



Shabbat Shalom

19 Sivan 5776

June 25, 2016

Parashat Beha'alotcha

This Week at Beth El Synagogue

Saturday, June 25:

Havdalah—9:18 pm

NO B'NEI MITZVAH PEER TUTORING

NO SHABBAT MISHNAH STUDY

Beth El in Israel

Orthodox Kehillah Services 9:00 am

Main Sanctuary Services 9:30 am

Sunday, June 26:

Beth El in Israel

Jewish Food Festival 11:00 am

Monthly Durham Community Café 5:30 pm

Monday, June 27:

Beth El in Israel

Tuesday, June 28:

Beth El in Israel

Wednesday, June 29:

Beth El in Israel

Weekly Wednesday Minyan 8:00 am

Thursday, June 30:

Beth El in Israel

Recovery International (RI) 6:30 pm

Support Group at Beth El

Friday, July 1:

Candle Lighting—8:18 pm

Beth El in Israel

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

This weekend's Kiddush lunch is sponsored by:
*Beth El Synagogue and
cosponsored by Barb Carter & Marc Moskovitz*

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. 7/2 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 7/2 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Mon. 7/4 Beth El Office Closed
- ✧ Wed. 7/6 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Thu. 7/7 MoB Durham Bulls Game
- ✧ Thu. 7/7 Recovery International Group
- ✧ Fri. 7/8 Partners for Youth Opportunity
- ✧ Sat. 7/9 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 7/9 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Sat. 7/9 Healing Yoga
- ✧ Mon. 7/11 Social Action Steering Committee Planning Meeting
- ✧ Tue. 7/12 Ritual Committee Meeting
- ✧ Wed. 7/13 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Thu. 7/14 Recovery International Group
- ✧ Fri. 7/15 Partner for Youth Opportunity
- ✧ Sat. 7/16 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 7/16 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.



6/25 Beha'alotcha
Diane Markoff
diane.markoff@earthlink.net 919- 969-8953

7/2 Shelach Lekha
David Rubin
david_rubin@unc.edu 919-967-7725

7/9 Korach
Bernie Fischer
Bernie.fischer@duke.edu 919-493-0306

7/16 Chukat
Jon Wahl
jmwahl@email.unc.edu 919-942-3827

Parashat Beha'alotcha

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

The concluding episode of this week's parashah is one of the most well-known and intriguing stories in the Torah, that of Miriam and Aaron publicly maligning Moses and the consequences thereof. The basic elements of the narrative (Num. 12:1-16) are these: Miriam and Aaron speak out against Moses regarding the Cushite woman he has married, and complain that he is not the only prophet in the family. God has spoken through the two of them, as well. God hears all of this. The story interjects that Moses is the humblest man on the face of the earth. All of a sudden, God summons the three siblings to the Tent of Meeting, descends to the entry of the Tent in a cloud, and calls out Miriam and Aaron. God chastises them and informs them that, though they may have been given the gift of prophecy, they are not in the same class as Moses. Moses's relationship with God is unique, his communication more intimate, and his prophecy of a different order than that of all other prophets—a superior order.

After berating them, God is still angry, and when the cloud representing God's presence withdraws from the Tent, Miriam is left afflicted with tzara'at, her skin turned white and flaking off. Recognizing the severity of her condition, Aaron acknowledges the grave wrong he and Miriam committed against Moses and begs his brother to intercede on Miriam's behalf. Moses utters the famous prayer "El na, refa na lah," "Please, God; please heal her!" God orders that she be publicly disgraced by being banished from the camp for seven days, after which she is readmitted and the Israelites decamp for the wilderness of Paran.

The story raises questions on many levels, questions that have fascinated commentators for generations. What was the nature of Miriam and Aaron's complaint, and what were the family dynamics underlying it? Was this simply a case of sibling rivalry? Why did God single out Miriam, and not Aaron, for punishment? Did Miriam—the older sister, who had not only helped save Moses's life when he was placed in the basket on the river, but had helped him maintain his connection to his people by arranging for his mother to nurse him after Pharaoh's daughter had adopted him, and had helped Moses lead the Israelites out of Egypt—feel she should have had a say in Moses's choice of a wife? Was it perhaps because Moses had become the singular prophet, the supreme leader? Did Miriam feel she and Aaron were being tossed aside now that their help was no longer needed?

What about Zipporah, the Cushite wife? Was she the problem? Was there something about her that aroused Miriam's disfavor? Was it her beauty, her blackness, her foreignness, her otherness? All these have been invoked by Bible commentators. Or was she merely a vehicle for the criticism and belittling of Moses?

We are told that Moses was the humblest man in the world, but what was the nature of that humility? Some translate anav as "meek" rather than "humble," and some commentators explain that on account of Moses's meekness, God had to intervene on his behalf because he was unable to do so for himself. Some take the opposite tack and explain that Moses was so sure of his value, his abilities, and his stature that he had no need to respond to the attacks leveled against him, that doing so would be beneath him.

Some explain that God called Miriam and Aaron out of the Tent of Meeting before chastising them so that their degradation would be public. This public shaming was, according to some, particularly appropriate because an important element of their transgression was that their complaint was made behind Moses's back; they did not have the courage to face him with their criticism.

When Miriam is stricken with the skin malady that makes her look like death itself, why does Moses intercede with God on her behalf? Is he ambivalent, or does he believe she is getting what she deserves? Does sibling feeling trump justice, or does he need her with him to continue the journey? Finally, Miriam suffers the humiliation of ostracism from the community, which must await her return to its midst before continuing its journey.

This story has inspired numerous midrashim and commentaries exploring the narrative elements within its boundaries. And yet, as I read the story today, I have found it impossible not to reflect on the current political season in the United States and, more broadly, on the state of interpersonal communication in our society as a whole. The lack of civility and the vulgarity in our political discourse has been both shocking and, in some instances, truly frightening. We are witnessing a political campaign of the battling tweets. To be sure, ad hominem attacks, negative campaign ads, and smear tactics are not new, but avenues of electronic communication like Twitter and comments sections have brought them to a whole new level. Users can post anonymously and never have to face those about whom they are writing. They can instantaneously reach thousands or even millions of people.

It is not only our political discourse which has suffered. Online bullying has become a serious problem, especially among adolescents. It is so easy to do. It is so easy to be anonymous. It is so easy to gang up on those who are vulnerable and unable to defend themselves. There are so few repercussions. We hear all too often about young people driven to suicide by this bullying. We must ask how many of them would have acted as they did if they had had to face their victim directly and see firsthand the suffering they caused. Remember, our Sages have told us that the reason God became so angry at Miriam and Aaron was that they spoke out against Moses behind his back.

Even electronic communication that is more benign has negative potential. Who of us has not sent an email we wish we could retract? We have become so used to instantaneous communication that we do not take the time to reflect before hitting the Send button. The word friend has become a verb and connotes an entirely different kind of relationship than the noun used to. And our thoughts are measured by the number of characters into which they can be put rather than the character they reflect.

Lest you think I am some kind of Luddite, I will readily admit that social media and newer methods of communication have much to offer. But we should remember that it comes with risks and it comes at a price. We risk inflicting pain, intentionally or unintentionally, and we risk making mistakes that cannot be undone. We pay a price in empathy and intimacy, the kind that comes from truly seeing the tzelem Elohim, the image of God, in our fellow human being.

Our Sages paid close attention to this story of Miriam, Aaron, and Moses and found in it a warning about lashon hara ("malicious speech") and motzi shem ra ("slander"). They recognized that the potential damage to the individual and the body politic had to be dealt with by at least temporary social ostracism. This is not a story about evil people; Miriam and Aaron are heroic figures. But even heroes can give in to this all-too-easy transgression. How much more so for the rest of us?

Refuah Shleymah רפואה שלמה

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

Yahrzeits יארצייטן

May their memory be a blessing

Gregory Chase Barry	Eunice Kresses Loewinsohn
Leonard Becker	Daniel Miller
Theodore Brody	Margot Sandick
Lawrence Fox	Sidney Shapiro
Fannie Promisel Freedman	Earl Siegel
Mollie Fridovich	Amanda Stang
Milton Goldstein	Edmund Stolzenberg
Hyman Kresses	
Tirtza Leiss	

BE Mazel Tov

Mazel Tov to the follow community members on their birthdays! Joel Abramowitz, Kathy Bartelmay, Sheila Kendrick, Annette Kirshner, Michael Lamvik, Tal Lewin Wittle, Stanley Ramati, Steve Sager, Cynia Shimm, Norman Weiner, Aliza Zaleon.

Nisiya Tova to all of the participants on the Beth El Synagogue trip to Israel! Have a great time and we cannot wait to hear all of the amazing stories and memories you bring home!

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 Yeshayah, who passed away June 9 in Durham.

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Rabbi: Daniel Greyber
Rabbi Emeritus: Steven Sager
Synagogue President: Noah Pickus