



Shabbat Shalom

24 Kislev 5777
December 24, 2016

Parashat Vayeshev

This Week at Beth El Synagogue

Saturday, December 24:

NO Shabbat Mishnah Study
NO B'nai Mitzvah Peer Tutoring
Orthodox Kehillah Services 9:00 am
Main Sanctuary Services 9:30 am
Havdalah 5:49 pm
First night of Chanukah

Sunday, December 25:

NO Talmud Torah (Pre-K-7th grade)
NO Weekly Sunday Minyan

Wednesday, December 28:

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

Friday, December 30:

Candle Lighting 4:53 pm

The synagogue office will be closed next week, December 26-30.

To report a life-threatening illness or death, please contact the head of Beth El's Chevra Kaddisha, David Klapper, on his cell phone at [919-270-1621](tel:919-270-1621).

Please visit our website www.betheldurham.org and Facebook page for more information about synagogue services and activities at Beth El and in the community.

This weekend's Kiddush lunch is sponsored by:

Karin Shapiro & Edward Balleisen, Ivy & Vince Wingate, Deborah & Irwin Kahn, Lynne & Jeff Koweek

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.

Upcoming Events:

- ✧ 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 NO Weekly Sunday Minyan
- ✧ Wed. 1/4 Talmud Torah
- ✧ Thu. 1/5 Executive Committee Meeting
- ✧ Thu. 1/5 Synagogue Life Committee Meeting
- ✧ Sat. 1/7 NO Shabbat Mishnah Study
- ✧ Sat. 1/7 NO B'nai Mitzvah Peer Tutoring
- ✧ Sat. 1/7 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 1/7 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Sat. 1/7 Healing Yoga
- ✧ Sat. 1/7 Parasha Study
- ✧ Sat. 1/7 Simchat Tot! Havdallah in Pajamas
- ✧ Sun. 1/8 Sisterhood Trip to NCMA
- ✧ Sun. 1/8 Talmud Torah
- ✧ Sun. 1/8 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.



12/24 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
1/14 Vayeichi David Rubin David_s_rubin@mindspring.com	919-967-7725

Parashat Vayeshev

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

Three years ago, Jewish novelist Dara Horn published her fourth novel, *A Guide for the Perplexed*. Borrowing its title from Maimonides's quintessential work of Jewish philosophy, the book follows two sisters, Josephine and Judith, as they struggle with issues of faith, reason, memory, and sibling rivalry. Josephine and Judith serve as stand-ins for Joseph and Judah; in a sense, the novel functions as an extended midrash on a key biblical incident which can be found in this week's parashah, Vayeshev: the casting of Joseph into the pit at the hands of his brothers. Ultimately, Horn's Josephine and the biblical Joseph arrive at the same conclusion: through suffering, which both characters experience in their respective tales, one can ultimately come to achieve greatness.

Vayeshev opens by recounting the favor and love which Jacob bestows upon Joseph, and the jealousy which this love incites in Joseph's brothers. As the text tells us, "And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him" (Gen. 37:1). Due to their hatred, the brothers devise a plan: they conspire to throw Joseph in a pit and tell their father that a "savage beast" devoured him. When Joseph comes upon his brothers, they strip him of his famous "many-colored tunic" and cast him into the pit.

In Horn's novel, the analogous incident takes place at a summer camp in the Berkshires. Josie, an asthmatic, is forced down into a pit deep in the woods to retrieve her inhaler, which was thrown down by her jealous older sister, Judith. Horn provides a harrowing account of a terrified young girl in the depths of both physical and emotional despair. "The sides of the pit rose up around her, merciless surfaces of mud and stone. For a long moment, oxygen fled her brain, returning in a dizzying rush that flung her to the ground. She lay on her back, looking up at the sky, feeling the frantic rise and fall of her chest" (36).

Yet all is not lost for Josie. While she is in the pit, afraid and alone, she has a vision: the walls of the pit become hundreds of little drawers, each filled with a memory from her past. Ultimately, this vision evolves into the basis for a software program (called, in the novel, Genizah), which becomes extremely successful and propels Josie to greatness. Her success can be attributed to her experience in the pit: had Josie not undergone such a traumatic incident as a young girl, she might never have achieved the greatness she was destined for.

Joseph's life follows a similar trajectory. Prior to being cast into the pit, he was living comfortably as his father's favorite child. Had he not undergone the terrible experience of being traumatized by his brothers, he would never have become a slave in Egypt, interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, or risen to second-in-command in the Egyptian court. In other words, without the suffering that Joseph was forced to endure, he might never have achieved greatness. Perhaps Josie and Joseph both experience an arc described by Friedrich Nietzsche, who wrote that "every major growth is accompanied by a tremendous crumbling and passing away: suffering, the symptoms of decline, belong to the times of tremendous advance." Or, as the legendary Jewish American singer-songwriter David Bromberg puts it, "you've got to suffer if you want to sing the blues."

The text of Vayeshev recounts that Joseph was cast into an empty pit, a *בּוֹר רָק*. "The pit was empty; there was no water in it" (Gen. 37:24). In a comment on this verse, Rashi asks the inevitable question: why did the Torah choose to include the second clause in the verse? Since the text already told us that "the pit was empty," do we not know that there was no water in it? The answer he gives, based on a classical midrash, is that although the pit might have been devoid of water, it was filled with *נחשים ועקרבים*, snakes and scorpions. This is far worse. Instead of giving Joseph a chance to survive by throwing him into an empty pit, in a midrash reminiscent of a scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the brothers throw him into a pit of snakes, condemning him to almost certain death and ensuring that he suffered to the greatest degree possible.

In a sense, 2016 has felt like a year in which we were collectively cast into a pit. It was the most politically turbulent year in modern memory, and it culminated in one of the most divisive elections in American history. Furthermore, we lost such luminaries as Leonard Cohen and Elie Wiesel, fires raged throughout Israel, and just this past week, we witnessed the destruction of Aleppo. It sometimes feels as if we are living in an empty pit, a *בּוֹר רָק*, the language of Genesis puts it. We are suffering. Perhaps we can draw some consolation from the lyrics of another legendary Jewish American singer-songwriter, and hope that "the darkest hour" is, in fact, "right before the dawn."

Saturday night marks the first night of Hanukkah. Hanukkah is the quintessential Jewish expression of moving from darkness to light. The rabbis of the Talmud teach that Adam celebrated the first Hanukkah after experiencing his first winter solstice, when he realized that the days were no longer getting shorter and darker, but were now getting longer and brighter (BT Avodah Zarah 8a). And as Hillel teaches, we light one more candle each night of the holiday to reflect that we should only ascend in holiness, and never descend, *מעלין בקדש ואין מורידין* (BT Shabbat 21a).

Just as we light a new candle each night of Hanukkah, so too did Joseph's reality gradually get brighter; eventually, he was raised from the darkness of suffering in the pit to the light of the Egyptian court. My hope and prayer for us, as we move into Hanukkah and 2017, is that we too are raised from the pit. Unlike Joseph's brothers, may we remember to always treat each other with love, mercy, and compassion. May the coming year be one in which rise from the darkness, and not be cast further down. To echo Hillel, may 2017 be a year in which we only ascend in holiness, and never descend.

Refuah Shleyamah רפואה שלמה

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

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

Yahrzeits יארצייט

May their memory be a blessing

Harold Goldstein	Michael Holub	Meyer Zucker
Sally Greenberg	Sidney Mintzer	Carolyn Flicker
Sophia Reichwalk	Ruth J. Halperin	Irving Levine
Della Guterman Brandt	Shirley Rosofsky	Harriett Bailin
Maurice D'arlin	Myron Kline	
Isaac Slifkin	Eva Markman	
Bernard Lee	Nathan Rosenstein	

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.

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

<p>Beth El Synagogue 1004 Watts Street Durham, NC 27701 919.682.1238 info@betheldurham.org www.betheldurham.org Rabbi: Daniel Greyber Rabbi Emeritus: Steven Sager Synagogue President: Noah Pickus</p>
