

Shabbat Update April 30, 2022

To rbessman@berchayim.org

Shabbat Update

April 30, 2022

Dear BCC Membership,

There is one week left to contribute to April's matching-fund drive for the World Union for Progressive Judaism's (WUPJ) Ukraine Emergency Support Program. As you know, the Board will match your donations, meaning more funds will be available for much-needed help. To read a description of the fund [click here](#). Please send a check payable to B'er Chayim Temple with a note explaining that it is for the WUPJ Ukraine Emergency Support Program.

Congregational trip-to-Israel notices may decrease, but that doesn't mean that plans aren't being made. I have heard from several people that they are very interested in going. I would like to hear from everyone about possible itineraries. Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, Masada (and the Dead Sea), Safed are must-sees. The Negev and Eilat are also possibilities. Ten or eleven days seems to be a reasonable time. We are aiming for Spring 2023. Please share with me your thoughts while itineraries are flexible.

Yom Hashanah, Israel's Holocaust remembrance day, begins tonight. Being in Israel during this time is very sobering and moving when activity stops for sixty seconds – something that leaves an impression long after the experience.

April Calendar of Events

*B'er Chayim
Temple is open for
in-person
services.
Safeguards will be
in place - mask
wearing &
observing
safe distances*

*ZOOM services
continue*

**Thursday
April 28
7:00 - 7:45 pm
Adult Hebrew
7:45 - 8:30 pm
Adult Education
"Aseret - The
Big Ten"
ZOOM only**

**Friday
April 29
7:30 pm**

Friday is Michael Sinclair's last Friday service with us. He is leaving the Appalachian Mountains with their beautiful views around every corner, heading south to some of the flattest lands in the country. Come and wish him luck. Yes, onegs have returned. Thanks to the Langs and the Reynolds for providing some nosh last week.

Classes continue at full strength, though we feel the pull of summer's break close at hand. I think we have a few good weeks left for a final push for learning. Adult Hebrew at 7:00 pm tomorrow, with Adult Education following at 7:45 pm. Friday night services at the Temple (and on Zoom) are at 7:30 pm before the previously-mentioned oneg honoring Michael Sinclair.

Shabbat Shalom,

Cantor Richard Bessman

This Week's Torah Portion

Acharei Mot II

אֲחֵרֵי מוֹת אַהֲרֹן
After the Death [of the Two
Sons of Aaron]

Leviticus 18:1–30

Summary:

- Moses condemns the sexual practices of some neighboring peoples. Certain forms of sexual relations are prohibited. (18:1-30)

Since the above summary is so short - here is another commentary on this week's Torah portion - so timely with the just past Earth Day!

Erev Shabbat
Service
In-Person &
ZOOM

Thursday
May 5
7:00 - 7:45 pm
Adult Hebrew
7:45 - 8:30 pm
Adult Education
"Aseret - The Big
Ten"
ZOOM only

Friday
May 6
NO Erev
Shabbat Service

Saturday
May 7
10:00 am
Morning
Shabbat
Service
In-Person &
ZOOM

Yahrzeits for
week ending
April 30

Betty White

Jack Minkelgreen

Louis Londe

Morris Mandell

Anna Schoffman

Cora Shapiro

Nathaniel Isaacs

It's Time to Cultivate a Connection with the Earth

Acharei Mot II, Leviticus 18:1–30

D'Var Torah By Rabbi Ben Spratt

In Parashat Acharei Mot, we read:

"You must keep My laws and My rules, you must not do any of those abhorrent things, neither the citizen nor the stranger who resides among you; for all those abhorrent things were done by the people who were in the land before and the land became defiled. So let not the land vomit you out for defiling it, as it spewed out the nation that came before you." (Lev. 18:26-28).

There are many elements that mark the spiritual mindset. Biblically, it is a perception of connection: divinity to humanity, cause to effect, blessing to virtue, and struggle to sin. Much of this ancient lens runs counter to modernity, in which humanity is seen as separate from beast and earth. In Torah, we see rain as relationship, an earth woven with ethic. Blessing is felt through pastoral plentitude, punishment through agricultural atrophy. The priestly precision of Leviticus imagines an ecology in which human morality determines terrestrial harmony. In Parashat Acharei Mot, we are deluged again with detail, ranging from priestly rites to sexual ethics, unified in conveying the sense that such laws guide us towards cosmic harmony.

Just as any being, when faced with disease and the invasion of something incompatible, will vomit out the offensive element, so too will the Land. For Leviticus, divine law is natural law: in adhering to one, the other is fulfilled. Conversely, violation of such law results in a punishment of both deity and dirt.

For some, we read such stricture as irrelevant or offensive; for others, we may see them as reflections of a worldview both primitive and simplistic. Today, few see the rise and fall of nations as a reflection of ritual accuracy or

Ben Schindler

Helen Wilner

Rae Pariser

Yosef Fivel Kaplon

Happy Birthday

April 12

Alan Clark

April 14

Jill Klein

April 22

Leslie Leibowitz

April 29

Alan Arnson

Happy Anniversary

April 10

Beth & Ben
Goldstein

April 26

Judi & Harry Haag

[share your birthday
and anniversaries
dates with our
friends and
families...contact
info@berchayim.org](#)

natural disaster as correlated to carnal choices. But the mindset of a perception of connection is one that we return to in a 21st-century definition of ecology. We are now aware of the immense complexities of our ecosystem: polar melts link to a polar vortex, hurricanes lead to migratory shifts that alter crop fertility. We are, more than ever in modernity, aware of our human impact on a global scale, and conscious of a connectedness to which we are subject.

Many of our early Sages, though living in an era without Temple or priestly performance, maintained this biblical ecology. In a midrash on Creation, we read:

"Look at God's work – for who can straighten what He has twisted?" (Kohelet 7:13). When the Blessed Holy One created the first human, He took him and led him round all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said to him: "Look at My works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are! And all that I have created, it was for you that I created it. Pay attention that you do not corrupt and destroy My world: if you corrupt it, there is no one to repair it after you." (Kohelet Rabbah 7:13)

The state of earth and environment is a reflection of human ethic; so too, our treatment and stewardship of the world mean to mirror the height of humanity. The concept is further expanded in the Babylonian Talmud not only to any wanton destruction (Kiddushin 32a), but also to any kind of waste (B'rachot 52b) and even to over-ostentation and over-indulgence (Chulin 7b; Shabbat 140b).

For many of the Chasidic masters, this same spiritual ecology also invites nature as a door to divinity. The late 18th-century rabbi, Nachman of Bratzlav, went so far as to believe that communing in nature was a necessary element of religious devotion. He wrote this prayer:

"Master of the universe, grant me the ability to be alone; that it may be my custom to go outdoors each day among the trees and the grass, among all growing things and there

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"Virtual" instructions -

*To watch on Zoom -
send an email to
admin@berchayim.org
and the ID and
Password will be
emailed back to you.
The ZOOM Id and
Password will be the
same each Friday
evening. Please
remember that Rebecca
is part time, and leave
yourself enough time.*

*Following along in
prayerbooks for ZOOM
services:
Links for prayerbooks
are found on our website
(www.berchayim.org).
Those links will take you
to Mishkah T'Filah for
Shabbat Services.*

may I be alone to enter into prayer, to talk with the One I belong to. May I express everything in my heart and may all the foliage of the field – all grasses, trees and plants – may they all awake at my coming, to send the power of their life into the words of my prayer, so that my prayer and speech are made whole through the life and spirit of growing things, which are made as one by their transcendent Source. May they all be gathered into my prayer and thus may I be worthy to open my heart fully in prayer, supplication and holy speech.” (The Empty Chair [Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1996], p. 86)

More than any other offering, perhaps our priestly precursors gift us today with the very mindset necessary for our own collective survival. In an age in which we see the collapse of ecosystems and rapid changes to climate and sea level, we are already seeing lands casting out their inhabitants. Rather than assuming such fates are both disconnected and beyond us, we inherit a spiritual tradition urging us towards a perception of connection. Such a frame offers a new ethic with ancient roots, one that invites us to see our each and every choice as woven into the very soil beneath us. Perhaps it is time to ditch the dialectic of disconnected dominion given by God in Eden (Gen. 1:26-28), and instead set our sights as global gardeners.

The medieval English anchoress, mystic, and author, Julian of Norwich, writes:

Be a gardener.

Dig a ditch

toil and sweat,

and turn the earth upside down

and seek deepness

and water the plants in time.

Continue this labor

**and make sweet floods to run
and noble and abundant fruits to spring.
Take this food and drink
and carry it to God
as your true worship.**

(Julian of Norwich)

Rabbi Ben Spratt is the senior associate rabbi of Congregation Rodeph Sholom in New York, NY. His passion continues to be building community beyond existent walls and boundaries and, in partnership with many others, has sparked Shireinu, Tribe, New Day Fellowship, and Minyan.

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