

Shabbat Shalom

2 Tevet 5777 December 31, 2016

Parashat Miketz

This Week at Beth El Synagogue

Saturday, December 31:

NO Shabbat Mishnah Study NO B'nai Mitzvah Peer Tutoring Orthodox Kehillah Services Main Sanctuary Services

9:00 am 9:30 am 5:54 pm

Sunday, January 1:

Havdalah

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

Monday, January 2:

Office Closed

Wednesday, January 4:

Weekly Wednesday Minyan 8:00 am Talmud Torah (2nd-6th grade) 4:40 pm

Thursday, January 5:

Executive Committee Meeting 8:30 am Synagogue Life Committee Meeting 6:00 pm

Friday, January 6:

Candle Lighting 4:59 pm

This weekend's Kiddush lunch is sponsored by:

Janine & Kirk Beeson, Sharon & Neil Freedman, Ann & Stuart Kaplan and Darryl Zeldin

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. 1/7 B'nai Mitzvah Peer Tutoring

Sat. 1/7 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services

Sat. 1/7 Parasha Study

Sun. 1/8 Sisterhood Trip to NCMA

Sun. 1/8 Talmud Torah (Pre-K-7th grade)

🜣 🛮 Sun. 1/8 Weekly Sunday Minyan

Sun. 1/8 Knitting Chevra

Sun. 1/8 Talmud Torah MLK Mitzvah Project

Sun. 1/8 Social Action: Regional Letter-Writing Campaign

Fri. 1/13 Teen NC-Wide Shabbaton

Sat. 1/14 Shabbat Mishnah Study

Sat. 1/14 NO B'nai Mitzvah Peer Tutoring

Sat. 1/14 Lunch and Learn with Rabbi Greyber

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.

1/7 Vayigash Matt Diamond

mattdiamond@mindsprings.com 919-906-6545

1/14 Vayechi David Rubin

David_s_rubin@mindspring.com

919-967-7725

1/21 Shemot

Bernie Fischer

Bernie.fischer@duke.edu

919-493-0306

1/28 Vaera/RH Sh'vat

Jon Wahl

jmwahl@email.unc.edu 919-942-3827

Parashat Miketz

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

Among baseball aficionados, the name of Ralph Branca is universally known. Branca, who died at the age of 90 at the end of November, was famous (or, for many, infamous) for being the pitcher who gave up the "Shot Heard Round the World." In the final game of the 1951 National League championship, the Brooklyn Dodgers were leading 4-2 in the bottom of the 9th inning with two men on base when the New York Giants' power hitter, Bobby Thomson, came to the plate to bat. The Dodgers called on Branca to save the game, but his second pitch flew off of Thomson's bat and over the green wall in left center field for a home run. As Thomson sailed around the bases, the Giants' announcer-in perhaps the most famous moment in sports broadcasting history—shouted, "The Giants win the pennant! The Giants win the pennant!"

Prior to that fateful pitch—memorialized in the writings of John Steinbeck, Jack Kerouac, and Don Delillo—Branca was an accomplished baseball player. He had three consecutive All-Star seasons for the Dodgers. And he deliberately stood beside Jackie Robinson on opening day in 1947 when his teammate broke baseball's color barrier. After 1951, he never regained his baseball stride, and Dodgers' fans never forgave him. Decades later, Branca made this poignant comment: "A guy commits murder and he gets pardoned after 20 years. I didn't get pardoned."

In this week's Torah portion, Miketz, we also are confronted with the notion of an unpardonable sin. We are deep into the story of Joseph, and famine has struck in Canaan. Jacob sends his ten remaining sons—all except the youngest and favorite son, Benjamin—to Egypt where food rations are available. They meet with their brother Joseph, who is now second in power only to Pharaoh, but they do not recognize him. Joseph, however, knows who they are and yet does not reveal himself. Instead, he accuses them of spying and orders them to retrieve Benjamin from Jacob's house and return with him to Egypt. In order to insure that they do so, Joseph seizes Simeon as a hostage.

Jacob, who believes that Joseph is dead and now hears that Simeon has been taken prisoner, is understandably reluctant to risk the loss of his most beloved son, Benjamin. Reuven, the oldest son, desperately tries to convince him to let Benjamin return to Egypt with him and his brothers. "Then Reuven said to his father, 'You may kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you'" (Gen. 42:37). To modern ears this seems a tad harsh, but in biblical terms, offering up one's child as a pledge of faith or security is not unheard of. Abraham is willing to offer up Isaac in Genesis chapter 22; and in the book of Judges, Jephthah kills his only daughter after pledging to sacrifice "whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me on my safe return" (Judges 11:30-31, 39). All of this may serve as a polemic against child sacrifice, but there is no mistaking the powerful force of such a pledge.

To his credit, Jacob dismisses Reuven's argument out of hand: "My son [Benjamin] must not go down with you for his brother is dead and he alone is left. If he meets disaster on the journey you are taking, you will send my white head down to Sheol in grief" (Gen. 42:38). Other than his affection for Benjamin, we do not know why Jacob rejects Reuven's guarantee. Perhaps he concluded that having lost one son already (Joseph) and facing the possible loss of a second son (Benjamin), not to mention the danger of losing a third son held hostage (Simeon), it would be scant comfort if Reuven had to redeem his pledge and sacrifice two of Jacob's grandsons. Jacob might have been our most flawed patriarch (which is what makes him so interesting), but his devotion to his family permeates the Genesis narrative.

Reuven's younger brother, Judah, tries a different tack entirely to convince Jacob. If he fails in his mission to return Benjamin safely to his father, Judah does not offer to sacrifice anyone or anything. Instead, he tells Jacob: "I myself will be surety for him; you may hold me responsible: if I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, I shall stand guilty before you forever" (Gen. 43:9). In other words, Judah is willing to acknowledge that if he fails to safeguard Benjamin, his sin will never be pardoned. That is the guarantee that Jacob accepts.

How are we to understand the intent behind Judah's words "I shall stand guilty before you forever"? The 19thcentury Italian rabbi and scholar Elijah Benamozegh offers the following explanation in his Torah commentary Em Lamikra:

> The figure of speech contains a valuable lesson, teaching us something not otherwise explicitly alluded to in the Torah: that there is no punishment outside of the sin. Sin itself is its own punishment in the Divine scheme of judgment and serves the purpose of reward and punishment.

Judaism is a religion that holds the promise of forgiveness. That is the theme of the Book of Jonah and the meaning of the High Holidays. We can seek forgiveness from God and our fellow human beings and, in so doing, our burdens will be lifted. But, in the nature of things, expiation is incomplete. There are some misdeeds, some angry words, some failures to take a stand that are never forgiven because we cannot forgive ourselves. The sin is its own punishment. In Tim O'Brien's searing phrase, these are "the things we carry."

While many would argue that carrying around these unpardonable sins throughout our lives is unhealthy, I would suggest otherwise. To be sure, we should be generally forgiving of ourselves just as we should be forgiving of others. But knowing that there are certain misdeeds and failures—a limited number of acts and omissions—that we will carry as a burden throughout our lives regardless of whether God or others forgive us creates a powerful incentive to avoid them if at all possible. Knowing that we "shall stand guilty forever" in our own eyes compels us to act with compassion when we are tempted to remain bystanders, to vigilantly watch our words so as not to humiliate others, and to risk our own safety to protect our neighbors.

Ralph Branca made one bad pitch and lived with the consequences for this rest of his life. As much as we wish otherwise, some things we do in life cannot be called back. That knowledge helps us to live with greater urgency, with greater sensitivity, and with greater compassion.

Refuah Shleymah רפואה שלמה

Baracha bat Sarah Batva bat Shprintza

Sarah bat Hinda (Barbara Roberman) (Svlvia Dante) Chana bat Malka

Sarah Gittel bat Rut (Sue Chana Leah bat Sarah (Anna Perlo) Crollman)

David ben Sarah Ramati) (David Leitner)

Shira Batya bat Meirav David Yosef ben Avraham v'Chana (Donald Goldstein)

Shrage ben Devorah Leah Esther bat Yankale Sura (Phillip Samuel Ramati) Esther Malka bat Chaya Fruma (Elinor Fleishman)

Skoletsky) Herschel David ben Aharon

haKohen u'Bela Miriam (Tovia Lebovich) srael ben Zalman u'Malkah

Malka bat Leah (Meg Anderson) Yakov ben Sarah Malka Chana bat Basha Rachel (Jacob Schonberg)

M'cor Evshel bat Esther Tzvia Mishulamit bat Maryam

(Marcia Hogan) Miriam Shifra bat Issur (Margaret Sachs)

Ovadya ben Esther Malkah (Ovadya Fleishman)

Reuven ben Chanoch v'Dinah

Shalom ben Sprintze (Stanley

Shmuel ben Shoshana

Shraga Feivel ben Leib (Philip

Tuvia ben Shmuel v'Tziporah

Tziporah bat Esther

Ya'akov Roni ben Margalit

Alvin Jacobson Anne Boyd Alan Marty Christine Walters Ezra Rapport Helen Rosenberg Jack Reich Jeff Shields Jovce Romm Ken Walkters Lauren Schiro Netta Boswell Orrie Wilner

Richard Roth

Sidnev Barker

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

יארצייט Yahrzeits

May their memory be a blessing

Alfred Feiler Samuel Levy Jacob Levtow Eli Nachamson Sarah Meyer N. Nachamson Max Meyer Arthur Gutman Norman Schultz Philip J. Goldberg Jeffrey Fried May Segal Sabrina Morris Irving Zauder Robert Spilo Estelle Fox Sarah Evans Morris Weinstein

Ruth Halberstadt Avigdor Victor Koren Irving Horowitz Miriam Levinson Kwatcher

Mazel Tov

Mazel Tov to Sierra Fangmeier and Jose Gil, and Sandy and Jim Fangmeier, on the birth of their daughter and granddaughter, Layla Camille Gil, born December 28, 2016!

> 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