



Shabbat Shalom

3 Tamuz 5776

July 9, 2016

Parashat Korach

This Week at Beth El Synagogue

Saturday, July 9:

Havdalah—9:16 pm

NO B'NEI MITZVAH PEER TUTORING

NO SHABBAT MISHNAH STUDY

Orthodox Kehillah Services	9:00 am
Main Sanctuary Services	9:30 am
Healing Yoga	10:00 am
Shabbat Service Leader Session	1:15 pm

Sunday, July 10:

Monday, July 11:

Tuesday, July 12:

Ritual Committee Meeting 7:30 pm

Wednesday, July 13:

Weekly Wednesday Minyan 8:00 am

Thursday, July 14:

Recovery International (RI) Support Group at Beth El 6:30 pm

Friday, July 15:

Candle Lighting—8:13 pm

Partners for Youth Opportunity 11:30 am

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.

Upcoming Events:

- ✧ Sat. 7/16 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 7/16 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Sun. 7/17 PJ Library Story Hour
- ✧ Mon. 7/18 Sisterhood Board Meeting
- ✧ Tue. 7/19 Va'ad Meeting
- ✧ Tue. 7/19 Finance Committee Meeting
- ✧ Wed. 7/20 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Thu. 7/21 Recovery International Group
- ✧ Sat. 7/23 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 7/23 Shabbat Morning Services
- ✧ Wed. 7/27 Weekly Wednesday Minyan
- ✧ Sat. 7/30 Shabbat Morning Orthodox Kehillah Services
- ✧ Sat. 7/30 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.



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

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.

Parashat Korach

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

“Which do you prefer—your firstborn child, or the five coins required to redeem him?”

This disconcerting question is part of the ritual known as pidyon haben, the redemption of the firstborn son. Rabbi Asher ben Yehiel (13th-14th centuries) reports this question as part of the liturgy from the geonic period in his Talmud commentary, and it is duly repeated by his son Rabbi Yakov ben Asher and later codifiers of Jewish law.[1]

How does the ritual go?

The mitzvah of pidyon haben applies only in a narrow set of circumstances: if a woman from an Israelite family delivers a son in a vaginal birth and has had no previous pregnancies, and the father is not himself a kohen (priestly descendant). In that case, on the 31st day of the child’s life, the parents are supposed to “redeem” their son from a kohen. The kohen asks them the “Which do you prefer?” question, and—assuming they answer, as expected, that they prefer their child—the kohen agrees to serve as a proxy for the child, in return for the five silver coins. The kohen takes the coins and declares them to be in place of the child, then the parents say blessings, and everyone enjoys a festive meal. It is like a bris, but without the surgery.

What is the source of this idea that a firstborn child must be redeemed? God explains to Moses that on the day that the Egyptians’ firstborn sons were killed in the tenth plague, “I sanctified to Me every firstborn in Israel, whether human or beast” (Num. 3:13). The law is expanded in our Torah portion, Korah, to clarify that firstborn humans, and also non-kosher animals such as donkeys, must be redeemed with five silver coins, whereas kosher animals are to be presented as gifts to the Temple: “You shall have the firstborn of man redeemed . . . take as their redemption price, from the age of one month and up, the money equivalent of 5 shekels by the sanctuary weight, which is 20 gerahs” (Num. 18:16).

While the mitzvah refers specifically to boys because of the association with the tenth plague, in our day we may expand the concept of redemption to girls as part of their own birth rituals. Indeed, baby-naming ceremonies for girls are often scheduled around the one-month mark in order to connect them to this ancient rite of passage.

But let us return to the kohen’s curious question, “Which do you prefer, your firstborn child or the five silver coins required to redeem him?” We have learned already that it is a commandment to redeem the child with the five silver coins. Why then does the medieval liturgy present this as a choice? When else do we ask Jews whether they would care to perform a mitzvah? Isn’t the essential meaning of mitzvah “commandment”?

Already in the 15th century, the parents’ question seemed out of place. Rabbi Israel Isserlein points out in his legal commentary that the child must be redeemed (Terumat Hadeshen #235). If not, then what would the kohen do with him? He can’t enslave him, and he can’t really adopt him and raise him as a kohen—the child belongs with his parents! The question then is rhetorical, not a real choice. But what then does it mean?

The 17th-century sage Rabbi Ya’ir Haim Bachrach addresses this question in his responsa (Hut Ha-shani #92). He says that the point is to endear the mitzvah to the father. Perhaps the father is worried about the expense of the five coins, and also the much greater expense of raising his son. Presenting the moment as a choice is a way of giving him agency in what may be an anxious time. Rabbi Bachrach has second explanation: the father could in fact ignore his obligation and let his son redeem himself when he grows up. In that sense, the kohen indeed presents a valid choice—what do you want more, the kid or the coins? But the former reading seems more likely—the kohen is making a point: Yes, this mitzvah is expensive; in fact, it is only the beginning. As a parent you need to choose, today and every day, to be responsible for this precious child of yours. Are you ready? Then here is your child; take good care of him!

I find this rare ritual moment to be poignant. At the beginning of the journey of parenthood, a new mother or father is overwhelmed with joy but also with responsibility. A vast realm of obligations has arrived together with their infant child, and thousands of decisions lie before them. Enormous expenses, more than they could have anticipated, are suddenly theirs. Thirty-one days into the journey, they are likely tired, cranky, and bewildered. At this very moment, a representative of our ancient tradition presents them with a choice—which do you prefer, your child or some money?

After a dramatic pause, the parent or parents look at their child—their precious, perplexing child—and they claim it from the priest. They say, “I want my firstborn child—here are your coins.” And so a journey begins. There will be many multiples of those five coins paid—for food and clothes, medicine and education, culture, camp, and hopefully their child’s marriage. But at this early stage, the new parents resolve to set aside their material worries for a moment. They redeem their child, praise God, and give gratitude for the gift of life.

Refuah Shleymah רפואה שלמה

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

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

Yahrzeits יארצייט

May their memory be a blessing

Pearl Fisher Alexander	Mary Kirshner
William Cassell	Sheila Krolik
Neil Felmus	Hannah Lakin
Vivian Fishkin	Etta Lind
Rachel Geller	Eunice Luebke
Shlomo Geller	Mildred Marcus
Ida Grossman	Gertrude Popovsky
Donald Benjamin Hackel	Elizabeth Gay Thurston

BE Mazel Tov

Mazel Tov to the follow community members on their birthdays! Shula Bernard, Lori Bernstein, Marni Bernstein-Wizwer, Ron Goldberg, Susan Gross, Bob Hill, Jeff Krolik, Sheila Levine, Elaine Marcus, Roger Perilstein, Aaron Rosenstein, Louis Sawyer, Scott Schwartz, Dirk Wilcox

Mazel Tov to Gladys Siegel for winning a Quest Collection menorah!

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