



Shabbat Shalom

5 Sivan 5776

June 11, 2016

Parashat Bamidbar

This Week at Beth El Synagogue

Saturday, June 11: Erev Shavuot

Havdalah—9:14 pm

NO B'NEI MITZVAH PEER TUTORING

Shabbat Mishnah Study	8:45 am
Orthodox Kehillah Services	9:00 am
Main Sanctuary Services	9:30 am
Tikkun Leil Shavuot	8:30 pm

Sunday, June 12: Shavuot I

Shavuot Day I Services	9:00 am
Orthodox Kehillah Shavuot Day I and Yizkor Services	9:00 am
USY and Kadima Shavuot Ice Cream Party	1:00 pm

Monday, June 13: Shavuot Day II

BETH EL OFFICE CLOSED

Shavuot Day II and Yizkor Services	9:00 am
------------------------------------	---------

Tuesday, June 14:

Wednesday, June 15:

Weekly Wednesday Minyan	8:00 am
-------------------------	---------

Thursday, June 16:

Recovery International (RI) Support Group at Beth El	6:30 pm
---------------------------------------------------------	---------

Friday, June 17:

Candle Lighting—8:16 pm

Please note that the following programs have been suspended for the summer: Sunday Minyan. Sunday Minyan will resume on Sunday, 9/11 at 9:30 am.

This weekend's Kiddush lunch is sponsored by:
*Ruth Dzau, Sharon and Neil Freedman,
Deborah and Irwin Kahn, Jack Leiss,
Judith and Arthur Marks, &
Diane and Mark Pozefsky*

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. 6/18 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 6/18 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Sat. 6/18 Healing Yoga
- ✧ Mon. 6/20-Fri. 7/1 Israel Trip
- ✧ Mon. 6/20 PJ Library Family Movie Night
- ✧ Wed. 6/22 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Sat. 6/25 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 6/25 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Sun. 6/26 Social Action Wrap-Up
- ✧ Sun. 6/26 Monthly Durham Community Café Dinner
- ✧ Wed. 6/29 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Thu. 6/30 Recovery International Group
- ✧ Sat. 7/2 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 7/2 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Mon. 7/4 Beth El Office Closed

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.



6/11 Bamidbar Jon Wahl jmwahl@email.unc.edu	919-942-3827
6/12* 1 st day Shavuot Matt Diamond mattdiamond@mindspring.com	919-688-0377
6/13* 2 nd day Shavuot Alan Mandel andelcpa@gmail.com	917-589-5673
6/18 Naso Diane Markoff diane.markoff@earthlink.net	919- 969-8953

Parashat Bamidbar

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

The Midrash teaches us that God destroyed the world several times before creating our world (Bereishit Rabbah 3:7 and 9:2). Famously, after the flood, God establishes a covenant with Noah, Noah's sons, and all living things. God says: "I will maintain My covenant [beriti] with you: never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth" (Gen. 9:11). When we read this verse in light of the midrash, we understand that God came very close to destroying the world again, but managed to enact a symbolic destruction, providing some people and some of the living creatures with a way to survive. This covenant is the vehicle for keeping humanity and all of creation connected with the divine even when rupture looms as a possibility.

In this week's Torah and haftarah portions, the specter of rupture looms repeatedly. First, we are reminded of the deaths of Aaron's two older sons, Nadav and Avihu. Though they had entered into a sacred pact to serve God in the intimacy of God's holiest places, they got it wrong—they "offered alien fire before the Lord" (Num. 3:4)—and died as a result. Their missing the mark led to their deaths and a transfer of the sacred role from the older to the younger sons. Similarly, our parashah then recounts the undoing of the sacred place held by the firstborn sons, chosen to be dedicated to God when they were saved from the tenth plague, the plague of the slaying of the firstborn. While God simply asserts that Moses should substitute the Levites for the firstborn sons (Num. 3:41), we must notice that, once again, a special relationship of service has been abrogated and a new group has replaced the original one.

Finally, in the haftarah, Hosea tells the story of Israel the unfaithful, through the vehicle of Gomer, his harlot-wife. While there is much in this haftarah to suggest that rupture is imminent, the haftarah ends with the words of a covenant renewed:

And I will espouse you forever:

I will espouse you with righteousness and justice,
And with goodness and mercy (hesed verahamim),
And I will espouse you with faithfulness (be'emunah);
Then you shall be devoted (veyada'at) to the Lord. (Hos. 2:21-22)

Growing up, I always felt deeply confident that God's covenant with the Jewish people was inviolable. No matter what we did, God would always be connected to us, bound up in our fate. I have always found this promise tremendously reassuring. But when I read these texts, I start to feel an anxiety that the possibilities of rupture are real. The power of Hosea's words is precisely the knowledge that the binding of God and Israel cannot be taken for granted. We cannot read the verses I have quoted without having an awareness of the danger of that covenant being dissolved. Surely the naming of Gomer's son makes the reality of the severing of relationship very clear. "Then He said, 'Name him Lo-ammi [not my people]; for you are not My people and I will not be your [God]'" (Hos. 1:9).

Given that Hosea's story focuses on the relationship between God and Israel through the paradigm of marriage, the haftarah quite naturally leads me to think about the reality of covenant in terms of divorce. The Jewish wedding incorporates the possibility of the rupture of the marriage, by way of either divorce or death, through the vehicle of the ketubbah. The ketubbah's original purpose was to protect the woman in case of divorce or death. One might ask: why must the specter of separation enter into the joy of the wedding day? While that desire to flee from reality is understandable, I find it heartening that Judaism does not indulge us in this way. Even on the day when we commit ourselves to our beloved, we must acknowledge that the union cannot rest on the reassurance that the covenant is permanent. We must make provisions for proper treatment of one another even in worst-case scenarios. It is only when we make room for those possibilities that we can make the difficult choices that will enable us to live in right relationship. Only when I know that divorce is real can I stop and listen to my partner when he or she is frustrated with the same fight we've had over and over. Only when I know that death is real can I make choices about how to live in the face of overwhelming limitations. A marriage that cannot envision that the marriage itself is a fragile arrangement is not a marriage that can be challenged to make difficult choices when crises emerge.

So I return to the verse from Hosea, "And I will espouse you forever." How does that espousal work? Judaism guides us in making this process concrete. Every day (except Shabbat), when Jews wrap tefillin (phylacteries), we say these verses as we wrap. The wrapping and reciting become a meditation about recommitting ourselves to the hard work of being espoused. I cannot be passive. I must act. So I affirm, "I will espouse you with righteousness and justice." There's a promise in there that my actions will lead to just desserts. So then I say, "And with goodness and mercy (hesed verahamim)." These attributes reassure me that even though I must focus on what I can do, the reality that follows my actions is tied up in God's boundless love and mercy, the boundless love and mercy of the other. Even when I err, rupture is not decidedly what follows. So then I say, "And I will espouse you with faithfulness." This faithfulness, emunah, draws on the idea of trust and steadfastness. When we live with a balance of all these attributes, then we can be faithfully bound to one another and to God. This sense of balance enables us to say "veyadat et Adonai," which I would translate as "then you shall know God."

The sacred partnership with another human being echoes our sacred partnership with God. When we know another person in loving relationship, and respect that we cannot take that relationship for granted, then we become motivated to make the choices that keep the relationship vital. We must do the same in our relationship with the Divine.

Refuah Shleymah רפואה שלמה

Aharon ben David v'Miriam (Alan Goldman)	Reuven ben Chanoch v'Dinah (Robert Feurst)	Lorraine Morley Ezra Rapport
Baracha bat Sarah	Sarah bat Hinda (Sylvia Dante)	Jack Reich
Chana bat Malka	Sarah Gittel bat Rut (Sue Perlo)	Richard Roth
Chana Leah bat Sarah (Anna Crollman)	Shira Batya bat Meirav	Lauren Schiro
David ben Sarah (David Leitner)	Shmuel ben Shoshana	Edward Thompson-Starkey
David Yosef ben Avraham v'Chana (Donald Goldstein)	Tuvia ben Shmuel v'Tziporah (Tovia Lebovich)	Susan Tolchin Christine Walters
Eliyahu Chanan ben Sarah (Ed Gagnon)	Tziporah bat Esther	Derrick Williams
Esther Malka bat Chaya Fruma (Elinor Fleishman)	Ya'akov ben Sarah (Jacob Schonberg)	Orrie Wilner
Malka bat Leah (Meg Anderson)	Ya'akov Roni ben Margalit	Please contact the synagogue office with any additions or changes to this list.
Malka Chana bat Basha Rachel	Anne Boyd	
M'cor Eyshe bat Esther Tzvia	Cynthia Brown	
Miriam Shifra bat Issur (Margaret Sachs)	Sammy Follodor	
Ovadya ben Elinor (Ovadya Fleishman)	Riki Friedman	
	Alan Marty	
	Inez McFarling	

Yahrzeits יארצייט

May their memory be a blessing

Jeremy Bland	Norbert Nevid
Eva Rosenstein Dave	Aron Pas
Bella Goldstein	Gerald Reed
Norma Greenberg	Esther Silverman
Carrie Hayer	Bruno Strauss
Annie Levy	Earl Weaver
Bertram Lubar	
Maria Mikhalevsky	

BE Mazel Tov

Mazel Tov to the follow community members on their birthdays!
Beth Berman, Sylvia Dante, Sandy Fangmeier, David Goldman, Debbie Goldstein, Lorri Gudeman, Bruce Guild, Ann Leibel, Samuel Ramler, Michael Schoenfeld, Len Spevak, James Tulsy

BE Remembered

Beth El Synagogue extends condolences to Marilyn Telen and Henry Greene and their family on the death of Marilyn's father, Abraham Telen -- Avraham ben Yeshayahu, who passed away Thursday morning in Durham. Funeral services will be held in New York. Information about a local shiva minyan will be forthcoming.

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