



Shabbat Shalom

23 Sivan 5777
June 17, 2017

Parashat Sh'lach

This Week at Beth El Synagogue

Saturday, June 17:

Orthodox Kehillah Services	9:00 am
Main Sanctuary Services	9:30 am
Healing Yoga	10:00 am
Post Kiddush class with Sheva Zucker	12:30 pm
Havdallah	9:16 pm

Monday, June 19:

Institute of Islamic and Turkish Studies	7:00 pm
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Wednesday, June 21:

Weekly Wednesday Minyan	8:00 am
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Friday, June 23:

Candle Lighting	8:18 pm
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Upcoming Events:

- ✧ Sat. 6/24 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 6/24 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Wed. 6/28 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Sat. 7/1 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 7/1 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Wed. 7/5 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Sat. 7/8 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 7/8 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Wed. 7/12 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Sat. 7/15 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Wed. 7/19 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Sat. 7/22 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 7/22 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Wed. 7/26 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Sat. 7/29 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 7/29 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Mon. 7/31 Tish'a B'Av Community 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.



6/24 Korah/RH Tammuz Diane Markoff Diane.markoff@earthlink.net	919-969-8953
7/1 Hukat Roger Perilstein rperilstein@hrc-pa.com	919-286-9814
7/8 Balak Matt Diamond mattdiamond@mindspring.com	919-906-6545
7/15 Pinchas David Kirsch dkirsch@md.duke.edu	919-286-4516

Kiddush is sponsored by:
Beth El Synagogue

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 Sh'lach

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

In light of the recent work of colleagues and friends regarding the boundaries of the Jewish people and how that impacts the weddings that should or should not be performed, I cannot but help to read this Shabbat's *parashah* in terms of boundaries.

The *midbar*—the desert as a metaphor—is a wild, boundaryless place. As the Talmud famously states, "*midbar mufkar lakol*": the desert is free and will always remain ownerless. It will always be a space without walls or structure. It's a place where we wandered aimlessly for 40 years between where we had to leave and where we wanted to go.

The *midbar* as a metaphor is never meant to be a place where B'nei Yisrael makes a home. We camped and we picked up, always moving and never putting down roots. The Jewish people are meant to transition out of this place which is really no-place. If the desert is ownerless (*mufkar*), no one takes responsibility in this (no) place; lawlessness reigns.

In fact, much of the Book of Bemidbar concerns learning about the new boundaries, both physical and otherwise, that the Torah seeks to establish. In this undifferentiated, wild space of the desert, B'nei Yisrael learn how to structure the physical camp and are instructed as to how the camp should travel. They begin to learn about the mitzvot, the new norms and obligations that constitute the spiritual language that will mediate their relationship with God. These mitzvot hope to give structure, direction, and content to the communities they will soon build once they enter the Land.

The Sages understood the undifferentiated expanse of the *midbar* as a place where God had not quite finished the work of Creation. This makes sense if we remember that before Creation, the world was unformed, and thus, chaos. God's work in Genesis 1 was principally the creation of boundaries. The act of separation both creates the "thing"—with its own unique identity—and allows for its perception. God teased apart light from darkness and birthed Day and Night. God separated "water from water" and created the sky, the land, and the seas.

The act of separating redeems the world from undifferentiated chaos. It is only by the act of separation (*havdalah*) that discrete entities—with their own unique identities—emerge. With its very first chapter, our Torah reminds us of a self-evident but at times elusive fact: that in order for something to exist it must have boundaries that distinguish it from other things. And because boundaries allow things to exist as themselves, the Torah sees them as a source of profound blessing (see Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Fine Line*, 1-20).

With this idea in mind, perhaps we can make more sense out of a strange incident at the end of our parashah:

Once, when the Israelites were in the *midbar*, they came upon an [Israelite] man (*mekoshesh*) gathering wood on the Sabbath day. (Num. 15:32)

This man will be detained and ultimately put to death, yet fundamental questions remain. Who was this person and what exactly did he do that was so horrible?

In an attempt to makes sense of this narrative, I draw our attention to the seemingly redundant word "*midbar*" in this introductory verse. Is it not clear that this incident is occurring in the desert?

I suggest that this use of the word "*midbar*" frames and unlocks the meaning of the event that follows. The "*mekoshesh*" is a man of the "*midbar*." He wants an approach to life without boundaries and limitations. He wants to move where and when he wants. The communal spiritual language of responsibility for the world, which is expressed as mitzvot, is not compelling for him. Communal norms stifle his individuality and rein in his autonomy.

Interestingly, there is an opinion in the Talmud in the name of Shmuel that identifies the act of the *mekoshesh* as carrying sticks between the public and private domains on Shabbat. Defined as such, his act constitutes a violation of the prohibition of moving an object from one domain to another. But his sin is not simply transgressing a general Sabbath prohibition. His particular infraction may actually be understood as attacking the *entire project of setting boundaries*—both literally (between public and private spaces) and symbolically. He acts to efface the setting of symbolic lines that are intended to give shape to the emerging nation of the Jewish people (see also Rabbi Shai Piron, *He'arot Shulayim*, 314).

After leaving Egypt, the Israelites will forge themselves into a people whose identity coheres around a commitment to the norms of the Covenant. Mitzvot constitute the particular conversation of meaning that will define this nation. The behavior of the *mekoshesh* is problematic not because of a single infraction. This unnamed man attempts to blur the boundaries that were intended to help form the national and religious identity of the Jewish people. The punishment is clearly not acceptable for our historical moment, but the existential fear engendered by a religious worldview that seeks to efface and elide the meaningfulness of life-giving boundaries does resonate for me. Of course, many serious and committed Jews will differ as to the boundaries of Judaism. But the *mekoshesh* seems not to simply disagree about particulars. He attacks the religious project of boundary drawing in general.

Which brings me back to the recent thinking and writing regarding weddings between Jews and non-Jews. In these rabbis' heartfelt efforts to respond to the challenge of intermarriage, they are undermining the boundaries that allow for meaningful Jewish identity. And without a core and compelling identity, Judaism will lose its power to inspire.

No doubt the concept of identity is blurry; life is rarely understood completely with binary ideas. But if we were to expand the definition of Jewishness to make room for Jew-ish, and if "committed fans of the Jewish people," "God-fearers," or "psycho-Semitic Gentiles" were to become new categories in Judaism, then perhaps we would have pushed the definition of "Jewish" beyond all real coherence.

To be clear, all of us must work toward creating loving and welcoming communities that

embrace family and community members who have decided not to join the Jewish people. But as we take up this challenge, we must also consider how our responses to these demographic challenges will alter the richness and depth of the Judaism we will offer our children. If we perform a wedding between a Jew and a *fan-of-the-Jews*—someone who is not yet ready to attach themselves to the destiny of the Jewish people—we erode the ability for Judaism to be a religion of norms and aspirations. And even if rabbis assert certain prescriptions around the performance of intermarriage—after this boundary is officially breached—how long before those restrictions go by the wayside? Over decades, it has proven impossible to advocate compellingly for in marriage after rabbis start performing intermarriage. Once a rabbi stands underneath a huppah in front of a Jew and a non-Jewish partner, all that people will see is an acceptance of intermarriage. As a community abandons use of the word "should" in its vocabulary, it will lose much of its power to religiously inspire. Such a Judaism will no longer be a source for moral agitation and personal growth, but will instead serve only to confirm ideas and values already held.

Refuah Shleymah רפואה שלמה

Adelah bat Avrom v'Chenya (Adele Abramowitz)	Miriam bat Batya (Joyce Gudeman)	Alvin Jacobson Anne Boyd
Chana bat Malka	Miriam Shifra bat Issur (Margaret Sachs)	Alan Marty Christine Walters
Chana Leah bat Sarah (Anna Crollman)	Moshe Yosef ben Vishka Elka (Michael Perkins)	Ezra Rapport Gail Freeman
David ben Sarah (David Leitner)	Ovadya ben Esther Malkah (Ovadya Fleishman)	Harold Strauss Helen Rosenberg
David Yosef ben Avraham v'Chana (Donald Goldstein)	Sarah bat Hinda (Sylvia Dante)	Jack Reich Jeff Shields
Esther bat Yankale Sura	Sarah Gittel bat Rut (Sue Perlo)	Joyce Romm Ken Walkters
Esther Malka bat Chaya Fruma (Elinor Fleishman)	Shalom ben Sprintze (Stanley Ramati)	Lauren Schiro Netta Boswell
Gershon Yonah ben Tevya haKohen v'Chanah Leah haLevi (Harlan Gradin)	Shira Batya bat Meirav Shmuel ben Shoshana	Orrie Wilner Richard Roth
Herschel David ben Aharon haKohen u'Bela Miriam	Shrage ben Devorah Leah (Phillip Samuel Ramati)	Sidney Barker
Israel ben Zalman u'Malkah Leah bat Miriam (Eileen Abramson)	Shraga Feivel ben Leib (Philip Skoletsky)	
Malka bat Leah (Meg Anderson)	Sura Malka bat Rivka (Molly Grossinger)	
Malka Chana bat Basha Rachel	Tuvia ben Shmuel v'Tziporah (Tovia Lebovich)	
M'cor Eyshel bat Esther Tzvia	Tziporah bat Esther	
Michael Pinchas ben Binyamin v'Rachel	Ya'akov Roni ben Margalit	
Mishulamit bat Maryam (Marcia Hogan)	Yehoshua Heschel ben Tova Gittel (Joshua Shatz)	

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

Yahrzeits יארצייט

Milton Goldstein	Mollie Fridovich	Joseph L. Wechsler
Tirtza Leiss	Irene Markoff	Lottie Frohman
Eunice Kresses	Theodore Brody	Julius Concors
Loewinsohn	Esther Markman Enzer	Isaac Evans
Daniel Miller	Elie Wiesel	Reba Levine
Amanda Stang	Dennis Hart	Rose Sugarman
Leonard Becker		

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