



# Shabbat Shalom

28 Tamuz 5777

July 22, 2017

Parashat Matot-Masei

## This Week at Beth El Synagogue

### Saturday, July 22:

Orthodox Kehillah Services	9:00 am
Main Sanctuary Services	9:30 am
Healing Yoga	10:00 am
Havdallah	9:09 pm

### Wednesday, July 26:

Weekly Wednesday Minyan	8:00 am
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### Friday, July 28:

Candle Lighting	8:05 pm
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### **BE Remembered**

Beth El Synagogue extends condolences to the families of:

Kalman Bland, former member of Beth El, who passed away on July 15, 2017 in England.

Linda Shapiro, former member of Beth El and long-time teacher in the Beth El Talmud Torah, who passed away on July 14, 2017 in Charlottesville.

Judy Byck, long-time member of Beth El, who passed away on July 12, 2017 at home in Durham.

May the Ever Present One comfort them among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

### Kiddush is hosted by:

Sharon & Ed Lunk, Leigh & Phil Zaleon, Jessie & Daniel Lunk, Aliza Zaleon

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:

- ✧ 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
- ✧ Wed. 8/2 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Thu. 8/3 MoB Night at the Durham Bulls
- ✧ Sat. 8/5 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 8/5 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Wed. 8/9 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Sat. 8/12 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 8/12 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Wed. 8/16 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Sat. 8/19 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 8/19 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Wed. 8/23 Weekly Wednesday Minyan- Rosh Chodesh
- ✧ Sat. 8/26 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 8/26 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.



7/29 Devarim Hazon Shula Bernard shulabernard@gmail.com	919-967-9393
8/5 Vaetchanan Nahamu David Kirsch dkirsch@md.duke.edu	919-286-4516
8/12 Ekev Diane Markoff Diane.markoff@earthlink.net	919-969-8953
8/19 Reeh David Kirsch dkirsch@md.duke.edu	919-286-4516

# Parashat Matot-Masei

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

Is God’s law perfect? Most of us would assume that anything created by an omniscient and omnipotent being must have no flaws. But a story in today’s parashah suggests otherwise—in a manner that shows a surprising similarity to a key concept of Jewish mysticism.

At the end of the reading for this Shabbat (Num. 36:1–9) and in four other passages in the Torah (Lev. 24:10–23, Num. 9:1–14, 15:32–36, and 27:1–11), the Israelites and Moses confront a situation in which the law is unclear, or in which some Israelites seem dissatisfied with the existing law. Moses asks God to clarify the law relating to the situation, and God responds to Moses’s request. For example, a story in last week’s Torah reading (Num. 27:3–4) tells of the daughters of a recently deceased man named Zelophehad, who had no sons. Because women could not inherit under the existing law, his landholding was set to pass to his closest male relative. As a result, his land and his name were going to disappear forever. The daughters approached Moses to ask why their father’s name should be lost, and they requested the right to inherit his land so that the family’s plot, and hence Zelophehad’s name, would endure.

The daughters’ query was not open-ended. They respectfully presented an objection to the existing law of inheritance, and they made the solution they were looking for explicit. God’s response when Moses brought the question to God’s attention is fascinating. God did not declare, “I am perfect, and My law is perfect, and who are these women to tell Me how to run My universe?” Instead, God agreed to their plan: “וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּדִבְרֵי בָנוֹת זֶלּוֹפֶהָד וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר כַּדְבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבְּרָה הַיְהוּדָה הַזֹּאת וְכַדְבָרֵי בָנוֹת זֶלּוֹפֶהָד כִּי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי צַדִּיק הָיָה זֶלּוֹפֶהָד וְלֹא יָרָשׁוּ אֲדָמָתוֹ כִּי לֹא יָרָשׁוּ אֲדָמָתוֹ כִּי לֹא יָרָשׁוּ אֲדָמָתוֹ כִּי לֹא יָרָשׁוּ אֲדָמָתוֹ” The daughters of Zelophehad speak rightly,” Num. 27:7). God agreed to modify the existing law of inheritance to allow a sonless man’s property to be divided among his daughters. That way, the property would stay together, forever associated with the deceased man’s name. This story from last week’s parashah presents the law as malleable and open to improvement.

As if to underscore this point, the revision God issued to the law of inheritance is itself revised in this week’s Torah reading. In Num. 36:2–4, the leaders of the tribe of Manasseh (to which Zelophehad’s family belongs) approach Moses to point out a wrinkle in the solution that God set forth back in Num. 27. What would happen, under the revised inheritance law, if one of the daughters marries a man from some other Israelite tribe? In that case, the children of that marriage will inherit Zelophehad’s land, and a piece of Manasseh’s territory will pass into the permanent possession of the other tribe. The tribal leaders object to the apparently unforeseen consequence of the legal revision reported in last week’s parashah.

Again, God does not respond angrily, insisting that there can be no consequences unforeseen by God’s all-seeing eyes. Rather, God responds precisely as God had done earlier: “וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּדִבְרֵי בָנוֹת זֶלּוֹפֶהָד וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר כַּדְבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבְּרָה הַיְהוּדָה הַזֹּאת וְכַדְבָרֵי בָנוֹת זֶלּוֹפֶהָד כִּי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי צַדִּיק הָיָה זֶלּוֹפֶהָד וְלֹא יָרָשׁוּ אֲדָמָתוֹ כִּי לֹא יָרָשׁוּ אֲדָמָתוֹ כִּי לֹא יָרָשׁוּ אֲדָמָתוֹ כִּי לֹא יָרָשׁוּ אֲדָמָתוֹ” The tribe of Joseph’s sons speak rightly,” Num. 36:5). The originally imperfect law had been improved in light of the daughters’ plea, but the tribal leaders’ subsequent plea reveals that God had not improved it enough. So the amendment is amended: the daughters may inherit, but not if they marry a man from outside their tribe. If they are to exercise their right to inherit, they must marry members of the tribe of Manasseh. In that case, Zelophehad’s land will stay with his descendants through the female line, while also remaining with his tribe. This amendment does not undo the earlier revision; before that revision, the land would have gone to Zelophehad’s closest male relative. Under the new law, the daughters may marry a much more distant member of their tribe, and the children of that more distant relative will end up owning the land. But the amendment to the amendment solves the problem that concerns the tribal elders.

In presenting these stories of legal revision, the Torah acknowledges without embarrassment or discomfort that what God has wrought is not always set in stone. The law, we might say, is 1.0, and it can be upgraded—as can the upgrade. The narrative makes clear that God does not find this insulting. God seems perfectly satisfied with a situation in which the Israelites participate along with God in allowing the law to develop over time.

Much the same thing can be said about the world itself in the Torah. As has been widely noted, the opening chapter of Genesis is in many respects a classic example of an ancient Near Eastern creation account, sharing with its Mesopotamian counterparts several features of plot and style. But Gen. 1 differs in some crucial respects. Many ancient Near Eastern creation myths conclude with the construction of the highest god’s temple by the lower-ranking gods. To a reader who has noticed the many elements of the ancient Near Eastern creation myths in Gen. 1, the world created there appears lacking, because it never arrives at its expected culmination, the erection of God’s palace or temple. That absence is remedied several thousand years later with the completion of the Tabernacle in the last two chapters of the Book of Exodus. The opening narrative of Genesis and the closing narrative of Exodus are linked by extensive verbal parallels, which indicate that Gen. 1:1–2:4 and Exod. 39–40 are the bookends of one long story that reaches its culmination in Exod. 40.

The world that God created in Gen. 1, then, was deliberately imperfect. It was “good”—and parts of it were “very good” (as Genesis 1 states several times)—just not perfect. God seems to have regarded Godself as free to desist from bringing creation to its ultimate goal, and it was the task of the Israelites to complete the work. Significantly, the deficiency is made right not by the gods who build the divine palace in other ancient Near Eastern myths, but by human beings.

In light of the story of Zelophehad’s daughters, it becomes clear that what is true of the world that God created is also true of the law God gave Moses: God’s handiwork wants improvement, and the expectation of the Torah is that the Israelites will provide it. This idea is not only present in the Bible. It is also central to Kabbalah. Especially in the teachings of one of the greatest Kabbalists, Isaac Luria (1534–1572), Jews are responsible to help God improve the

world, and they do so by observing the mitzvot or commandments. Luria calls improvements generated by observing commandments *tikkun*.

We can restate the message of the story from today’s parashah in Lurianic terms: The original law needs *tikkun*, as does the original cosmos. Enacting that *tikkun* is the role of the people Israel—today, no less than in Moses’s own time. This classically Kabbalistic, and also classically Conservative, idea was well phrased by Abraham Joshua Heschel in his book *God in Search of Man*: “There is a partnership of God and Israel in regard to both the world and the Torah: He created the earth and we till the soil; He gave us the text and we refine and complete it. ‘The Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah unto Israel like wheat from which to derive fine flour, or like flax from which to make a garment’ [quoting Midrash Tanna devei Eliyyahu Zuta 2:1]” (274). This week, as we read about Zelophehad’s daughters, is an ideal time to commit ourselves anew to this partnership, and to the responsibilities it entails.

## Refuah Shleymah רפואה שלמה

<i>Adelah bat Avrom v’Chenya (Adele Abramowitz)</i>	<i>Moshe Yosef ben Vishka Elka (Michael Perkins)</i>	<i>Alvin Jacobson</i>
<i>Chaim ben Shraga v’Tziporah (Jerry Cramer)</i>	<i>Rachel bat Rut (Rachel Judith Mandel)</i>	<i>Anne Boyd</i>
<i>Chana bat Malka</i>	<i>Sarah bat Hinda (Sylvia Dante)</i>	<i>Alan Marty</i>
<i>Chana Leah bat Sarah (Anna Crollman)</i>	<i>Sarah Gittel bat Rut (Sue Perlo)</i>	<i>David Thomas</i>
<i>David ben Sarah (David Leitner)</i>	<i>Shalom ben Sprintze (Stanley Ramati)</i>	<i>Ezra Rapport</i>
<i>David Yosef ben Avraham v’Chana (Donald Goldstein)</i>	<i>Shira Batya bat Meirav</i>	<i>Gail Freeman</i>
<i>Esther Malka bat Chaya Fruma (Elinor Fleishman)</i>	<i>Shmuel ben Shoshana Shraga Feivel ben Leib (Phillip Samuel Ramati)</i>	<i>Harold Strauss</i>
<i>Herschel David ben Aharon haKohen u’Bela Miriam</i>	<i>Sura Malka bat Rivka (Molly Grossinger)</i>	<i>Harry Mellon</i>
<i>Israel ben Zalman u’Malkah Leah bat Miriam (Eileen Abramson)</i>	<i>Tuvia ben Shmuel v’Tziporah (Tovia Lebovich)</i>	<i>Helen Rosenberg</i>
<i>Llan ben Eunice (Lani Harrington)</i>	<i>Tziporah bat Esther</i>	<i>Jack Reich</i>
<i>Malka bat Leah (Meg Anderson)</i>	<i>Ya’akov Roni ben Margalit</i>	<i>Jeff Shields</i>
<i>M’cor Eyshel bat Esther Tzvia</i>	<i>Yehoshua Heschel ben Tova Gitel (Joshua Shatz)</i>	<i>Joyce Romm</i>
<i>Michael Pinchas ben Binyamin v’Rachel</i>	<i>Zvi ben Chanoch v’Rivka (Harold Strauss)</i>	<i>Lauren Schiro</i>
<i>Mishulamit bat Maryam (Marcia Hogan)</i>		<i>Lorraine Morley</i>
<i>Miriam bat Batya (Joyce Gudeman)</i>		<i>Netta Boswell</i>
		<i>Nina Gorback</i>
		<i>Orrie Wilner</i>
		<i>Richard Roth</i>
		<i>Sidney Barker</i>

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

## Yahrzeits יארצייט

Sidney Stern	Bertha Agid	Grant Anderson
Shayna Belenko	Willie Massey	Joani Gudeman
Arlene Bergman	Irma Fischer	
Steve Hershenov	Carolyn Lubovsky	
Myer B. Marcus	Sadie Kramer	
Pedro Urow	Gerri Ann Pomerantz	

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