



# Shabbat Shalom

10 Tamuz 5776

July 16, 2016

Parashat Chukat

## This Week at Beth El Synagogue

### Saturday, July 16:

*Havdalah—9:13 pm*

NO B'NEI MITZVAH PEER TUTORING

NO SHABBAT MISHNAH STUDY

Orthodox Kehillah Services 9:00 am

Main Sanctuary Services 9:30 am

dvar torah given by Rabbi Fox

### Sunday, July 17:

PJ Library Story Hour 4:00 pm

### Monday, July 18:

Sisterhood Board Meeting 7:30 pm

### Tuesday, July 19:

Va'ad Meeting 7:00 pm

Finance Committee 7:30 pm

### Wednesday, July 20:

Weekly Wednesday Minyan 8:00 am

### Thursday, July 21:

Recovery International (RI) 6:30 pm

Support Group at Beth El

### Friday, July 22:

*Candle Lighting—8:09 pm*

\*\*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*

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. 7/23 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 7/23 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Wed. 7/27 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Thu. 7/28 Recovery International (RI) Support Group at Beth El
- ✧ Sat. 7/30 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 7/30 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Wed. 8/3 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Thu. 8/4 Synagogue Life Committee Meeting
- ✧ Thu. 8/4 Recovery International (RI) Support Group at Beth El
- ✧ Sat. 8/6 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 8/6 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Sat. 8/6 Healing Yoga
- ✧ Mon. 8/8 MoB Bowling
- ✧ Tue. 8/9 PJ Library Pool Party and Ice Cream Social
- ✧ Wed. 8/10 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Thu. 8/11-Mon. 8/15 Sicha Shabbaton
- ✧ Thu. 8/11 Recovery International (RI) Support group at Beth El

### 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.



- 7/16 Chukat  
Jon Wahl  
jmwahl@email.unc.edu 919-942-3827
- 7/23 Balak  
Shula Bernard  
shulabernard@gmail.com 919-967-9393
- 7/30 Pinchas  
Diane Markoff  
diane.markoff@earthlink.net 919-969-8953
- 8/6 Matot-Masei  
Isaac Price  
Isaac@isaacprice.org 919-866-5453

# Parashat Chukat

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

Bereft, I combed through the grass in Central Park at dusk when I realized I had lost my late husband's house keys. Yes, on some level, I knew it wasn't about the keys. His sudden death two months earlier had devastated me in much more profound ways. And yet, I felt desperate to find those keys!

Many are the paths of grieving, and they are irrational and ever shifting. This week's parashah, which includes the deaths of Miriam and Aaron, gives us the opportunity to reflect on the grieving process.

Aaron's death is the more well known. An influential leader and the first high priest, Aaron merited a public ritualized mourning. God prepared the people for his death by instructing Moses to enact the transfer of the high priesthood from Aaron to his son, Eleazar. The three men ascended Mount Hor, where Moses stripped Aaron of his vestments and dressed Eleazar in them. When only Moses and Eleazar descended from the mountain, with the latter dressed as high priest, this signaled to the people that Aaron had died. And then the Torah tells us that all the people bewailed his death for 30 days; Aaron was the first biblical figure about whom we are told that the people mourned for such a period (Num. 20:23-29).

Miriam's death is simply recorded; nothing is said about the circumstances of her death or the people's reaction to it (Num. 20:1). Notable because her death is one of only four women's deaths mentioned in the Torah (the others being Sarah, Rachel, and Rachel's nurse Deborah), Miriam was buried, but we don't know by whom. She had led the women in song as the Israelites crossed the Red Sea and had earned the designation of prophet, one so rare for a woman. Did her death not also elicit public mourning?

Surely silence about how the people mourned Miriam's death reflects to some degree a gender bias in the Torah that privileges men's stories. But there are other matters to consider, as well. According to Rashi, Rashbam, and other commentators, Miriam's death took place in the 40th year of wandering in the desert. The oldest of the three siblings, who had watched over Moses when he was placed in the river, Miriam could have been a full generation older than her brother, and thus quite elderly at her death. She had likely long since faded from public view, a function both of her advanced age and the fall from grace symbolized by her affliction with a skin disease after she spoke out against Moses's wife (Num. 12). Moreover, most of her generation had surely already died—the tradition tells us that none would enter the Land—and in the 40th year, few of the remaining Israelites who had exited Egypt would have remembered firsthand Miriam's crucial role in the Exodus. So perhaps the people didn't think they needed to mark Miriam's death in a public manner.

Yet through this account, the parashah offers us another insight into human grief. In the verse immediately following Miriam's death, we learn that the Israelites cried out because they lacked water. Their emotions reached a fever pitch when they exclaimed that they wished they had died with their peers during the rebellion of Korah rather than dying of thirst in the desert (Num. 20:2-5). But maybe the Israelites' sense of deprivation wasn't just about the lack of water. Perhaps they were caught unaware by the intensity of grief that they didn't realize they harbored, and they fixated inconsolably on the water, as if quenching their thirst might soothe their heartbreak. Many commentators note the association of Miriam with water, notably watching over her brother on the banks of the river Nile and dancing at the sea. In this parashah as well, the ritual purification by fresh water is described in the verses immediately preceding the report of her death (Num. 19), and then water is absent after her demise. Thus, commentators speculate that as long as Miriam was alive, the Israelites had drinking water; with her death, the water dried up. While the people grieved Aaron's death, they felt they literally would not survive Miriam's.

Sometimes, dying occurs gradually, and those who love, admire, and depend on the dying can prepare their hearts and minds for the impending loss. The dying can implement a succession plan at work and share last thoughts with family and friends. But sometimes death is sudden, and we feel as if we've been sucker punched. However death occurs, the course of grief shifts in unpredictable ways. At times we recognize our sorrow, and at other moments we realize how sad we are only after we have no water—or have lost our keys.

By juxtaposing the distinct treatment of Miriam and Aaron's deaths and their aftermath in this parashah, the Torah models the idiosyncratic courses of grief. It gives voice to the profoundly human and sometimes irrational ways in which we grieve, while hinting at rituals that might help us mourn our losses. And Rabbinic Judaism then built on what's modeled in this parashah: with water, we cleanse the deceased before burial and wash our hands as we exit the cemetery. The 30-day period marks one of the stages of grief during the year of mourning. These wise practices, and others that guide the bereaved individually and communally through the days, weeks, and months after a death, are reserved not only for men or high priests; we all benefit from structured ways to cope, even if they'll never fully shield us from the unanticipated ways in which our grief may linger.

So, yes, when my late husband died, it wasn't about the keys, and yet in some way it was, for losing the keys signified yet another way in which my physical connection to him had slipped agonizingly through my fingers. Among the many lessons of this parashah, then, the Torah signals us to acknowledge, embrace, and mark our losses fully, for as individuals and as a community we each need to find our own way out of the deserts of our grief.

# Refuah Shleymah רפואה שלמה

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

## Yahrzeits יארצייט

May their memory be a blessing

Janet Alpern	Martin Landau
Julius J. Bienstock	Nathan Orloff
Lester Bogdanoff	Mandel Silverman
Albert M. Fleishman	Eva M. Woods
Jorge Gadlli	
Ann Geller	
Yetta Greenberg	
Norman Kirshner	

## BE Mazel Tov

Mazel Tov to the follow community members on their birthdays!  
 Kay Alexander, Hana Baskin, Rachele Bienstock, Sally Brown, Riki Friedman.  
 Kenny Levine, Theo Luebke, Connie Margolin, Krisha Miller, Caitlin Pitt,  
 David Rubin, Ilana Saraf, Ellen Singer, Luba Spevak, Daryl Spinner,  
 Jeff Spinner Halev, and Elsa Waller

**Beth El Synagogue**  
 1004 Watts Street  
 Durham, NC 27701  
 919.682.1238  
[info@betheldurham.org](mailto:info@betheldurham.org)  
[www.betheldurham.org](http://www.betheldurham.org)

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