

A New Haven Tradition since 1892



BEKI bulletin
 Congregation
 Beth El-Keser Israel

First Adar 5774

Vol. 20 Issue 2

Page 4: February Shabbat Schmooze

A Message from Rabbi Tilsen

No Place to Go



The old story has a Jewish Israeli kvetching (griping) to a friend about life in Israel. “The politicians are corrupt or incompetent. The Jews and Arabs are on the verge of civil war and war with each other. And the price of cottage cheese is incredibly high.”

“You’re right,” said the friend. “As soon as they make another Jewish State, I’m leaving.”

With all the talk about the troubles of the Conservative Movement, I feel like the Israeli in the story: As soon as they start another Conservative Movement, I’ll join it.

The scholarly roots of our movement 150 years ago represented the mainstream Jewish ideals of valuing learning and adherence to the mitzvot, and in particular embraced both tradition and change. It spoke in a self-aware manner about the process of evolution that has been an essential element of Judaism, and promoted a scientific (or academic) approach to understanding our own civilization.

While the founders were driven by deep insights and expansive vision, most of the people who actually joined and supported Masorti Judaism were just “regular Jews” who realized they could not find a home in either Reform or Orthodox Judaism (both of which developed as movements and schools of thought before the Conservative movement was formed). They were traditionalists who believed it was acceptable for the rabbi to preach in English instead of Yiddish, who supported the idea of reconstituting the Jewish Commonwealth in the Land of Israel (i.e. political Zionism), and who believed the enlightening notions of science should continue to be incorporated into Jewish culture – all rejected by mainstream Orthodox communities 100 years ago. They

were progressives who believed that the restrictions of kashrut (dietary laws) and Friday-Saturday as Shabbat were essential to Jewish life, that Hebrew was the essential language of the Jewish People, and that our existence as a nation was primary even over our religious identity (and thus supported political Zionism) – all officially rejected by Reform Judaism.

The financiers of the Jewish Theological Seminary included many who had also supported the major Orthodox or Reform rabbinical schools but found the Conservative approach inspiring. They were people who were already involved and committed to Jewish life who found an approach that seemed most sensible. Most of the rabbis in the first part of the twentieth century had grown up in nominally Orthodox settings, and some in Reform settings – they were people who had a deep concern but could not follow the trajectory of their home movements.

The BEKI community is itself quite diverse. Our members grew up in households that were Reform, Reconstructionist, Orthodox, Satmar, various Hasidic groups, secular Jewish, Catholic, Muslim, Mormon, atheist, devout Communist, and others. Some of our members might rather be in another place, but don’t feel welcome elsewhere due to issues of ethnic background, gender or sexual orientation, ideology or halakhic orientation, or some other consideration. Some are at BEKI because this is a simple preference, but for some there is no other place to go.

Despite all the problems of our Masorti-Conservative Movement, I have no other place to go. Maybe I’ll help fix it, or maybe I’ll just be content in the BEKI Bubble. ☆

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- Call the Synagogue office: (203) 389-2108
- Write: 85 Harrison Street, New Haven, CT 06515-1724
- Email: jjtilsen@beki.org
- Visit our web page: www.beki.org

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המקום ינחם

HaMaqom Yenahem

With sorrow we note the passing of

Max Brunswick, brother of Barbara Cushen and
uncle of David Wright

William Chernoff,
brother-in-law of Al (& Marge) Barnett

Belle Reese

May the Almighty comfort those who mourn

HaNolad BeMazal Tov

Mazal tov to BRS faculty member Shlomit Daniel & Isaias on the birth of their son Yonatan and his admission into the covenant through brit mila.

Kadima

February is here and with it comes our annual tiqun olam Project: Deli Boxes. Pick up at lunch time on Feb. 2. Stay tuned for a Kadima pizza and movie night this month.

Kadima parents, be sure to check out our Kadima Blog at bekibjkadima.blogspot.com. Please don't hesitate to contact me with questions, comments, concerns and thoughts: Emily Zaghi, BEKI-BJ Youth Group Coordinator (516) 316-6154, bekibjkadima@gmail.com

Tiqun Olam: Abraham's Tent

BEKI is once again participating in the amazing Abraham's Tent, a cooperative effort between Columbus House, Interfaith Cooperative Ministries and local congregations.

We are in the midst of the 4th year of the program, which runs each year from the beginning of December until the end of March. Our partner, the Church of the Holy Spirit in West Haven – with BEKI's considerable help – will host another group of men in the church from 24-30 March 2014.

Last year, with the help of only a few professional staff people, the program was able to not only involve 17 wonderful host sites, but an additional 15 congregations and schools providing much needed volunteer supports. BEKI is excited to have been one of these 15 "partner" congregations.

To remind you, each year, 12 men who would otherwise only have the choice to stay at the Columbus House for overnight shelter during the winter, are screened and enrolled in the program. Having gone through an application process conducted by Columbus House staff, they are chosen, in part, due to their ability to be part of such a small group throughout the winter. The twelve men are assigned a case manager, and from the beginning of the program are offered services that include employment and income support, basic life skills training and referrals to community resources for health care, mental health and/or substance

abuse treatment. Toward the end of the winter, these 12 men are also offered housing assistance. For each of the 3 previous years, a significant percentage of these men have either found permanent or transitional housing.

Last year, there were well over 2000 volunteers involved at some level in the Abraham's Tent initiative from the various congregations and organizations involved. Over 20 volunteers from BEKI were among them, providing shopping, cooking, dining and evening companionship, and overnight support. Once again, we are looking for volunteers.

Our partnership in this program has remained strong with the Church of the Holy Spirit (Episcopal) in West Haven and has been a great experience. Responsibility for providing dinners is split between the two groups, and overnight support is provided by mixed groups of volunteers (with a majority from BEKI). In the past, we have provide vouchers for lunches for the 12 men for two days (for which your generous support would be appreciated), many, many supplies, two wonderful dinners for all the men and volunteers, and 4-5 nights of overnight support.

If you are interested in participating in this year's Abraham's Tent or have questions about the project, contact either Darryl Kuperstock kuperst@aol.com or Ivan Alvarez ivan_ta@yahoo.com, project co-chairs.



BEKI to host Shabbat Schmooze with Dr. Ron Wolfson

Thanks to the Jewish Federation of New Haven, along with Temple Beth David of Cheshire and Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel, Ron Wolfson, is coming to New Haven, where he will present three interactive sessions about the importance of relationships in our synagogues, and in the greater Jewish Community.

Wolfson, the Fingerhut Professor of Education at American Jewish University, is a frequent scholar-in-residence for synagogues and communities, speaking on a wide range of topics in Jewish life. He is co-founder and co-president of Synagogue 3000, an institute whose mission is to catalyze excellence in synagogue life. A pioneer in the field of Jewish family education, Wolfson is a member of Shevet: Jewish Family Education Exchange.

A scholar, writer and educator, his most recent book is “Relational Judaism: Using the Power of Relationship to Transform the Jewish Community.” During his weekend



in New Haven, Wolfson will help us to explore the ways in which “relational engagement” can help ensure that synagogues are inspiring communities where people feel welcome and connected to one another. Recognizing that we live in a time when many Jews are not affiliated with a synagogue and may even feel alienated from their Judaism, Wolfson believes that our communities can be places where conversations and interactions may inspire people to feel more richly connected to their spiritual lives as well as their communities.

Please join us for any or all of the following programs. Your participation will help make these events lively, interesting and inspiring. They are all free and open to the public. And some of them even include food.

- Thursday, **Feb. 20**, 7 p.m. at the JCC, 360 Amity Road in Woodbridge.

- “Relational Judaism: Using the Power of Relationships to Transform the Jewish Community” Shabbat morning services, **Feb. 22**, 9:15 a.m. at BEKI, followed by a luncheon and discussion: “Good Tents: The Relational Synagogue and the Community in the 21st Century.”

Library News

The following books were purchased through generous donations to the Ari Nathan Levine Fund, and will be housed in the Claire Goodwin Youth Room. They will be a particularly valuable resource for the volunteer parent leaders of our year-round weekly children’s Shabbat programs.

Sadie’s Almost Marvelous Menorah, Jamie Korngold

The Wooden Sword: A Jewish Folktale from Afghanistan, Ann Redisch Stampler

Tikkun Olam Ted, Vivian Newman

Don’t Sneeze at the Wedding, Pamela Mayer

Rise & Shine: A Challah-Day Tale, Karen Ostrove

The Schumutzy Family, Madelyn Rosenberg

The Cats on Ben Yehuda Street, Ann Redisch Stampler

Happy Hanukkah, Curious George, H. A. Rey

Stand in My Shoes: Kids Learning About Empathy, Bob Sornson

One Little Chicken, Elka Weber

Thank You Trees, Gail Langer Karwoski

It’s a Mitzvah, Grocer, Tilda Baisley

Barnyard Purim, Kelly Terwilliger

The Vanishing Gourds, A Sukkot Mystery, Susan Axe-Bronk

The Longest Night: A Passover Story, Laurel Snyder & Catia Chien

Oh No, Jonah, Tilda Baisley

Grandma Rose’s Magic, Linda Elovitz Marshall

A Watermelon in the Sukkah, Sylvia A. Rouss and Shannan Rouss

Speak Up, Tommy, Jacqueline Dembar Greene

What a Way to Start a New Year: A Rosh Hashanah Story, Jacqueline Jules

Cheesecake for Shavuot, Allison Ofanansky

Lights Out Shabbat, Sarene Shulimson

Sammy Spider’s First Yom Kippur, Sylvia A. Rouss

Sammy Spider’s First Book of Jewish Holidays, Sylvia A. Rouss

Mitzi’s Mitzvah, Gloria Koster

Tease Monster (A book about teasing vs. bullying), Julia Cook

Cliques Just Don’t Make Cents, Julia Cook

USY International Convention

I would like to highlight three aspects of our USY program. First, I am proud that two of our USYers who had previously held chapter board positions won competitive regional board positions this year. (Our region, Hanefesh, includes Connecticut and Western Massachusetts.) Our teen leaders meet regularly with USY staff. They gain valuable leadership and programming experience, and colleges look particularly favorably on teens who have held regional positions.

Both of our USY regional officers chose to attend this year's USY International Convention (IC), which was held in New Orleans. There were over 800 USYers from around the country kicking up a storm at IC last week. My second point is something that I find very impressive – Rabbi Steven Wernick, Executive Vice President and Chief Executive Officer of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism 'religiously' attends IC. He deeply understands that nurturing our teens is crucial to developing the next generation of teen leaders, and he demonstrates his commitment to 'l'dor v'dor' by participating in the kinnus (convention).

Back to our chapter sending delegates to IC. Are you aware that the money the Youth Commission raises in the Deli Box Fundraiser is used to provide subsidies to any Kadima or USY program costing over \$50? Last year, over \$1,500 in subsidies were provided by the Youth Commission to the families of Kadimaniks and USYers. This year's delegates to IC also received support from the Sisterhood's Marcel Gutman Scholarship Fund (BSGS). This month is our Deli Box fundraiser – please purchase generously to support our youth programs. If you are reading this appeal after the deadline has passed for ordering deli boxes, please know that you can always make a contribution or volunteer your time.

B'shalom, Rena Cheskis-Gold, Chair, BEKI Youth Commission, and Joint BEKI-BJ Youth Commission

Notes from our delegates

From BEKI-BJ member and Regional Religious Education VP Tova Benson-Tilsen:

I spent over a week with some of my best friends in New Orleans as a member of BEKI/BJ and Hanefesh USY. I attended International Convention (IC) for United Synagogue Youth, or USY, which is a teen organization affiliated with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ). We

spent 5 days participating in community service around the areas of New Orleans still damaged from Hurricane Katrina. We heard from guest speakers such as film director Andy Fickman and news reporter Jessica Abo, both USY alumni. We were given free time to explore the lively streets of New Orleans in Jackson Square and some tourist attractions in the area. We sampled the delicious local delicacies called

'beignets' and watched talented street performers. At the convention center and hotel, USYers expressed their love of Judaism through creative tefillot and learning sessions. I was given the honor of singing on stage with a group called "Changemakers" who had done work throughout the year to improve their communities. We sang 'Ani VeAta' by the famous Israeli musician, Arik Einstein, who sadly passed away just a few weeks ago. We were also given the time to have reunions with our friends from



Ramah and USY summer programs.

The penultimate day of IC was partially dedicated to elections and installations of the 2014 International Executive Board (IEB). This was an incredible process of democracy in our organization, and I am so proud to say that our very own Regional President, Abe Bayer, was elected as the 2014 International Membership/Kadima Vice President. When he won, our small yet powerful group of delegates from Hanefesh screamed in delight and rushed up to be the first to hug him. Our region also won the International Israel Challenge, a wonderful accomplishment for such a passionate group of people.

Our region then joined our neighbor, NERUSY (Boston-Providence), for post-convention over the weekend. Arriving home on Monday after such an incredible week was bittersweet. I left with dozens more friendships, but with the knowledge that I won't see many of those amazing people for a very long time. IC NOLA was absolutely incredible, and I can't wait for IC Atlanta next December.

From Regional SA/TO Vice President Kate Shragis:

IC gives you a great opportunity to meet kids from the USA and Canada. Hundreds of kids go from all the regions. They teach much about Judaism, in seminars, games, and activities. There is always an opportunity to do SA/TO and help others. I'm very glad I did it. It is a very influential venue in which to experience Judaism and connect with our culture and religion. Rebuild, rejoice, USY.

Shabbatot (Saturdays)

דרשנים

Darshanim

Darshan – *noun, plural dar·sha·nim*. Judaism. a preacher or teacher of Aggada or Halakha in a synagogue.

Rabbi Tilsen has invited the following speakers to serve as guest Darshanim in the coming weeks.

A Special Guest may serve as darshan on Shabbat Parashat VaYaqhel, Feb. 22.

Talia Weintraub, bat mitzva, will serve as darshanit on Shabbat Parashat VaYiqra, March 8.

Jacob Lettick, bar mitzva, will serve as darshan on Shabbat Para (Sabbath of the Cow) Parashat Shemini, March 22.

Rabbi Stuart Kelman will serve as darshan on Shabbat HaHodesh (Sabbath of the Moon) Parashat Tazria, March 29.



Stuart Kelman

Shabbat Shalom Torah Study

The *Shabbat Shalom Torah Study* meets every other Saturday morning at 10:45a in the office and is an ideal

setting for veteran and novice shulgoers alike to explore the scriptural readings and liturgy of the day in a supportive setting. Expertly led by **Steven Fraade**, with **Rabbi Alan Lovins**, **Rabbi Murray Levine**, **Nadav Sela**, **David Kuperstock**, **Isaiah Cooper**, **Rabbi Eric Silver** and others, the Shabbat Shalom Torah Study is a nurturing exploration of practice and theory presented in a participatory, non-threatening and multi-generational setting. Many members who take advantage of this unique offering feel a deeper sense of awe born of increased understanding and appreciation of the Torah reading, Haftara (Prophetic reading) and liturgy.

The program often focuses on the scriptural readings, but also address-



Steven Fraade



Alan Lovins

es the prayer liturgy and other topics related to the liturgical calendar, scriptural readings or current issues of concern.

Everyone is welcome to participate regardless of religious status or background. It is suitable for mature, or at least well-behaved, youth along with adults.



Nadav Sela

Mishna Sanhedrin at Minha

Every Shabbat afternoon through March 1, between Minha and Maariv services, there will be a 25-minute study period featuring the classic Mishna text of Mishna Sanhedrin. The *masekhet* (tractate) deals with judicial procedure in capital and other cases, along with related subjects. The Mishna is a compilation of Jewish law redacted by Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi around the year 220 CE in Tsiptori, northern Israel, based largely, apparently, on the teachings of Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Aqiva.

Who knows six? *Shisha sidrei Mishna*: Six are the Orders of the Mishna. The volume Sanhedrin (Supreme Council) is a tractate within the order Neziqin (Damages). The other five orders are Zeraim (Seeds); Moed (Festivals); Nashim (Women); Qodashim (Holies); and Tohorot (Purities). Sanhedrin is one of the sixty tractates of the Mishna.

Following the compilation of the Mishna, two sets of extended outlines of discussions based on the Mishna and called “Gemara,” were composed, one in Bavel (Iraq) and one in Jerusalem (Israel). The two works published together, usually with extensive commentaries and apparatuses, are called the Talmud.

Mondays

Rashi Study Group: Shemuel

Each Monday morning from 7:45 to 8:30 adults meet in the Library Chapel to read Rashi’s commentary on the TaNaKh (Hebrew Bible). The Rashi Study Group (RSG) has begun the Book of Shemuel (Samuel). Characters in the narrative include the Prophet Samuel, King Saul and King David, Mikhal, Batsheva, and more. It is possible to join the study group



Jon-Jay Tilsen

Continued on **Page 7**

Adult Studies

Continued from Page 6

for a single meeting or to begin at any time. Knowledge of Hebrew is not necessary. Rashi purported to explain the *peshat* of the text, i.e., the meaning in its historical, literary and linguistic context. Visitors and new participants are welcome. Hebrew and English texts are available. The RSG meets immediately following the 7:00a *shaharit* morning service. On Feb. 17, Presidents Day, morning services begin at 9 a.m., and the RSG meets 9:45 to 10:30. With Jon-Jay Tilsen.

Wednesdays

Hebrew Word of the Week

The Wednesday morning service (*shaharit*) features a 180-second “Hebrew word of the Week” to promote the learning of Hebrew. The Hebrew language is highly structured. Most words are based on three-letter roots, and are made with a limited set of verb or noun forms. By learning a few dozen roots and a small set of word-forms, it is possible to roughly translate Hebrew words isolated from any context, something less often possible in English. The Word of the Week often relates to the weekly scriptural readings, enhancing personal study and public Torah discussion.

Rabbis’ Study Group

Wednesdays with Murray is a weekly study group exclusively for rabbis, facilitated by Rabbi Murray Levine. The Wednesday study group affords local rabbis an opportunity to pursue their own *talmud torah* (Torah study) in a “safe” setting and with opportunities to learn from each others’ experience and insight. The study group meets Wednesday mornings in the Rosenkrantz Family Library. For more information, call Rabbi



Murray Levine

Murray Levine at (203) 397-2513.

Thursdays

Mini Morning Learning Service

The Thursday morning services are supplemented with commentary and teaching relating to the history, themes, choreography and language of the daily service. *Shaharit* service is from 8:15 to 9:15 on Thursdays; on other weekdays, the service begins at 7 a.m.

Sanhedrin Talmud Study Group

The *Sanhedrin Talmud Study Group* meets on Thursdays during the lunch hour (noon to 1). The Group has met weekly since 1999. For some participants, this is their first direct experience with Talmud text; for others, it is a continuation of a long journey. The Group focuses on the issues raised in the Talmud, with less attention to the technical aspects of the text. Knowledge of Hebrew or Aramaic is helpful but not required.



Isaiah Cooper

The Talmud, based on an oral text, has no beginning or end. One can begin study at any point; now is the best time. The Sanhedrin Talmud Study Group meets in BEKI’s Rosenkrantz Family Library. For information, contact Isaiah Cooper at his law office icooper@cooperlaw.net.

The Sanhedrin Study Group will not meet on Feb. 20.

Every Day

Divrei Torah on the Web

A collection of Divrei Torah (Torah commentaries) and essays by members and Rabbi Tilsen is posted on BEKI’s website under “Adult Studies” and “Meet Rabbi Tilsen.”



March Shabbaton with Rabbi Stuart Kelman

Rabbi Stuart Kelman will be our guest for a Shabbaton planned for March 28-29 at BEKI. Rabbi Kelman is an author and educator, and the founding Rabbi of Congregation Netivot Shalom in Berkeley, Calif. He will guide us in a weekend of learning and exploration as a community. The weekend activities will include Friday night dinner and learning session after Qabbalat Shabbat, special programming for adults and children on Shabbat morning as well as sessions on Shabbat afternoon. If you would like to help, please contact Shoshana Zax or Karel Koenig. We need sponsors as well as people who are interested in planning, prepping, publicity and more.



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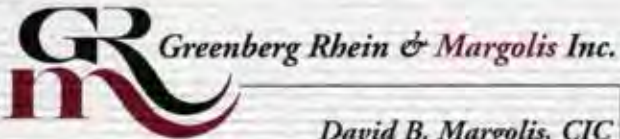


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Chai Fund (minimum \$18) to support synagogue operations

- To Mary Doyle Zuskin with sympathy on the passing of Thomas H. Nikkel by Joanne Foodim & Ron Forbes

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- To Rabbi Richard & Judy

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- To Susan Stone with sympathy on the passing of Lou Stone by Betsy & Mikki Ratner

Yahrzeit Fund (\$5 minimum) to support synagogue operations

- In memory of Pearl Weiner by Joanne & Steve Rudof
- In memory of Irving Weinstein by Anita Weinstein
- In memory of Benjamin Brodner by Leatrice & Richard Brodner
- In memory of Hattie Henken by Gladys Lipkin

- In memory of Kate Weinstein by Suzanne Weinstein
- In memory of Lawrence Moscowitz by Mike Moscowitz
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- In loving memory of Phyllis C. Rogoff by Eileen S. Rogoff
- In memory of Reuben Gralla by Linda Schultz & Howard Gralla
- In memory of Eleanor Hepler by Linda Schultz & Howard Gralla
- In memory of loved ones by Allen & Sheila Mushin
- In memory of Rita Moscowitz by Mike Moscowitz
- In memory of Milton Cohen by Doris & Stephen Brody
- In memory of Celia Russ by Doris & Stephen Brody
- In memory of Rose Cohen by Doris & Stephen Brody
- In memory of George Brunswick by Barbara Cushen
- In memory of Donna Wright by Barbara Cushen
- In loving memory of his mother-in-law Gertrude Slopak by David Schwartz
- In memory of her brother Mel Miller by Marsha Landsberg
- In memory of Jacob Pepper by Anna Pepper
- In memory of Anne Schnitman Irwin by Helene & Edward Vanderhoef
- In memory of her mother Esther Heller by Rhoda Lemkin
- In memory of Louis Rochlin by Kranie & Earl Baker
- In memory of Jack Nankin by Sheldon Nankin
- In memory of Rebecca Rader by Dennis & Barbara Rader

Sisterhood

Rabbi David Wolpe came up with an idea for a bumper sticker for Conservative Judaism that would read “Qedishanu beMitzvotekha” – “Send holiness into our lives through Your mitzvot.” What is holiness? Holiness is expressing humanity by doing things that human beings can do that other creatures can't. And the best source of holiness is imposing choice on instinct.

Historically, Women's League has been known for its focus on education, on enhancing the Jewish knowledge of its members. But often overlooked or down-played is its commitment to tiquan olam (repairing the world).

Women's League commitment to tiquan olam is expressed through our membership in major national and international Jewish organizations, such as the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, Coalition on the Environment, Jewish Life (of which we are a founding member), Greenfaith, and the American Zionist Movement. We are proud of the good work our collective voice has achieved in our 95-year his-

tory. There is so much more to be done.

We encourage you to join our congregation's sisterhood and become a member of Women's League. By joining your voice to our network, you help strengthen the impact we have in repairing the world. Membership is \$25 a year. Please write your check to Sisterhood and mail it to Miriam (Miki) Ratner 135 Seneca Rd. New Haven, CT 06515.

A million candles

Help light a million candles to remember the 6 million.

For Yom HaShoah, April 28 – 28 Nisan 5774, candles may be purchased in the Sisterhood Gift Shop any time. Encourage your children to contribute some of their allowance to this cause. We are looking for 100% of our members to support this project. A donation of \$6 is suggested or any other amount you wish to contribute.

Scholarships will be awarded to our BEKI students who will be attending Camp Ramah this summer. Forms are at <http://beki.org/forms/bsgs.pdf>.

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Free Israel Trip

Registration for Summer Birthright/Taglit Trips is Feb. 19 at 10 a.m. New eligibility rules make it easier than ever to participate on a Birthright/Taglit Israel trip. You can now apply if you have been to Israel on a peer trip before the age of 18, or if you are age 27-29 and in certain professions. Register at www.birthrightIsrael.com.

More Israeli Dancing

New Haven Israeli dancing meets at BEKI every Tuesday night in January and February, 7:30 to 8:30 beginners and teaching, 8:30 to 11 p.m. open session. \$10 for BEKI members, teens free. No prior experience needed. Pay at the door. Teachers Leng & Igal www.ctisraelidance.com.



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