleymah רפואה שלמה

<i>Avigal bat David haLevi</i> (Alice Gold)	Miriam bat Rivka vNatan (Miriam Sharp)	<i>Tziporah bat Esther</i> <i>Yakov ben Sarah</i> (Jacob Schonberg)
<i>Avram Moshe ben Esther</i> (Alan Mandel)	Miriam Shifra bat Issur (Margaret Sachs)	<i>Ya'akov Roni ben Margalit</i>
<i>Baracha bat Sarah</i>	Mordechai ben Mathilda (Morty Berkowitz)	
<i>Batya bat Shprintza</i> (Barbara Roberman)	<i>Ovadya ben Esther Malkah</i> (Ovadya Fleishman)	<i>Alvin Jacobson</i>
<i>Chana bat Malka</i>	<i>Rachmiel Daniel ben Nachama uPinchas</i> (Roger Perilstein)	<i>Anne Boyd</i>
<i>Chana Leah bat Sarah</i> (Anna Crollman)	<i>Reuven ben Chanoch v'Dinah</i> (Robert Feurst)	<i>Alan Marty</i> <i>Christine Walters</i>
<i>David ben Sarah</i> (David Leitner)	<i>Sarah bat Hinda</i> (Sylvia Dante)	<i>Ezra Rapport</i> <i>Helen Rosenberg</i>
<i>David Yosef ben Avraham v'Chana</i> (Donald Goldstein)	<i>Sarah Gittel bat Rut</i> (Sue Perlo)	<i>Jack Reich</i> <i>Joyce Romm</i>
<i>Esther bat Yankale Sura</i>	<i>Shalom ben Sprintze</i> (Stanley Ramati)	<i>Ken Walkters</i> <i>Lauren Schiro</i>
<i>Esther Malka bat Chaya Fruma</i> (Elinor Fleishman)	<i>Shira Batya bat Meirav</i>	<i>Netta Boswell</i> <i>Orrie Wilner</i>
<i>Herschel David ben Aharon haKohen u'Bela Miriam</i>	<i>Shmuel ben Shoshana</i>	<i>Richard Roth</i> <i>Sidney Barker</i>
<i>Israel ben Zalman u'Malkah</i>	<i>Shrage ben Deborah Leah</i> (Phillip Samuel Ramati)	
<i>Malka bat Leah</i> (Meg Anderson)	<i>Shraga Feivel ben Leib</i> (Philip Skoletsky)	
<i>Malka Chana bat Basha Rachel M'cor Eyshel bat Esther Tzvia</i>	<i>Tuvia ben Shmuel v'Tziporah</i> (Tovia Lebovich)	<i>Please contact the synagogue office with any additions or changes to this list.</i>
<i>Mishulamit bat Maryam</i> (Marcia Hogan)		

Yahrzeits יארצייט

May their memory be a blessing

Alfred Louis Gabin	Lilly Miller Gladstein	Samuel Lipschitz
Nathan Wilbur Gladstein	Kenneth Slakoff	Mary Forshag Hill
Philbert Hartman	Morris Mazursky	Charles Sawilosky
Barnard Greenberg	Emil Agid	Sam Austin
Lisa Kaplan	Robert Lipton	Bernard Leibell

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Rabbi: Daniel Greyber

Rabbi Emeritus: Steven Sager

Synagogue President: Noah Pickus