



Shabbat Shalom

14 Tevet 5776
December 26, 2015

Parashat Vayechi

This Week at Beth El Synagogue

Saturday, December 26:

Havdalah—5:50 pm

NO SHABBAT MISHNAH STUDY

NO B'NAI MITZVAH TUTORING

Orthodox Kehillah Services 9:00 am

Main Sanctuary Services 9:30 am

Sunday, December 27:

Weekly Sunday Minyan/Shiva Minyan 8:00 am

This Sunday's minyan will take place at the home of

Eileen Abramson instead of at Beth El,

3007 Glendale Ave., Durham, NC 27704

NO TALMUD TORAH (Prek-7)

Monday, December 28:

BETH EL SYNAGOGUE OFFICE CLOSED

Tuesday, December 29:

BETH EL SYNAGOGUE OFFICE CLOSED

Wednesday, December 30:

BETH EL SYNAGOGUE OFFICE CLOSED

Weekly Wednesday Minyan 8:00 am

NO TALMUD TORAH (2-6)

Thursday, December 31:

BETH EL SYNAGOGUE OFFICE CLOSED

Friday, January 1:

Candle Lighting—4:54 pm

BETH EL SYNAGOGUE OFFICE CLOSED

*Please note that the Beth El Synagogue Office
will be closed next week (December 28-January 1).*

This weekend's Kiddush lunch is sponsored by:
*Mary Butler and Philip Goodman, Steve and Gail
Grossman, Sam and Marsha Horowitz, Jonathan and Sean
Angela Meltzer, Susan and Mike Roth*

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. 1/2 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 1/2 NO B'NAI MITZVAH PEER TUTORING
- ✧ Sat. 1/2 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Sun. 1/3 Weekly Sunday Minyan
- ✧ Sun. 1/3 NO TALMUD TORAH
- ✧ Tue. 1/5 Sisterhood Board Meeting
- ✧ Wed. 1/6 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Wed. 1/6 Talmud Torah (2-6)
- ✧ Thu. 1/7 Lunch and Learn with Rabbi Greyber
- ✧ Thu. 1/7 Synagogue Life Meeting
- ✧ Sat. 1/9 Shabbat Mishnah Study
- ✧ Sat. 1/9 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 1/9 B'nai Mitzvah Peer Tutoring
- ✧ Sat. 1/9 Saturday Morning Services
- ✧ Sat. 1/9 Chavurah Minyan
- ✧ Sat. 1/9 Simchat Tot Havdalah 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.



12/26 Vayehi
Alan Mandel
andelcpa@gmail.com 917-589-5673

1/2 Sh'mot
David Rubin
david_rubin@unc.edu 919-967-7725

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

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

Parashat Vayechi

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

Given all that's come before in Genesis, the Torah's notice that Israel's days are nearing their end brings dread. This stems not from fear of death, but a dread of blessing. The passing of a patriarch means that a scene of generational blessing is imminent. Experience tells us that these transitions are neither easy nor clean. Abraham accedes to God's elevation of Isaac over his firstborn, Ishmael. Even though Ishmael will also be great even by the measure of "keeping up with the Jacobs" (he, too, will father twelve nations), God explicitly rejects Ishmael's inheritance of God's blessing. Worse still, Ishmael and his mother, Hagar, are banished in an unforgettable episode of rupture and vulnerability. The imperative of Isaac's destiny as heir to the blessing cannot be denied, even at great pain.

In like manner, Jacob twice takes for himself blessings ostensibly reserved for his older twin. That his rightful inheritance was already established when he and his brother wrestled in Rebecca's womb reads as small comfort because Esau's pain is so palpable and radiates outward, damaging his whole family. While I'm blurring the distinction between the household inheritance that Jacob ladles into his own bowl and the Abraham blessing that he claims as a wolf in sheep's clothing, the fact is that the imperative of Jacob's destiny sunders the bonds of family. Against the threat of fratricide, Jacob flees into a long exile. Isaac and Rebecca take sides vis-à-vis their sons and Esau tries to regain love he hadn't known he'd lost.

By the time we get to Jacob's adult family—his wives, their maidservants, their sons, and their daughter, blessing as such is not even on the table. Rather, in this family, the blessing of rank and status gets established as an expression of irrational love. The rivalries, deceit, and violence that mark every turn of the story of Jacob and his sons are one miserably failed attempt after another at compelling love (Jacob's, by Leah and Rachel) or destroying a beloved that cannot be had (Joseph, by Potiphar's wife) or denying a beloved to another (Joseph, by his brothers). How many times in a single story can Joseph die a death of sorts on the road to realizing his destiny? How many times can Jacob be bereft of a child over the error of loving one overmuch?

It's no wonder, then, that the reader feels dread in our parashah when Jacob is nearing death and word is somehow dispatched to Joseph alone, who presents himself at his father's bed with his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Indeed, the scene goes forward in as inauspicious way as we have come to expect: The favored son again gains his father's special attention as he always has. Joseph learns that Jacob will exercise his prerogative and elevate Joseph's sons through adoption to the same status (vis-à-vis inheritance) as Joseph and his brothers (Gen. 48:5-6). Joseph's "take" relative to his brothers is now doubled.

What follows is confusing, as it seems that Jacob—having just adopted the boys—seems not to know who they are. "Who are these boys?" he asks in verse 8, to which Joseph responds: "They're my sons, whom God gave me in this place [Egypt]." With the seeming confusion cleared up, Jacob says, "Bring them to me that I may bless them."

Scholars explain that the bumpy sequence in our passage results from the Torah editing together two different tellings of the same story. The commentator Keli Yakar, though, understands Jacob's hesitation differently. He reads Jacob's words to be elliptical—an unfinished sentence that when expressed in full reads thus: "Joseph, who are you bringing forward for a blessing? These boys are unworthy." Jacob's entire life has been about destiny and the struggle to protect it. He is also a prophet. His comment derives from his knowledge that Ephraim's descendants will include the evil kings of Israel Jeroboam and Ahab. "How," Jacob is wondering, "could I possibly invoke God's blessing on these boys, knowing as I do who will come from them?" Joseph replies, "They are my children. Whatever else may be true about them and their descendants they are my children and from my perspective they merit blessing."

Joseph brings as proof the fact that God blesses Isaac when God knows that Isaac's son Esau will bear descendants who include idol worshipers. In the Keli Yakar's interpretation, Joseph counters his father's resistance to blessing his sons by referencing the moment when God saves Ishmael, the rejected son. Ishmael lies dying of thirst in the wilderness (because God himself endorsed his banishment)! In that moment, Ishmael is an innocent. God does not leave him to die but, seeing him—**וַיִּרְאוּ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יִשְׁמָעֵל**—as he is and where he is, reveals to Hagar a well of water at hand from which she might save her son's life and her own. (Gen. 21:17-19) In our scene at Jacob's deathbed, Joseph tells his father that he must bless the boys. "They are my children and from my perspective they merit blessing. When it comes to blessing, who one is and where he is now is the only thing that matters. For all creatures are blessed by God. So of course you should bless them."

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: Rachel Galanter

Refuah Shleymah רפואה שלמה

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

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

Yahrzeits יארצייט

Irving Alexander	Max Gerald Levy
David Convisser	Nathan Mikhalevsky
Benjamin Culp	Melvin William Oakes
Jack Gindes	Aaron Rosenblatt
Rose Leibel	

BE Remembered

Beth El Synagogue extends condolences to:
*Eileen Abramson and her family on the death of Eileen's mother and long-time Beth El member, May Segal, who passed away early morning, December 20th, at 102 years old.
Shiva minyan for our beloved May Segal will take place as follows:
Shacharit (morning): Sunday morning at 8:00 am.

*Lewis and Alice Gold and their family, and Andrea, Kevin, Dreizin and Nathan Ginsberg on the death of Emily B. Gold -- Lewis's mother, Andrea's grandmother, and Dreizin and Nathan's great-grandmother -- who passed away on Tuesday, 12/22.