

# THE BETH EL BULLETIN

Durham, North Carolina

Issue 4  
May, 2024

## A Message from Rabbi Greyber

“Beyond Letters on Parchment”

Rabbi Daniel Greyber

May 2024

If you tell a child, “don’t move an inch,” what do they do? They move. One inch. Why? Because they know you don’t literally mean, “an inch” and most children enjoy proving you wrong! (Is it just me??) Ever childlike in their reading of Torah, the rabbis (too) rarely sufficed with literal reading. Even those with a distaste for more mystical, esoteric readings of the Torah understand that the literal understanding of a verse is rarely its simple, plain (p’shat) meaning.



Take a verse from parshat Kedoshim: “Do not curse the deaf; before the blind, do not place a stumbling block; rather, fear your God, I am Adonai” (Leviticus 19:14). A literal reading of verse demands one read the verse as prohibiting two (and only two) specific actions - cursing, placing stumbling blocks - towards two (and only two) specific people - a deaf person or a blind person. Yet who believes that that is all that is meant by this verse? Reading this way is not only boring; it is inaccurate.

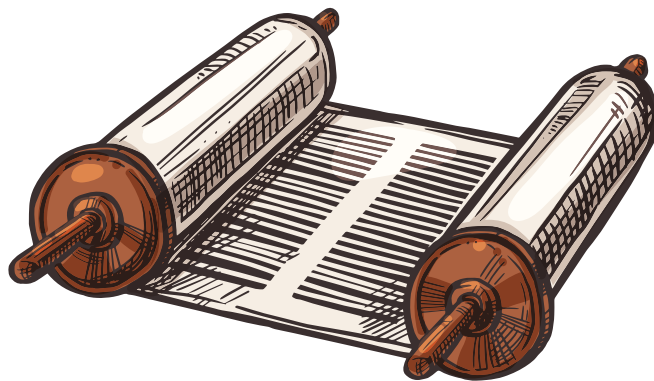
Rashi explains that what is prohibited in this verse is not only placing a physical stumbling block before someone who is physically blind, but rather placing a metaphorical “stumbling block” before someone who is metaphorically “blind” to something. He writes,

*the words “before a blind person” [refer to] “someone who is blind about something.” Don’t give advice that does not make sense for someone. [For example] do not say, “sell your field and buy a donkey for yourself,” and then you go and by-pass him and take it [the field] from him.”*

Human beings have a great capacity to deceive others. Someone asks us for advice and we see an opportunity for exploitation. Someone seeks our strength and we take advantage of their weakness, of the blindness they dared reveal to us.

We deceive others, but we also deceive ourselves. Rashi explains that the phrase, “Fear your God,” is added at the end of the verse “because this thing is not given to [other] human beings to know if his/her intentions were good or bad.” You ask me for advice about a friend but instead of helping, it makes things worse. I can convince myself that I just made a mistake and gave poor advice, when really I was jealous of your friendship with another and intentionally soured your relationship. How are you to know? You cannot. But also, how am I to know? Rashi explains, “it is possible to rationalize and say, “I meant to be good” - therefore it says, “fear your God,” the One who knows the thoughts of human beings. And thus in regards to everything that is given to the heart of the doer, that other human beings do not know, the Torah says, “fear God.”” Be honest with yourself. God knows your heart.

Literal reading tempts us because it narrows the scope of what is meant by the law so much so as to make it irrelevant. “I followed the law,” we tell ourselves to soothe our guilt. But our tradition pushes back. Not just the deaf and blind. Why mention them at all? Rabbi Bachya explains, “to teach you to apply logic. If the Torah forbids you to curse the deaf person who does not hear it and therefore does not feel angry or saddened [assuming s/he does not find out what was said!], how much more so must we not curse someone whose faculties are not impaired. All these directives are designed to improve a person’s basic character traits and to ensure that he will not become the victim of bad habits.” If we avoid cursing the deaf, who may never know what we’ve said, “one will be doubly careful not to curse those who can hear.” All this, our tradition insists, is contained in the plain meaning of scripture. Is it possible to read otherwise? Of course. We can always close our eyes and cling to what is literally on the page. But God hopes for ever more ways the Torah can move beyond letters on parchment to words in our heart.



# A Message From The Executive Director

Chevre,

As we approach the end of another remarkable year in our synagogue's history, I reflect on our journey together. It has been a year filled with unity, growth, and purpose, and I am immensely proud of all we have accomplished as a community.

Throughout the year, we have come together to celebrate our shared faith, support one another in times of need, and engage in meaningful dialogue about the issues that matter most to us. I am continually inspired by the compassion and generosity of spirit that define our community.

Together, we have embarked on a journey of growth, individually and collectively. Through engaging discussions, thought-provoking lectures, and immersive educational experiences, we have deepened our understanding of Jewish tradition and values. We have also expanded our reach and impact through our various outreach efforts, reaching out to those in need within our community and beyond.

As we look ahead to the coming fiscal year starting on June 1, I am filled with a profound sense of optimism and excitement for all that lies ahead. Together, we will continue to build upon the strong foundation that we have laid, deepening our connections with one another and with our faith. We will strive to be a beacon of light and hope in an often-tumultuous world, spreading love, kindness, and understanding wherever we go.

I want to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to each of you for your dedication, passion, and unwavering support. Because of you, our synagogue continues to thrive and grow, and I am truly honored to serve as your Executive Director.

Warm regards,

Ed Fleishman  
Executive Director



— 2024 —  
*may*

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			01 <b>Break for Passover!</b> 	02	03	04
05	06	07	08 7:45 am: Minyan and Parsha Study 4:30 pm: Talmud Torah Trop Course 6:00 pm: Rosh Chodesh Gathering	09 12:00 pm: Lunch and Learn at The Forest 7:00 pm: Yom HaShoa Film Screening No Talmud Group	10 5:30 pm: Eat, Schmooze, Pray 7:30 pm: HS Senior Shabbat Dinner	11 8:45 am: Mishnah Study 9:30 am: Shabbat Services (HS Seniors) 10:15 am: Peer Tutoring 11:15 am: Shabbat Tot
12	13 7:15 pm: Community Budget Conversation via Zoom Yom HaZikaron	14 Yom HaAtzma'ut 	15 8:00 am: Minyan and Parsha Study 4:30 pm: Talmud Torah Trop Course	16 No Talmud Group	17 5:45 pm: Talmud Torah Family Kabbalat Shabbat Service and Potluck Dinner	18 8:45 am: Mishnah Study 9:00 am: Chavurah Minyan 9:30 am: Shabbat Services 10:15 am: Peer Tutoring 1:00 pm: Shiur
19 11:00 am: Beth El Annual Meeting 12:30 pm: Racial Justice Committee Meeting	20 9:45 am: Music and Movement with PJ Library 	21	22 8:00 am: Minyan and Parsha Study 4:30 pm: Talmud Torah Trop Course	23 3:30 pm-7:00 pm: Community Blood Drive at Beth El 7:00 pm: Talmud Group	24 6:00 pm: Kabbalat Shabbat Services- Maya Singer's Bat Mitzvah	25 8:45 am: Mishnah Study 9:30 am: Shabbat Services: Maya Singer's Bat Mitzvah
26 Lag BaOmer 	27 Memorial Day: Office Closed 	28 7:00 pm: Sisterhood Jazz Night Out at Sharp 9 Gallery	29 8:00 am: Minyan and Parsha Study	30 7:00 pm: Talmud Group	31 6:00 pm: Kabbalat Shabbat Services- Rachel Skolnick's Bat Mitzvah	

**Calendar events are subject to change. Check out our [website](#) and the weekly announcements to stay up to date!**

# May Event Spotlight

Save the Date!  
Beth El's Annual Meeting  
Sunday, May 19 at 11:00 am  
[Click here to RSVP!](#)

This year's Annual Meeting is scheduled for **11:00 am on Sunday, May 19**. Please [RSVP here](#) so we know you are coming! If you have health or mobility constraints, we invite you to join via [Zoom](#).

In addition to voting on the proposed operating budget for 2024-2025 and the proposed Board of Trustees slate, we hope that you can join us in celebrating our remarkable volunteers of the year, Krisha Miller and Richard Hart.

**We are required to have a quorum (at least 64 family units) at this meeting to conduct these essential votes**, so in addition to giving you the opportunity to come together, your attendance will be a mitzvah.

Please see links to important documents for the Annual Meeting:

[Meeting Agenda](#)

[Proposed 2024-2025 Operating Budget](#)

[Budget Narrative](#)

For anyone with questions about the budget, please attend the Zoom session on **Monday, May 13 at 7:15 pm** [using this link](#). If you plan to attend this pre-Annual Meeting discussion, RSVP [here](#).

# Youth Programming Updates

During the end of April, the students in the Talmud Torah were focused primarily on Passover. Sounds of the Mah Nishtanah echoed through the hallways as the children learned about, and reviewed, the symbols of the seder, the story of the Exodus and the Hebrew brachot and songs that we all somehow know so well even though we only encounter them at seder each year.



This year was especially poignant as we waited for any news of the hostages and watched things unfold on our university campuses. How much to share with our children, how to best celebrate when our hearts are heavy, how to continue to instill pride and joy in our heritage when all is constantly being challenged – these were the questions that many of us dealt with over this Passover holiday.

We opted to end our Passover unit for our Gimel – Vav students with a chocolate seder. Reviewing the steps of the Seder while enjoying chocolate treats of all kinds was a great way to send our students off to their Pesach vacation – with apologies to parents if kids came home over-sugared or with tummy-aches!

The Gimel–Vav students also spend time in elective classes regarding the formation of the State of Israel. Too many American Jews have little to no knowledge about the history of the formation of the state so even though the children are too young to understand the complexities of the events from the late 19th century through 1948 – it's not too early to begin laying the foundation for continued learning. Some classes focused on the music of the early halutzim (pioneers), some worked on a timeline of events and others took a look at some of the people involved. One group worked on creating a map of Israel – focusing on important sites throughout the land. The unit ended in a sharing of learning and a small Israeli-style “feast.”

Our final Sunday program on May 5, included:

- Time for well-deserved teacher appreciation
- A farewell to our Kitah Zayin students – along with a welcome for them to join the Talmud Torah as bmitzvah tutors or teen madrichim (classroom aides)
- A welcome to our Kitah Bet students to our mid-week program
- Havdalah with Eliana Light
- A story from scholar-in-residence, Rabbi Ed Feinstein

During the Wednesdays in May, we will offer additional, optional, opportunities for learning and Jewish growth. The students who elect to attend can choose from Shira (choral music), Omanut (Jewish crafts) and Torah Trop boot camp.

It's been a privilege and a delight to work with the Beth El Talmud Torah over the past year. There were, to be sure, some challenges, most of which were met and the result was a full and robust year of learning. Kol Hakavod to the Va'ad HaHinuch for their leadership, to the teaching staff for their dedication, to all the parents/grandparents/and others who made sure the children were here in class.

Hazak, Hazak, V'nithazek – may we all go from strength to strength in furthering Jewish education.

Amy Ripps



# Teen Newsletter

Chevre,

As we approach the end of another fantastic school year of teen programming at Beth El, I have truly enjoyed my second year working with our USY chapter and continue to be in awe at the dedication and commitment of our teens. Their creativity and passion for creating an inclusive and welcoming community of Jewish high schoolers in the Triangle has been inspiring, and I couldn't be prouder of our progress together. Last weekend, we elected a new teen board, and I am excited to see the fresh energy and ideas they will bring to our community.

**I invite you all to join us on May 11 for High School Senior Shabbat**, where we will celebrate the remarkable accomplishments of our seniors as they take their next steps into Jewish adulthood.

Reflecting on the past month, we've had some incredible events that brought our community together in meaningful ways. From the joyous (and yummy!) Pre-Passover Seder, filled with laughter, pizza, and pasta, to the exciting USY open house at Two Roosters Ice Cream for our 8th to 10th graders, the attendance and enthusiasm were heartwarming.

As we look forward to a relaxing summer ahead, I am already excited about the innovative programs and events we will plan in the fall. Together, we will continue to nurture a vibrant, inclusive, and supportive community for our teens to thrive.

Wishing you all a wonderful summer filled with smiles, popsicles, and loved ones.

Best,

Amy Granick

Director of Marketing and Member Engagement

USY Advisor





# Member Spotlight



## Meet **The Cohen/Nussbaum Family.**

When we moved to Durham in 2015 from Philadelphia, we were looking for a Conservative synagogue that felt comfortable and welcoming. It didn't hurt that we were also renting a home down the street on Markham and chose to send our eldest child, who was two at the time, to Beth El preschool. Before our second child was born, we got to know Rabbi Greyber in preparation for our son's bris, and felt the warmth when he invited us to his home to talk about the bris and our hopes for our growing family. We moved away from Durham for work two years later, knowing that we would come back someday. We also knew that when we did return to Durham, which we ultimately did in 2021 with our third child in tow, we would join Beth El again and make an effort to dive head-first into the community.

We love the warmth of the community, the inclusiveness, and the chance to be involved in helping Beth El grow and thrive. We love that it's a place where our three children feel at home and where they can develop friendships with other Jewish kids. We love the variety that Beth El offers, too. There's always a new program to look forward to (with delicious food!), from Eat, Schmooze, Pray to lighting Hannukah candles with members of neighboring churches to Rabbi Greyber's Bar Mitzvah. We're so happy to be part of the Beth El community and are excited to be a part of its future.

# Welcome New Members

\***Kim (52)** and **Jonathon (50) Holt** have lived in Durham for over 20 years where Kim raised all four kids (only **Simon (17)** still lives at home) while Jonathon worked as a toxicologist in Biotech. Kim has been participating at Beth El as third Gabbai while meeting people and getting to know the community. She is an avid knitter and baker and is looking forward to sharing both with people in the community in the coming years.



## Mazel Tov!

\*Mazel tov to our Director of Marketing and Member Engagement **Amy Granick** on completing her Master of Arts in Integrated Marketing Communication from The University of North Carolina at Wilmington.



\*Mazel tov to **Sharon Freedman** on being honored with the prestigious Outstanding Educator Award during the annual meeting of the American Glaucoma Society (AGS) on Saturday March 2, 2024.



# Committee Updates

## ↳ Sisterhood

Sisterhood has been a great way to reconnect with old friends and make new ones. Each member's \$40 dues does a lot of good at Beth El Synagogue and beyond. Sisterhood uses funds from dues and donations, Gift Shop sales and the Chanukah Bazaar to offset costs of our events. We have donated to several Beth El programs and to building renovations. A portion of membership dues goes to support Women's League for Conservative Judaism (WLCJ) and the Torah Fund Campaign to help pay for programs and rabbinic scholarships.

**REMINDER:** If you haven't done so already, please pay your 2023-2024 dues before this fiscal year ends on May 31. Thank you!

Coming up soon (RSVP for events to [sandyfang@frontier.com](mailto:sandyfang@frontier.com)):

**CANCELLED- May 21 at 9:30 am:** Monthly Breakfast Outing: Big Bad Breakfast (2608 Erwin Rd. #120)

**May 28 at 7:00 pm:** Jazz Night Out at Sharp 9 Gallery

**June 9 at 1:00 pm:** Shavuot Cheese Blintz Brunch



## ↳ Sisterhood Gift Shop

Contact Carol Haynes for more information about all things Gift Shop (919-815-1068, [anewatt@gmail.com](mailto:anewatt@gmail.com)). [Check out the Sisterhood Gift Shop Catalog here!](#)

## ➔ **Community of Caring**

We want to hear from you and you in turn will hear from us! Do you have a need or an interest where you would like some assistance or companionship?

If you would like a synagogue member to:

- Visit with you
- Accompany you for a walk
- Assist with an occasional errand
- Take you for a drive
- Form a small book club
- Assist with night driving
- Assist with a ride to a Beth El service or event

Please call the office at (919) 682-1238 or email: [caring@betheldurham.org](mailto:caring@betheldurham.org)

Additionally, if you know someone who might benefit from a contact from the Community of Caring to gauge if they could use some assistance, please reach out as well.

## ➔ **Beth El Durham CAN Core Team**

Beth El has been a member of Durham CAN, <https://www.durhamcan.org/>, for one year. To learn more or get involved, email Aviva Starr, at [avivastarr@gmail.com](mailto:avivastarr@gmail.com)

## ➔ **Social Action Committee**

Last month our Beth El Board voted to join the [Triangle Interfaith Reproductive Justice Coalition](#). We are joining a group of NC synagogues and churches who want to stand up and organize support for reproductive freedom in our state. Current state law about abortions pose possible infringement on Jewish religious rights. The more religious institutions that join us, the greater the potential we have for becoming a vocal force for reproductive freedom. The Coalition has organized rallies, film showings and symposiums. There are many initiatives we can undertake as a group.

Contact Robin Barth, [robin7500@gmail.com](mailto:robin7500@gmail.com) to learn more.

## ➔ Racial Justice Committee

Last month, Beth El's Racial Justice Committee, Sisterhood, and other Beth El members visited the historic Stagville Plantation in Durham. We were guided through the history and buildings by a very knowledgeable docent, Vera. She shared stories of several individuals and families enslaved on the plantation, relating details of the conditions in which they lived. Their descendants continued to live and work on the property as sharecroppers after emancipation, and through the 1940s. Generations later, their descendants continue to live in the area.

Stagville preserves a small fraction of the plantation holdings of the Bennehan and Cameron families who profited from the forced labor of enslaved Africans and African Americans on this land. By the 1860s, the Cameron heirs controlled over 30,000 acres of land and enslaved over 1,000 people. This plantation was one of the largest sites of mass slavery in North Carolina. Stagville and the Horton Grove quarters are one of the oldest sections of this vast plantation complex. Stagville is a historic site dedicated to centering enslaved people's history, stories, and experiences. Historic Stagville preserves a small fraction of the plantation holdings of the Bennehan and Cameron families.

We saw (from the outside) the large Bennehan family home, in contrast to the excavated foundation of an enslaved family's house, and 4 small bungalows of enslaved families we could enter, each of which housed several families.



The Mordecai family married into the Cameron family and were also slaveholders. Many/most of the family converted to Christianity, but there is a clear Jewish background. One of the marriage gifts was "Mrs Mordecai's Jewish Sabbath bread." Many of us discussed touring Mordecai's historical site in Raleigh.



# Member News

➡ **The River Church and Beth El Women's Book Group meets the first Wednesday of each month at 7:00 pm.** Most meetings are on Zoom with some in-person meetings. To get more information or be added to the email list, email Aviva Starr at [avivastarr@gmail.com](mailto:avivastarr@gmail.com).

➡ **Want to learn to knit or learn a new knitting technique?** Or just want to hang out and stitch with other people? **Meet with us at Joe Van Gogh on Broad St at 3:30 pm on May 19 to knit and hang out.**



## ➡ **Eric Pas Jewish Camp Scholarship**

Applications are now available for partial scholarship funding for a Beth El family who needs financial assistance in sending a child to a Jewish camp. Funding will be made available on a need basis and information will be kept confidential. In the past 23 years, the scholarship fund has distributed \$62,931 and has been able to partially sponsor 88 Beth El children. Our children have participated in our local Jewish For Good's Camp Shelanu, as well as Ramah Darom in Georgia, Young Judea, and two overseas programs.

If you would like further information or an application, please text Michele Pas at (919) 451-9190, or email [mjbpas@aol.com](mailto:mjbpas@aol.com).

Please consider making a contribution into this fund -- Beth El members' continued financial support of will allow more of our synagogue's children to have a Jewish camp experience.

With appreciation,  
Michele Pas



# TORAH OF LIFE'S CHANGES

WITH RABBA SHANI GROSS & PROFESSOR DEBORAH BARER

## How can Jewish wisdom help guide us through major life transitions?

Rooted in Jewish texts and tradition, the Torah of Life's Changes provides a supportive cohort-based learning experience for those in the process of a major transition. Alongside peers experiencing similar life changes, participants will find support and inspiration while receiving practical tools to help navigate life's unexpected twists and challenges.

MOURNERS MINYAN:  
GRAPPLING WITH GRIEF  
ONLINE  
TUESDAYS, MAY 7 – JUNE 18

L'DOR V'DOR: EMBRACING  
THE EMPTY NEST  
ONLINE  
THURSDAYS, MAY 9 – JUNE 20

Register: [www.pardes.org/il/tlc](http://www.pardes.org/il/tlc)



# BLOOD DRIVE



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CONNECTION**

*Your Community Blood Center*

## Beth El Synagogue

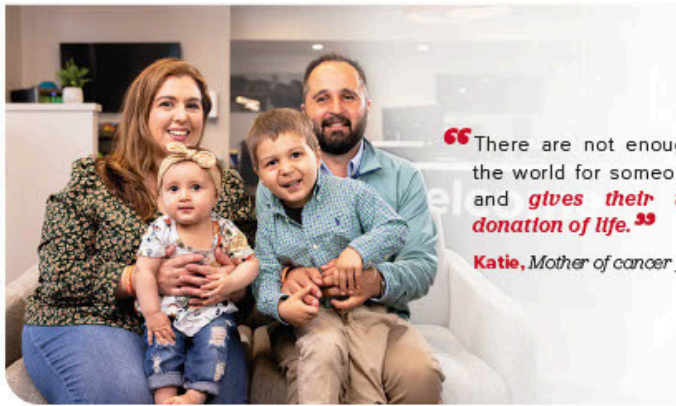
1004 Watts St  
Durham, NC 27701

**05/23/2024 | 03:30 PM–07:00 PM**

A \$25 charitable donation will be made per donor  
PLUS donors will receive \$25 in rewards!

\*Rewards= TBC reward points awarded in donor portal. Redeem for eGift card(s).

1991



“There are not enough thank you's in the world for someone who is selfless and *gives their time and their donation of life.*”

*Katie, Mother of cancer patient, Luca*



The Blood Connection is a non-profit organization. Blood can be donated every 56 days. Donors must be 16 years or older and over 110 lbs. to donate. Written parental consent required for 16 year olds in SC and GA, 16 AND 17 year olds in NC. Before you donate blood, make sure that you drink plenty of water and eat a healthy meal. TBC Donor ID Card (preferred) or photo ID required to donate. Rewards are non-transferable.

  
thebloodconnection.org