



Shabbat Shalom

2 Sivan 5777
May 27, 2017

Parashat Bamidbar

This Week at Beth El Synagogue

Saturday, May 27:

Shabbat Mishnah Study	8:45 am
Orthodox Kehillah Services	9:00 am
Main Sanctuary Services	9:30 am
Havdallah	9:06 pm

Sunday, May 28:

Knitting Chevra at Gladys Siegel's home	10:30 am
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Monday, May 29

Memorial Day: OFFICE CLOSED

Tuesday, May 30:

Shavuot Ramadan Iftar and Study and Dinner	7:30 pm
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Wednesday, May 31:

OFFICE CLOSED

Weekly Wednesday Minyan	8:00 am
Shavuot I Services: Main Sanctuary	9:00 am
Shavuot I Services: Orthodox Kehillah and Yizkor	9:00 am

Thursday, June 1:

OFFICE CLOSED

Shavuot II: Main Sanctuary	9:00 am
Yizkor	10:30 am
Synagogue Life Committee Meeting	6:00 pm

Friday, June 2:

Kadima and 5th grade Shabbat at the Greybers'	6:30 pm
Candle Lighting	9:10 pm

Upcoming Events:

- ✧ Sat. 6/3 Shabbat Mishnah Study
- ✧ Sat. 6/3 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 6/3 Camp Send-Off Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Wed. 6/7 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Thu. 6/8 Learning and Loving Exchange: Potluck Break Fast at Ar Razzaq Islamic Center
- ✧ Sat. 6/10 Post Kiddush Talk: "Cultural Jew, Jew-by-Choice, and Jew: We come in Multiple Varieties," with Rabbi Listfield
- ✧ Wed. 6/14 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Fri 6/16 Got Shabbat? Poolside
- ✧ Sat. 6/17 Shabbat Mishnah Study
- ✧ Sat. 6/17 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 6/17 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Sat. 6/17 Healing Yoga
- ✧ Mon. 6/19 Institute of Islamic and Turkish Studies visit
- ✧ Tue. 6/20 Va'ad HaChinuch Meeting
- ✧ Wed. 6/21 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Sat. 6/24 Shabbat Mishnah Study
- ✧ Sat. 6/24 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 6/24 Shabbat Morning Services

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.



5/31 Shavuot I Matt Diamond mattdiamond@mindspring.com	919-916-6545
6/1 Shavuot II Shula Bernard shulabernard@gmail.com	919-967-9393
6/3 Naso Isaac Price isaac@isaacprice.org	919-866-5453
6/10 Beha'alotcha David Rubin David_s_rubin@hotmail.com	919-967-7725

Kiddush is sponsored by:

Janine & Kirk Beeson, Allison Oakes & Renzo Chauca Pibiri, Steven Rose, and Cheryl & William McCartney

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 Bemidbar

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

With the start of Sefer Bemidbar, the narrative of the Torah turns to the long journey of Benei Yisrael through the wilderness—punishment for the sin of the Golden Calf and preparation for entry into the Land of Israel. Passage into the sacred terrain first requires an arduous ordeal of wandering—a physical process of movement and quest. Penitence, pilgrimage, and transformation are anchored *in the space of wilderness*.

Moshe, too, after killing the Egyptian and prior to his divine call to leadership, retreats to the wilderness, a period of withdrawal into a space outside the habitation of society. It was only in that space, R. Bahya ben Asher suggests, far from the *yishuv* (dwelling place) of the population, that Moshe could reenact the prophetic encounter of his ancestors, a withdrawal for the sake of spiritual and moral elevation (commentary to Exod. 3:1). Like Moshe the solitary shepherd, the people of Israel must undergo a spiritual transformation, a process of purification—from the impure state of idolatry to the refined condition necessary to enter the holy land. This purification is represented by the desolate nature of the wilderness—a vast emptiness that facilitates a breakthrough in mind and soul. As Kathleen Norris has written, evoking life on the Great Plains of Dakota as a spiritual practice:

Here the eye learns to appreciate slight variations, the possibilities inherent in emptiness. It sees that the emptiness is full of small things... A person is forced inward by the spareness of what is outward and visible in all this land and sky... Maybe seeing the Plains is like seeing an icon: what seems stern and almost empty is merely open, a door into some simple and holy state (Dakota, pp. 156-7).

The experience of what appears to be emptiness is an opening into another state of spiritual perception, an opening of the heart into the concealed indwelling of divine holiness. The sublime interior of the human soul is revealed in that moment of mystery and grandeur before the vastness of the All.

Likewise, R. Bahya asks, restating an earlier midrashic teaching (Tanhuma, 6; Bemidbar Rabbah, 1:7): why does the Torah emphasize God’s speech to Moshe *in the wilderness of Sinai* (בְּמִדְבָּר)? (אין אדם קונה התורה עד שיעשה עצמו הפקר כמדבר) was to teach that “a person does not attain the Torah until they have made themselves empty and abandoned like the wilderness” (אין אדם קונה התורה עד שיעשה עצמו הפקר כמדבר) [commentary to Num. 1:1]. To receive the revelation of Torah—or perhaps a bit less grandly, to let Torah take root in one’s heart—a person must first make themselves into a *midbar*, an inner empty wilderness that is cleared of all the weeds and brush that obstruct true perception and feeling. A wilderness that returns to the first purity of nature.

Just as divine revelation and the Torah arise from the physical space of wilderness, of *midbar*—at the burning bush and then at Mount Sinai—a heart infused with divine Torah arises through a person’s mindful cultivation of their own interior wilderness. One should seek to attain the level of *hefker*—of feeling unbound by the pride and egoism of ownership, of being unattached to materialism. In *hefker* consciousness, we train our spiritual sight to see the Divine Presence that dwells beneath the surface, beneath the many golden calves of our obsessions, possessions, and wayward priorities. This is a radical reinvention of the concept of *hefker*, a neutral halakhic category of abandonment and ownerlessness (e.g. BT Eruvin, 45b).

In this transformed reading, the *midbar* may be said to embody a pure state of emptiness—an inner cleansing that allows us to go deeper into the spiritual path. Becoming *hefker kemidbar* is a process of letting go of our imprisonment in materiality, in ephemeral and finite desires—to be liberated into the vastness of an inner wilderness. As R. Nahman of Bratzlav taught (*Likutei Moharan* 1:52), the most profound opening of the heart to God takes place in the physical space of darkness and wilderness, the frightening ground of loneliness and alienation. It is in *hitbodedut* (solitude) that we are able to empty our minds and hearts of society’s overwhelming drumbeat, where the ultimate *bitul hayeish* (erasure of superficial, mundane consciousness) becomes possible, and we are truly opened in all of our vulnerability before Divinity. In that place of *midbar*, we are able to break open the heart in ways we didn’t know were possible, to cry out to God from a place of the deepest emotional honesty. The *midbar* is an inner place of psyche as much as it is a terrestrial location.

But it was *hefker kemidbar* as a state of *moral* piety that was first articulated by the Sages (see BT Sanhedrin, 49a; Bahya ben Asher, *Kad Hakemah*, “*Orhim*”; Metzudat David on I Kings 2:34), and this interpersonal dimension remains a powerful feature of the ideal to which we aspire. As these sources teach, one should make one’s home *hefker kemidbar*, free and open for all—cultivating an ethic of hospitality in which the poor and the less fortunate feel free to come and be cared for. The model of wilderness, of *midbar*, is here taken to be an inspiration to live a life of openness and kindness toward other human beings. As the modern monk Thomas Merton said: “The speech of God is silence. His Word is solitude...It is in deep solitude and silence that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brother and my sister” (*Entering the Silence*, 2:398). In this reading, *hefker* is understood in the most charitable and positive sense of “free for all,” as opposed to the more pejorative meaning of *hefker* as a chaotic and uncontrolled “free-for-all.” The openness of a *midbar*-state-of-being is one that inspires kindness and generosity: the gentleness needed to sincerely love one’s fellow person. That gentleness is the silent speech of God flowing through man and woman to be realized as moral living. Integrating Merton’s insight with the Jewish sources we have considered, the retreat of solitude is filled with the living word of God, the breath of divine sustenance. It is our spiritual work to let that divine solitude refine the openness and gentleness with which we treat our fellow human beings.

To paraphrase the teaching: You will attain the true soul of Torah only when you have made yourself *hefker kemidbar*—a person cleansed of superficial obsessions, gentle and generous toward other people, one who has nullified the grip of pride and egoism. As the early Hasidic rebbe R. Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk (*Pri Ha’aretz*, Letter 27) taught, true wisdom and humanity rises from the cultivation of deep humility:

The Torah only stands firm in one who makes himself like a *midbar hefker* before those who are poor of mind and rich of mind, and he doesn’t think of himself as better than his friend. On the contrary, he should be completely nullified before his friend, and it is through this that they become united and bound up one with the other.

True spiritual refinement, the deepest attainment of *hefker kemidbar*, must not remain at the level of individualistic mystical growth and the personal quest for divine revelation. To realize the ideals of piety, to ensconce the living Torah in the wholeness of oneself, a person must aspire toward a genuine humility, to avoid the harmful path of judgmentalism and arrogance. It is in the bond of loving friendship and fellowship, in kindness and humility toward the other, that the Torah—and God—are most radiantly revealed.

Refuah Shleymah רפואה שלמה

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

Yahrzeits יארצייט

Ann Feldman	Sarah Goldberg Sody	Aron Pas
Daniel Parker	Luan Walker	Earl Weaver
Morton Pizer	Eva Rosenstein Dave	Norma Greenberg
Abraham Telen	Bertram Lubar	Gerald Reed
Benjamin Pudolsky	Bruno Strauss	

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