



Shabbat Shalom

9 Sivan 5777

June 3, 2017

Parashat Nasso

This Week at Beth El Synagogue

Saturday, June 3:

Shabbat Mishnah Study	8:45 am
Orthodox Kehillah Services	9:00 am
Main Sanctuary Services— Summer Send-off	9:30 am
Havdallah	9:10 pm

Sunday, June 4:

Board Retreat	8:30 am
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Wednesday, June 7:

Weekly Wednesday Minyan	8:00 am
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Thursday, June 8:

Interfaith Learning and Loving Exchange: Potluck dinner at Ar Razzaq Islamic Center	7:30 pm
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Friday, June 9:

Candle Lighting	8:13 pm
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Upcoming Events:

- ✧ Sat. 6/10 Shabbat Mishnah Study- Last one till Fall
- ✧ Sat. 6/10 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 6/10 Post Kiddush Talk: "Cultural Jew, Jew-by-Choice, and Jew: We come in Multiple Varieties," with Rabbi Stephen Listfield
- ✧ Mon. 6/12 Sisterhood Board Meeting
- ✧ Wed. 6/14 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Fri 6/16 Got Shabbat? Poolside
- ✧ 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 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

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.



6/10 Beha'alotcha David Rubin David_s_rubin@hotmail.com	919-967-7725
6/17 Sh'lach Lekha Bernie Fischer Bernie.fischer@duke.edu	919-493-0306
6/24 Korah/RH Tammuz Diane Markoff Diane.markoff@earthlink.net	919-969-8953
7/1 Hukkat Roger Perilstein rperilstein@hrc-pa.com	919-286-9814

Kiddush is hosted by:

Norma & Bob Gindes, Sue Gidwitz & Gail Freeman, Libby Vaughn, and Leslie Winner & Gerald Postema

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 Nasso

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

Modern Judaism has a problem with the priesthood. The notion of hereditary holiness—that one segment of the Jewish people is set apart from others, given ceremonial privileges, and invited to bless the people—conflicts with our egalitarian ethos. The strange rituals of the priests, especially when they are invited to raise their hands in blessing the people, feel magical and irrational. For these reasons, many non-Orthodox communities have diminished or even eliminated the priestly privileges such as reserving the first aliyot for *kohanim* and *Levi'im*. On festivals, when priests traditionally ascend to the bimah during the *Musaf* service and chant the biblical blessings from underneath their tallit, many of our congregations simply assign the role to the leader, regardless of tribal status.

Yet there remain passionate defenders of the priestly prerogatives, and they, too, have their reasons. First, of course, the Torah itself defines an elaborate role for the tribe of Levi and within it, the descendants of Aaron. In our portion this week we read, “And they shall set My Name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.” R' Yehoshua b. Levi states in the Talmud (BT Sotah 38b) that a *kohen* who refuses to bless the people violates three commandments (for the three times that the Torah instructs *kohanim* to bless the people).

Beyond the biblical imperative, the priestly blessing also infuses ritual with mystery. Further, it is a deeply meaningful family tradition for many *kohanim*. Although traditionally women were excluded from the ritual, the CJLS approved a 1994 responsum by [Rabbi Mayer Rabinowitz](#) called “[Women, Raise Your Hands](#),” which argued that women from priestly families also have the ability to bless the community, and therefore may play all of the liturgical roles traditionally assigned to male priests. These reasons suffice for many of our congregations to continue, restore, or initiate the traditional practice of inviting priests to bless the community from the bimah (*dukhening*) on festivals.

When I was a pulpit rabbi, I served a congregation that was founded in the 1940s, during the height of 20th-century rationalism, and had never included the ritual of *dukhening*. With the dawn of the 21st century and increasing interest in the mystical side of Judaism, as well as in the exploration of family genealogy, I proposed that we institute the priestly blessing on festivals. While most congregants supported the move, and we did indeed begin the practice, others were unhappy and even offended. The most passionate objection was that putting the priests on a pedestal to bless the congregation was not appropriate, because they were not necessarily better models of piety than anyone else. One congregant raised a sensitive concern that this practice would invite others to make unflattering comments along the lines of, “If you knew what I know about Mr. Cohen, you wouldn’t want his blessing.”

This congregant had a good point. Indeed, there are many centuries of literature addressing precisely her concern. In the Talmud Yerushalmi (Gittin 5:9, 47b), Rav Huna says that even if there is only one *kohen* (priest) present to say the blessing, the prayer leader should still cry out in the plural, “*kohanim*,” to show that it is the tribe, not the individual, that offers blessing. He continues: “This is lest a person should say, *this kohen has had illicit sex, or shed blood, and now he is going to bless us?* God says, *the priests will pronounce My name, but I will bless the people.*”

Concerns about the attitudes of the people to the priests are explored in the halakhic literature (See Shulhan Arukh OH 128). Some of these concerns seem to be reasonable. For example, according to Rabbi Karo, a *kohen* who has killed a person, even unintentionally, may never again raise his hands in blessing lest it distract the people, just as the Yerushalmi fears. Even so, Rabbi Moshe Isserles permits a *kohen* who has killed but then repented to offer blessings, lest his repentance be discouraged. The people are instructed to be forgiving, and thus worthy of the blessing.

What about the attitude of the *kohen* toward the people? Does it suffice for the *kohen* to say the words and trust that God will show mercy upon the people, even if the *kohen* himself is filled with anger or indifference toward them? This is a question where the mystical book of Zohar effectively weaves together the biblical and rabbinic materials to influence the halakhah in a very meaningful fashion. In the book of Proverbs (22:9) we read, “one who is generous will be blessed”; an alternative translation would be, “only a person who looks well upon others may bless them.” In the Talmud (BT Sotah 39a) R' Zeira teaches in the name of R' Hisda that before uttering the priestly benediction, the *kohen* says the following blessing: “...who has commanded us regarding the holiness of Aaron, commanding us to bless God’s people Israel with love.” Those final two words, “with love,” imply that the priest needs to be filled with mercy at the time of blessing. The Zohar expands upon this theme (Vol. 3, 147b; see Daniel Matt edition, vol.8, 479f), saying, “Any priest who does not love the people, or whom the people do not love, should not spread his hands to bless the people.” The Zohar cites our verse from Proverbs to prove the point.

So, is it mystical and irrational to invite the priests up to bless the people? Yes, it is, in the best possible sense. When a congregation can set aside its disagreements and accept the blessings of even unpopular members, that is irrational and mysterious. When a *kohen* who is an otherwise plain person with no leadership profile is nevertheless invited to offer a blessing, and when that person does so with love, that, too, is irrational and mysterious.

Thank God for such irrational and mysterious behaviors! To be critical of each other and filled with harsh judgment is frequently rational and fully justified. We are living in a highly rancorous environment where our worst assumptions of other people are being confirmed each day. Nothing can be more rational than to criticize and even despise our fellow citizens. But the mystery of faith is animated by the power of mercy to overwhelm judgment, and love to banish hatred. When the priests pronounce God’s name in love, then mercy links heaven and earth, and the world becomes fertile with blessing. What is true of the priests is true of each of us—after all, we, too, are commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves. May we summon the irrational and mysterious ability to ignore the faults of others, and to bless them with love. In so doing, may we in turn receive God’s mysterious and irrational blessing.

Refuah Shleymah רפואה שלמה

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

Yahrzeits יארצייט

Jeremy Bland	Molly Zauder	Gordon Empey
Bella Goldstein	Peggy Elizabeth Silver Huffman	Lily Feiler
Maria Mikhalevsky	Marilyn Lubar	Willard Gidwitz
Esther Silverman	Lotte Herzfeld	Carrie Hayer
Annie Levy	Herman B. Kushner	Amram Rasiel

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