



Shabbat Shalom

17 Lyyar 5777
May 13, 2017

Parashat Emor

This Week at Beth El Synagogue

Saturday, May 13:

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
Simchat Tot Shabbat Picnic	3:30 pm
Havdallah	8:55 pm

Tuesday, May 16:

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

Wednesday, May 17:

Weekly Wednesday Minyan	8:00 am
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Friday, May 19:

Kabbalat Shabbat Services	7:00 pm
Got Shabbat? @ the home of Randi & Scott Smith	7:15 pm
Candle Lighting	7:54 pm

Upcoming Events:

- ✧ Sat. 5/20 Shabbat Mishnah Study
- ✧ Sat. 5/20 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 5/20 B'nai Mitzvah Peer Tutoring- Last day
- ✧ Sat. 5/20 Shabbat Morning Services- Sisterhood Installation
- ✧ Sat. 5/20 Healing Yoga
- ✧ Sun. 5/21 Annual Meeting/ Capital Campaign Celebration
- ✧ Thu. 5/25 Lunch and Learn with Rabbi Greyber
- ✧ Sat. 5/27 Shabbat Mishnah Study
- ✧ Sat. 5/27 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 5/27 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Sun. 5/28 Knitting Chevra @ Gladys Siegel's
- ✧ Tue. 5/30 Shavuot/Dinner
- ✧ Thu. 6/1 Synagogue Life Committee Meeting
- ✧ Fri. 6/2 Kadima + 5th Grade Shabbat at the Greybers'
- ✧ Sat. 6/3 Shabbat Mishnah Study
- ✧ Sat. 6/3 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 6/3 Camp Send off Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Sat. 6/10 Post Kiddush Talk: "Cultural Jew, Jew-by-Choice, and Jew: We come in Multiple Varieties," with Rabbi Listfield
- ✧ Sat. 6/17 Healing Yoga

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.



5/20 Behar-Behukkotai Shula Bernard shulabernard@gmail.com	919-967-9393
5/27 Bamidbar Jon Wahl jmwahl@email.unc.edu	919-942-3827
5/31 Shavuot I Matt Diamond mattdiamond@mindspring.com	919-916-6545
6/1 Shavuot II Alan Mandel andelcpa@gmail.com	917-589-5673

This weekend's Kiddush lunch is hosted by:

Tal Lewin Wittle & Eric Wittle, Rachel & Nathan Bearman, Naomi Ornstein Davis & Ian David, Elyza Halev & Jeff Spinner Halev, Susan & Matt Springer, and Lauri Klein

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 Emor

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

In the fall of 2012, I taught a course at the Princeton Theological Seminary entitled “An Introduction to Rabbinic Literature.” I saw my mission as twofold. My stated goal was to familiarize my students with the intellectual and spiritual world of the Rabbis through the study of representative texts from each of the genres of rabbinic literature: Mishnah, Tosefta, the Talmuds, and the halakhic and aggadic midrashim.

However, my study of text had a subtext: to disabuse my Christian students of the pernicious stereotypes of rabbinic Judaism that, some would argue, were first fostered by the apostle Paul and that persist to this very day in many Christian circles. I speak in particular of the image of rabbinic Judaism as spiritless legalism, lacking in compassion for the sinner and offering no path to salvation.

I began addressing and combating this perception by presenting the rabbinic treatment of “an eye for an eye” (Exod. 21:24, Lev. 24:20, and, with slight variation, Num. 19:21). The Torah seems to be prescribing *lex talionis*, imposing the same injury on the assailant as he inflicted upon his victim. Through midrashic interpretation, however, our Sages posited that what was intended was monetary compensation rather than corporal retribution.

After completing the study of the halakhic midrashim that are employed to buttress this claim, I screened the courtroom scene from *The Merchant of Venice*. I chose the version in which Al Pacino is cast as Shylock. No actor radiates seething anger more than Pacino, and his portrayal of a scorned and despised Jew seeking murderous revenge against his Christian tormentors is raw and disquieting. Throughout the scene, Shylock insists on the authority of law and demands that it requires that his claim to a pound of his debtor Antonio’s flesh be satisfied. In the midst of the proceedings a lawyer’s apprentice, Balthazar—actually, the beautiful heiress Portia in disguise—arrives and seemingly takes Shylock’s side in the dispute. At the same time, she urges Shylock to exercise compassion, in what is undoubtedly the most famous speech in the play: “The quality of mercy is not strain’d.” She concludes as follows:

Therefore, Jew,
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
That, in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy;
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy. (4.1)

The notion that mercy is of supreme importance is hardly foreign to Judaism, although Shylock has clearly chosen to put aside all thoughts of compassion. However, folded into the warning that “in the course of justice none of us shall see salvation” is a specifically Christian claim that lies at the heart of Pauline Christianity; “the law [literally: the letter] kills, but the spirit gives life,” as Paul proclaims in 2 Corinthians 3:6. In fact, Portia attempts to demonstrate the literal truth of this assertion in Shylock’s case. Shylock, she points out, is entitled only to flesh and not to blood, and to precisely a pound, no more and no less. In other words, it will be impossible for him to exact the revenge he seeks without violating the terms of the bond and thereby becoming liable for the death penalty and the confiscation of his property. Thus, if the law is followed, death will result: Antonio’s, if Shylock successfully extracts exactly a pound of Antonio’s flesh without spilling a drop of blood—an impossibility—and Shylock’s as well if his efforts are unsuccessful.

After watching the film—which clearly discomfited many of the students—we returned to the rabbinic analysis of the “an eye for an eye” passage. I asked the students, “What do you think the Rabbis would have said to Shylock and Portia?” They were able to see that Shylock’s actions were diametrically opposed to rabbinic law: he sought to impose physical injury as payment of a monetary obligation, whereas the Rabbis were mandating monetary compensation for the inflicting of physical injury.

However, I needed them to go beyond this realization. I needed them see that the mercy of which Portia spoke was found by the Rabbis neither outside of the law nor in opposition to it, but rather within and through the law itself. God’s law must embody justice, and there is no justice without compassion.

In an argument that anticipates Portia’s ridicule of law, the Rabbis point out the inherent absurdity and consequent injustice of *lex talionis*:

Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai said: “An eye for an eye”—this means monetary compensation. You say it means monetary compensation; but perhaps it is to be taken literally? Behold, if a blind assailant took out someone’s eye, or an amputee caused another the loss of a limb, or someone lame caused another to become lame, how am I to fulfill in this case “an eye for an eye”? Did not Scripture state, “there shall be one law for you” (Lev. 24:22), a law in which all are treated equally!” (BT Bava Kamma 84a).

One may say that Rabbi Simeon is engaging in a bit of casuistry, and indeed the Talmud goes on to suggest proofs for their interpretation that it considers more convincing. What unites and underlies all the interpretations, however, is a fundamental belief that God would not prescribe a punishment both useless and inhumane. Compassion is and must be a guiding force when pursuing justice.

The Rabbis understood well that the law is not always just. They struggled to counteract the inequities that are sometimes its result, and they were not indifferent to the claims of compassion—because they recognized that law (halakhah) is revealed to us through Torah, which we received as a consequence of God’s love for us. Law *itself* can be an expression of love when it is meant to guide us toward the good and the holy. As we read in the blessing before the Shema in the morning liturgy: “You have shown us a great love...you taught [our ancestors] live-giving laws; so too, show us favor and teach us.”

Refuah Shleymah רפואה שלמה

Adelah bat Avrom v'Chenya (Adele Abramowitz)	Miriam Shifra bat Issur (Margaret Sachs)	Alvin Jacobson Anne Boyd
Bedonna Riva bat Ya'akov v'Sarah (Donna Goldstein)	Moshe Yosef ben Vishka Elka (Michael Perkins)	Alan Marty Christine Walters
Chaim Michael ben Flora (Howard Margolis)	Ovadya ben Esther Malkah (Ovadya Fleishman)	Ezra Rapport Helen Rosenberg
Chana bat Malka	Sarah bat Hinda (Sylvia Dante)	Jack Reich Jeff Shields
Chana Leah bat Sarah (Anna Crollman)	Sarah Gittel bat Rut (Sue Perlo)	Joyce Romm Ken Walkters
David ben Sarah (David Leitner)	Shalom ben Sprintze (Stanley Ramati)	Lauren Schiro Netta Boswell
David Yosef ben Avraham v'Chana (Donald Goldstein)	Shira Batya bat Meirav	Orrie Wilner Richard Roth
Esther bat Yankale Sura	Shmuel ben Shoshana	Sidney Barker
Esther Malka bat Chaya Fruma (Elinor Fleishman)	Shrage ben Devorah Leah (Phillip Samuel Ramati)	
Herschel David ben Aharon haKohen u'Bela Miriam	Shraga Feivel ben Leib (Philip Skoletsky)	
Israel ben Zalman u'Malkah	Sura Malka bat Rivka (Molly Grossinger)	
Leah bat Miriam (Eileen Abramson)	Tuvia ben Shmuel v'Tziporah (Tovia Lebovich)	
Malka bat Leah (Meg Anderson)	Tziporah bat Esther	
Malka Chana bat Basha Rachel	Ya'akov Roni ben Margalit	
M'cor Eyshel bat Esther Tzvia	Yehoshua Heschel ben Tova Gitel (Joshua Shatz)	
Mishulamit bat Maryam (Marcia Hogan)	Yehoshua Yitzchak ben Ya'akov v'Sarah (Howard Goldstein)	
Miriam bat Batya (Joyce Gudeman)		Please contact the synagogue office with any additions or changes to this list.

Yahrzeits יארצייט

Albrecht Strauss	Rose Nydick	Marica Lynn August
James Guild	Alexander Koplowitz	Wendy Finger
Miriam Gingold	Ricka Hart	Morris Snyderman
Sylvia Slachter Levy	Charles Kaplan	
Arnold Lind	Alfred Veis	

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