



Shabbat Shalom

17 Kislev 5777
December 17, 2016

Parashat Vayishlach

This Week at Beth El Synagogue

Saturday, December 17:

NO Shabbat Mishnah Study
NO B'nai Mitzvah Peer Tutoring
Orthodox Kehillah Services 9:00 am
Main Sanctuary Services 9:30 am
Havdalah 5:45 pm

Sunday, December 18:

NO Talmud Torah (Pre-K-7th grade)
Weekly Sunday Minyan 9:30 am

Monday, December 19:

Sisterhood Board Meeting 7:30 pm

Tuesday, December 20:

Va'ad HaChinuch Meeting 7:00 pm
Finance Committee Meeting 7:30 pm

Wednesday, December 21

Weekly Wednesday Minyan 8:00 am
NO Talmud Torah (2nd-6th grade)

Friday, December 23:

Candle Lighting 4:48 pm

Upcoming Events:

- ✧ Sat. 12/24 Chanukah Starts
- ✧ Sat. 12/24 NO 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
- ✧ Wed. 12/28 NO Talmud Torah
- ✧ Sat. 12/31 NO Shabbat Mishnah Study
- ✧ Sat. 12/31 NO B'nai Mitzvah Peer Tutoring
- ✧ Sat. 12/31 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 12/31 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Sun. 1/1 NO Talmud Torah
- ✧ Sun. 1/1 Weekly Sunday Minyan
- ✧ Wed. 1/4 Talmud Torah
- ✧ Thu. 1/5 Executive Committee Meeting
- ✧ Thu. 1/5 Synagogue Life Committee Meeting
- ✧ Sat. 1/7 Healing Yoga
- ✧ Sat. 1/7 Simchat Tot! Havdallah in Pajamas

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.



12/17 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
1/7 Vayigash Matt Diamond mattdiamond@mindsprings.com	919-906-6545

This weekend's Kiddush lunch is hosted by:

Sandy & Jim Fangmeier, Margaret Sachs, Edy Parker, Merle & Bob Schwartz, Anita & Paul Farel

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 Vayishlach

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

Among the thrills in superhero movies is seeing the good guy take a pummeling and then stand unscathed in the next scene, ready again for battle. “Nobody else could survive that punishment,” we gush. The indestructible superhero comes to mind while reading of Jacob’s return to Canaan after living under Laban’s thumb, then wrestling with a mysterious man, then encountering Esau—a man who’s had twenty years to stew in a fratricidal rage.

It comes as a welcome relief when we read: “Jacob arrived *shalem*”—whole, complete, unscathed—“at Sukkot, which is in Canaan, when he came back from Padan Aram” (Gen. 33:18). In this spirit Rashi lays out how, upon his return to his homeland, Jacob is undiminished and uncompromised. Rashi comments that Jacob arrived home “*shalem* in body, as he had healed from his limp [acquired in the wrestling match with the angel], *shalem* in his financial resources, in that he lacked for nothing materially even after having given his brother such an enormous gift (32:14-17), and *shalem* in his Torah, in that he’d not forgotten in Laban’s home the teachings [he’d previously learned].”

On the second half of the verse Rashi goes further: “Like when a man who says to another, ‘I know a fellow who escaped lions’ jaws without a scratch on him [came out *shalem*],’ so was Jacob who arrived back from his journey to Padan Aram, from his encounters with Laban and Esau who attacked him along the way.” Two strong arguments support this reading of *shalem* in our verse. The first looks backward. Nahum Sarna writes, “It may mean ‘safe and sound’ and would thus resonate with 28:21, ‘If I return safe (*be-shalom*)’” (*JPS Torah Commentary*). God has provided the full measure of protection Jacob sought (seemingly as a condition for maintaining his loyalty to God) upon fleeing Canaan to escape his brother twenty years before. With *shalem* in our verse, then, we see that Jacob has come full circle. While he has experienced much, suffered much, and gained much, God has ensured that Jacob was unbroken by his travails.

The second argument for this reading looks forward, to the deeply unsettling story of Dina. Now *shalem* is a fraught reference to Hamor and Shechem’s characterization of Jacob’s family that “these men come to us in peace,” *shelemim* (34:21). Here Hamor and Shechem make the case to the men of their city to accede to Jacob’s sons’ demand that they circumcise themselves as condition for the (falsely proposed) peaceful union of the two clans. Our verse, in this reading, fortifies Jacob’s honor before the shameful story that follows: *Jacob* came in peace; but *Shechem* raped Dina.

In this reading of *shalem*, whether looking forward or back, Jacob is a man of great integrity in both senses of the term: he is upright and he is whole.

An alternative reading sees Jacob’s wholeness as a missed opportunity for growth. Our verse is immediately preceded by Jacob’s peaceful reunion with his brother. As reunions go, it is decidedly heavy on the *disunion*, on the arms-length formality that signals from the first “It’s so good to see you!” that Jacob cannot wait to part ways for good from Esau.

Jacob prepares with mortal dread to meet his brother. He has not forgotten that at 27:41 Esau vowed to kill him at the first opportunity, and he imagines that Esau’s memory is as long as his own. Learning in 32:7 that Esau is “coming to meet [him] and has 400 men with him,” Jacob concludes, not unreasonably, that his brother is bent on the bloody fulfillment of his vow.

Jacob’s preparations are famously extensive: he divides his camp in two, to minimize his losses should he be attacked; he prays for God’s protection; he sends some servants ahead with an extravagant gift for Esau; and he moves his family to safety across the Yabbok River. After this maneuver, in the middle of the night, Jacob has his bout with the angel, leaving him with a limp and a new name.

When the brothers’ camps meet, Jacob arranges his family members strategically and then advances to greet his brother. His theatricality leaves me shaking my head: he bows low seven times as he makes his approach. While Jacob aspires to humble dignity with this grand gesture, I can only imagine that instead—as he’s still limping from the wrestling match—he looks awkward, even ridiculous.

Esau, eschewing ceremony as ever, runs toward Jacob, and falls upon him in a bear-hug of an embrace. They both weep. Except for that brief emotional release, Jacob rejects every gesture and offer of reconciliation from Esau. Where Esau calls Jacob “my brother,” Jacob calls Esau “my lord.” Where Esau demonstrates that he is entirely reconciled to his destiny, satisfied with his wealth, and indicates no hostility toward his brother, Jacob insists that Esau accept a placating bribe. When Esau invites Jacob to travel with him to Seir, Jacob equivocates, saying that his slow-moving camp will follow Esau there. Instead, they head toward Sukkot (33:12-17).

In fairness, Jacob couldn’t go to Seir. As the beneficiary of Isaac’s blessing, Jacob’s home was in Canaan, not Seir. He had to get back to where his destiny awaited. And so Jacob arrived *shalem* in Sukkot. But even in the time they had together, Jacob kept his brother apart. Jacob held his heart closed to Esau.

It didn’t have to be that way. After all, we have another example of two men of separate destinies who nonetheless have an encounter of deep and lasting connection, of intimacy, of love: Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro. After the Exodus, Jethro meets up with Moses and the Israelites. Over a long night together, Moses regales Jethro with the tales of God’s miracles, and Jethro emerges changed, praising Moses’s God (Exod. 18:1-11). Yet Jethro remains himself. He neither abandons his god nor his place (18:27), though his vision and heart are enlarged by virtue of his encounter with Moses. At the same time, Moses (and the Israelites) are saved by the open exchange with Jethro, for Jethro advises Moses to establish a much-needed system for managing the people. Not so in Jacob’s encounter with his brother.

When the wrestling angel bestows on Jacob his new name Yisrael, he says, “For you have striven with God and men, and won out” (Genesis 32:29). But what if Jacob had truly striven with Esau as he—as we—should strive with God, and with one another? Not evading encounter through manipulation, not holding his breath even in the midst of an embrace, not shaking his head “no” even as his mouth says “yes.” What if Jacob had truly opened his heart to strive with and come to terms with his estranged twin? What if instead of arriving *shalem*—“sealed, unopened”—to Shechem, Jacob had arrived *shalem*—“reconciled and at peace”—from a relationship that had been so painfully fractured long ago? What then?

Refuah Shleymah רפואה שלמה

Avigal bat David haLevi (Alice Gold)	Miriam Shifra bat Issur (Margaret Sachs)	Alvin Jacobson
Avram Moshe ben Esther (Alan Mandel)	Ovadya ben Esther Malkah (Ovadya Fleishman)	Anne Boyd
Baracha bat Sarah	Reuven ben Chanoch v’Dinah (Robert Feurst)	Alan Marty
Batya bat Shprintza (Barbara Roberman)	Sarah bat Hinda (Sylvia Dante)	Christine Walters
Chana bat Malka	Sarah Gittel bat Rut (Sue Perlo)	Ezra Rapport
Chana Leah bat Sarah (Anna Crollman)	Shalom ben Sprintze (Stanley Ramati)	Helen Rosenberg
David ben Sarah (David Leitner)	Shira Batya bat Meirav	Jack Reich
David Yosef ben Avraham v’Chana (Donald Goldstein)	Shmuel ben Shoshana	Jeff Shields
Esther bat Yankale Sura	Shraga ben Devorah Leah (Phillip Samuel Ramati)	Joyce Romm
Esther Malka bat Chaya Fruma (Elinor Fleishman)	Shraga Feivel ben Leib (Philip Skoletsky)	Ken Walkters
Herschel David ben Aharon haKohen u’Bela Miriam	Tuvia ben Shmuel v’Tziporah (Tovia Lebovich)	Lauren Schiro
Israel ben Zalman u’Malkah	Tziporah bat Esther	Netta Boswell
Malka bat Leah (Meg Anderson)	Yakov ben Sarah (Jacob Schonberg)	Orrie Wilner
Malka Chana bat Basha Rachel	Ya’akov Roni ben Margalit	Richard Roth
M’cor Eyshel bat Esther Tzvia		Sidney Barker
Mishulamit bat Maryam (Marcia Hogan)		

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

Yahrzeits יארצייט

May their memory be a blessing

Ann Simon Fischer	Bernard Weisner	Louis Skoletsky
Morley Fenson	Gershon ben Chayim	Bonnie Haynes
Lucille Livingston	v’Gitel	Joy Shapiro
William Kline	Anita Ullman	Arthur Abraham Maislen
Simon Lipton	Florence “Flo” Sandick	Susan Spritzer
Morris M. Siegel	Simon Lakin	
Murad Sasson	Bertha Bergman	

Be Remembered

Beth El Synagogue extends condolences to Michelle Shrott, Jeff Krolik, Jonah and Aaron on the death of Michelle’s mother and Jonah and Aaron’s grandmother, Helen Shrott (Hinda bat Ya’akov u’Pesacha), who died Wednesday morning, December 14, in Toronto, Canada. Information about shiva minyanim will follow.

Beth El Synagogue extends condolences to Diana and Stan Levy and their family on the death of Diana’s mother, Miriam Schonwetter Sharp (Miriam bat Rivka v’Natan), who passed away on, December 10, in Philadelphia, PA.

May the Ever Present One comfort them among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

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