

# BEKI Bulletin

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February 2001 Vol. 7 Issue 2

ק"ק בית אל-כתר ישראל

Shevat 5761

## Mishloah Manot – Purim Baskets

Purim is coming! This year we will again help you celebrate the Purim mitzva of *mishloach manot* - the sending of gifts - and *matanot la'evyonim* - presents to the poor - with our beautiful **BEKI Purim baskets**.

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# טו בשבט

Tu B'Shevat  
8 Feb

## Coat Drive

As part of his celebration on becoming a Bar Mitzva, Jason Wiener is collecting warm coats (gently used), toiletries and books. All items will be donated to Domestic Violence Services of New Haven, an agency that provides assistance and support to battered women and children.

Jason will be accepting items until his Bar Mitzva date of 5 May 2001. Items may be deposited in the designated box in the BEKI coatroom.

## Administrative Announcements

### How to Contact the BEKI Bulletin

Responses to "A Message from Rabbi Tilsen," questions for "Dear Rabbi" and Letters to the Editor can be sent to: Editor, BEKI-Bulletin, 85 Harrison Street, New Haven, CT 06515 or by email to [jjtilsen@beki.org](mailto:jjtilsen@beki.org).

*Rabbi Tilsen's mail and e-mail are opened directly and exclusively by the Rabbi himself and are as secure and confidential as mail and e-mail can be.*

### Calling BEKI

To call BEKI, dial (203) 389-2108.

When the automated attendant answers, dial any of the numbers below for the desired extension. You don't have to wait to hear the whole recorded greeting. If you don't have a "touch-tone" phone (i.e. a phone that dials by sending tones), wait to the end of the greeting and you will then be able to leave a message for the Administrator. A shortcut: To skip to the end of a greeting, press asterisk (\*).

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### BEKI-Bulletin

The newsletter is published monthly by Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel for the benefit of its members. Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel is affiliated with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

To contribute articles or for inquiries regarding membership, donations, or special activities, call the Synagogue office (203) 389-2108, or write to 85 Harrison Street, New Haven, CT 06515-1724 or email: [jjtilsen@beki.org](mailto:jjtilsen@beki.org)

or see our web page created by Phill Simon:  
[www.beki.org](http://www.beki.org)

For information about advertising, call the synagogue office. Deadline for submission of ads or articles is the 1st of the month preceding publication.

Annual subscription is \$36.00.

#### BEKI-Bulletin

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A Message from Rabbi Tilsen & Dear Rabbi  
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### Daily Services

Daily services at BEKI provide an opportunity to learn, pray, reflect, transition and center one's own spiritual life. Services provide a context for fulfilling the mitzva (religious obligation) of daily worship. Services are held every weekday morning and evening. See the calendar for a schedule. During the winter, there will be a special need for more participants on Tuesday mornings (7:00a), Thursday mornings (8:15a) and Sunday nights (5:45p).

### No Parking

Members and visitors are advised that parking is prohibited at all times on the East side of Harrison Street as indicated by the "No Parking" signs. Parking is usually available across Harrison Street, and ample parking is available in the BEKI lot at the rear of the building. When driving in the BEKI parking lot, please observe the 5 miles-per-hour speed limit, which is enforced by random speed bumps.

## A Message From Rabbi Tilsen

Although I am not an expert in American law, I read with great interest the United States Supreme Court ruling in the case *Bush v. Gore*, which determined the outcome of last year's presidential election. The chasm between the thinking of the majority of five and the minority of four justices was striking. Two thoughts linger in my mind. One is, "Reasonable people can disagree." The other is, "Reactionary judges with an agenda can use legal terminology to justify any legal decision, no matter how devoid of precedent or sound legal reasoning."

These thoughts apply to the Jewish judiciary, the rabbinate charged with interpreting and applying *halakha* (Jewish law) in our day, as much as to any other judiciary in any place and time. One of the great distortions of traditional Judaism as it is expressed today derives from a peculiar, though not unique, circumstance in which we find ourselves: Much of the rabbinate in our day is reactionary in its world outlook. I use the term "reactionary" advisedly, as a merely descriptive term, not necessarily with the intent of dismissing serious consideration of their views. This reactionary outlook is most often displayed overtly and can be seen readily in issues pertaining to gender, economic justice, race or democracy.

Here is one example. Much is made of the problem of the "aguna," the would-be divorcee who cannot remarry because her original husband will not grant her a *gett* (*halakhic* bill of divorce), either out of spite or due to circumstances beyond his control (such as imprisonment). Apparently as many as several thousand women suffer this status, especially in Israel. The essential barrier cited by the courts to explain their inability to offer relief to these women is a principle of *halakha* based on Scripture that requires a *gett* to be issued by the husband *by his own free will*. Such a principle of law is surely reasonable. It would in some circumstances prevent the powerful men of society from forcing other men to relinquish their wives. Besides, it is a Biblical law which we must obey, regardless of our ability to understand it; failure to comply with its requirements could result in adultery and the birth of *mamzerim* (illegitimate children), both of which are grave transgressions under Biblical law.

While the requirement of the man's free will is surely an *important* principle of law, it was not, until the past century, taken as an *absolute* principle of law that trumps all others. Our sages have taught, "The rabbis were lenient in order to prevent *agunot*" (Talmud Yevamot 88a). Rabbenu Asher wrote, "It is fitting for every *halakhic* authority to examine all sides in order to allow the *aguna* to remarry" (*Responsa* 51:2). I believe that the many volumes of legal precedent and codification published over the past two thousand years evidence numerous solutions to the "Aguna" problem, many of which in essence "force" the husband to issue a *gett* or, alternatively, issue a *gett* on the court's authority. Moreover, since the 1950s, most Conservative rabbis have insisted that marrying couples at whose weddings they officiate sign a *ketuba* (wedding contract) or prenuptial agreement stipulating legal procedures that can prevent any woman from becoming an *aguna*. Some Orthodox factions have gotten themselves into a bind by condemning the Conservative rabbinate's solution, primarily as an anti-Conservative polemic. Those same factions cannot now use the same legal device and have had to struggle to find alternatives, some of which are almost identical to the Conservative device but are known by other names (lest anyone think they are following a legal standard initiated or popularized by the Conservatives).

During my years of Rabbinical training at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York and Jerusalem, I encountered many scholars as well as fellow students deeply committed to the integrity of the *halakhic* process. At the same time, there were those with a more cynical view, who believed that the judge decides what he wishes, then finds some legalistic justification for it. In branches of government other than the judiciary, the distinction is called "the rule of law" versus "the rule by law." Rule "of" law means that the law is a tool for insuring justice; rule "by" law means that law is used as a tool by the ruling class to impose its will with-



Rabbi Tilsen

Continued on next page

## A Message from Rabbi Tilsen

Continued from page 3

out respect to ideals of "justice." Both approaches exist in the American legal system, and both exist in the Jewish legal system. The difference is more than rhetorical; it describes an essential difference between a just and an oppressive society.

Was the split decision on *Bush v. Gore* a case of reasonable people disagreeing, or was it a majority imposing its will with only a patina of legal language that could only convince the most biased partisan? The same could be asked of the other decisions rendered in Florida and Federal courts. Bias, and disregard for established rules of procedure and precedent, is a fault not limited to the reactionary right.

I believe that the future of a democratic America, and of an enlightened and vibrant Judaism, require an affirmation of and commitment to the highest principles of justice and the rule of law. In large part it was for that reason I was dismayed at the judicial proceedings determining the presidential selection process (independent of the outcome), which I viewed as a travesty of justice. At the same time, I feel equally strongly about representations

of Jewish law made by some segments of the rabinate. Are the differing positions on questions of Jewish law instances of reasonable people disagreeing, or are these stated positions merely the polemics of the partisans? The reality of the Jewish world today, even more than democratic America, is that "the people" decide which authorities to follow. It is my hope that the majority of American Jews will value allegiance to the principles of Jewish law highly as they chart their personal course of affiliation and conduct.

Reader response for publication may be directed to [jjtilsen@beki.org](mailto:jjtilsen@beki.org).

### RAVIT AVNI-SINGER, MSW LCSW

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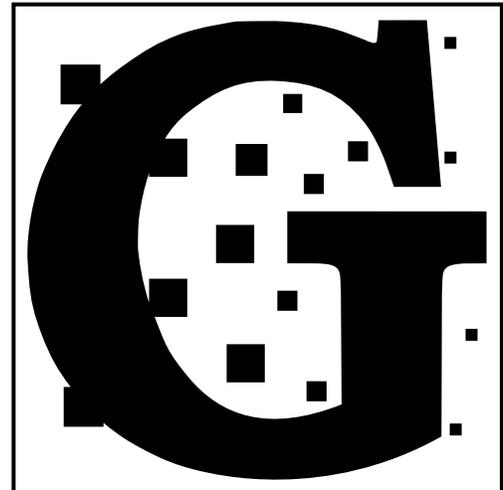
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## LifeCycle

### With sorrow we note the passing of

- Deanie Levine, mother of Roger (& Susan Stone) Levine
- Louise Egalka, sister of Miriam "Mikki" Ratner

May the Almighty comfort those who mourn

### HaNolad beMazal Tov!

We are pleased to announce the birth of Jacob Noah Lettick, son of Robert & Janice Lettick, brother of Matthew, great-nephew of Edward Lettick

### Mazal Tov

To Prof. Shulamith Chernoff on winning the Anna Davidson Rosenberg Emerging Poet Award in an international competition sponsored by the Judah L. Magnes Museum in Berkeley, California.

To Adele Tyson for receiving a public service award from the Jewish Home for the Aged.

## Letters

To the BEKI community:

We are touched by the prayers and concern of the congregation during our family crisis. Special thanks to those who prepared meals, or watched Rebecca and Sarah while we visited the hospital. We hope and pray for the continued recovery of Janet's father, Ron Michelson.

Sincerely,  
David & Janet Golden

Dear BEKI friends,

I want to thank you for your outpouring of love and support as I grieve the loss of my father. Your cards, honorary donations, thoughts, food, and child care have filled me with an even deeper appreciation of our wonderful community.

-Ravit Avni-Singer

There will be a memorial service marking the end of Sheloshim for **Deanie C. Levine** on Sunday 11 February 2001 at 1:00p at BEKI.



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## 20s-30s Havura at BEKI

Jewish singles and couples in their 20s and 30s are invited to contact BEKI member Valerie Sandler (777-4784 or [valerie.sandler@yale.edu](mailto:valerie.sandler@yale.edu)) or Mary Ellen Mack (389-2108 x14 or [beki@snet.net](mailto:beki@snet.net)) for information on special events of interest. BEKI's new 20s-30s Havura is primarily for adults without children, and meets about once a month at BEKI for Shabbat services, dinner and *shmoozing* and informal discussion. People *with* children are encouraged to contact Anne Johnston (389-2108 x33 or [anne@beki.org](mailto:anne@beki.org)) or Mary Ellen Mack (389-2108 x14 or [beki@snet.net](mailto:beki@snet.net)) for information on the Children's Shabbat Havura and other activities of special interest.

## Planning Ahead...

If you are interested in including BEKI in your estate planning or current planned charitable giving, please feel free to contact estate planning attorney Donna Levine at 787-1633 ([sdsij@aol.com](mailto:sdsij@aol.com)). You may also contact Rabbi Tilsen at 389-2108 x10 ([jjtilsen@beki.org](mailto:jjtilsen@beki.org)) or Deborah Kaplan Polivy at The Jewish Foundation at 387-2424 x304 ([dpolivy@jewishnewhaven.org](mailto:dpolivy@jewishnewhaven.org)) for a confidential discussion.

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## Torah for the Hungry Mind: Adult Studies at BEKI

### Jewish Parenting Workshop

As parents we have the ability to create homes that foster the values important to building a rewarding Jewish family life. This workshop, "Jewish Parenting: Creating a Meaningful Jewish Home," will give participants the tools necessary to develop a family culture and rhythm and a nurturing Jewish environment in which parents and children will thrive. The workshop, presented by Jewish Educator Amy Pincus, will be on Sunday 25 February from 9:45a to 11:15 in the Rosenkrantz Library.

### Darshanit in February

Shulamith Chernoff will serve as darshanit (Torah commentator) on Shabbat morning 10 February, Shabbat shira. Shula is Associate Professor Emerita at Southern Connecticut State University. She is an internationally recognized expert in early childhood development and education, and an award-winning poet.

### Pirque Avot

Mishna Avot, also known as *Pirque Avot* or Ethics of the Fathers is studied at BEKI each Shabbat afternoon between the *minha* and *maariv* services during the winter months. Everyone is welcome.

### Book Group Thursday Night

BEKI's monthly Book Group meets on Thursday 15 February 7:30p in BEKI's [Rosenkrantz Family Library](#). For further information, contact Helen Rosenberg at 389-9594 or Marc Schwartz at [marc.schwartz@healthcalls.com](mailto:marc.schwartz@healthcalls.com).

### Rashi Study Group

Each Monday morning from 7:45a to 8:30a adults meet in the [Rosenkrantz Family Library](#) to read Rashi's commentary on the Torah. It is possible to join the study 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.

### AA Meetings Thursdays at 8:00p

The Thursday night [AA meeting](#) has a new time — 8:00p — and a new format. A weekly AA Meeting has been held at BEKI since May 1997. Open to any person who can benefit from a recovery program, the meeting is held according to standard AA procedure. This is not a specifically Jewish recovery group, although a large proportion of participants are Jewish. The meeting now features a speaker. For information on the weekly meeting call Jay at (203) 387-6019 or email Jay at [jay@jacsw.org](mailto:jay@jacsw.org).

## BEKI Events

*February - Shevat - Adar*

2001

5761

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				8 Shevat 1	9 Shevat 2	10 Shevat 3
Shaharit=Morning Minha =Afternoon Maariv=Evening SSLM=Shabbat Shalom Learners' Minyan TNS=The New [Religious] School KISS=Kids in Shul when there's no School	<b>BEKI phone numbers:</b> (203) 389-2108 Fax (203) 389-5899 Mary Ellen-Office x14 Religious School x13 Rabbi x10 Kulanu x33	<b>Office Hours:</b> Mon 9a-12 & 1p-3p Tue by appt. only Wed 10a-12 & 1p-6p Thu 9a-12 & 1p-3p Fri 9a-2p		8:15a Shaharit 5:45p Maariv 8:00p A.A.	7:00a Shaharit 4:49p Candles 6:00p Maariv 6:30p 20s/30s Havura Group Shabbat Dinner	9:15a Shaharit 10:45a Children's Programs 4:45p Minha
11 Shevat 4	12 Shevat 5	13 Shevat 6	14 Shevat 7	15 Shevat 8	16 Shevat 9	17 Shevat 10
9:00a Shaharit 9:30a Religious School and Tu B'Shevat Program 5:45p Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 7:45a Rashi Study Grp 5:45p Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 5:45p Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 4:15p Religious School 5:45p Maariv	<i>Tu B'Shevat</i>	7:00a Shaharit 4:58p Candles 6:00p Maariv	<i>Shabbat Shirah</i>
				8:15a Shaharit 5:45p Maariv 5:45p Benei Mitzva Prgm 8:00p A.A.	9:15a Shaharit <i>Darshanit: Shulamith Chernoff</i> 10:45a Children's Programs 10:45a Cosmic Conversations 10:45a SSLM <i>Kiddush in Honor of Sarah Serkin</i> 4:55p Minha	
18 Shevat 11	19 Shevat 12	20 Shevat 13	21 Shevat 14	22 Shevat 15	23 Shevat 16	24 Shevat 17
9:00a Shaharit 9:30a Religious School 5:45p Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 7:45a Rashi Study Grp 5:45p Maariv 7:45p Exec. Board	7:00a Shaharit 5:45p Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 4:15p Religious School 5:45p Maariv	8:15a Shaharit 5:45p Maariv 7:30p Book Group 8:00p A.A.	7:00a Shaharit 5:07p Candles 6:00p Maariv	9:15a Shaharit 10:45a Children's Programs 5:05p Minha
25 Shevat 18	26 Shevat 19	27 Shevat 20	28 Shevat 21	29 Shevat 22	30 Shevat 23	1 Adar 24
9:00a Shaharit No Religious School 9:30a Congregational Breakfast 5:45p Maariv	<i>Presidents' Day-Office Closed</i> 9:00a Shaharit 9:45a Rashi Study Grp 5:45p Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 5:45p Maariv	7:00a Shaharit No Religious School 5:45p Maariv	8:15a Shaharit 5:45p Maariv 8:00p A.A.	7:00a Shaharit 5:17p Candles 6:00p Maariv	<i>Rosh Hodesh - Shabbat Shekalim</i>
						9:15a Shaharit 10:45a Children's Programs 10:45a Cosmic Conversations 10:45a SSLM <i>Kiddush Sponsors: Bennett Graff and Sharon Lovett-Graff</i> 5:15p Minha
2 Adar 25	3 Adar 26	4 Adar 27	5 Adar 28			
9:00a Shaharit No Religious School 9:45a Creating a Meaningful Jewish Home 5:45p Minha	7:00a Shaharit 7:45a Rashi Study Grp 5:45p Maariv 7:45p General Board	7:00a Shaharit 5:45p Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 4:15p Religious School 5:45p Maariv			<b>BEKI email:</b> Office: BEKI@snet.net Rabbi:jjtilsen@beki.org Anne Johnston: anne@beki.org website: www.beki.org

## Library News

The following books were contributed to the [Rosenkrantz Library](#) by Rabbi Murray Levine in memory of Malka Levine:

*The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*, by Abegg, Flint and Ulrich

*African Americans and Jews in the Twentieth Century*, by Franklin, Grant, Kletnick and McNeil

*New Age Judaism*, by Melinda Ribner

*Schmoozing*, by Joshua Halberstam

*The Far Euphrates*, by Aryeh Lev Stollman

*The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis*, by Avivah G. Zornberg

The following books have been purchased through the Family Education Grant from the Department of Jewish Education, Jewish Federation of Greater New Haven, and thanks to the efforts of BEKI Family Education Director Anne Johnston. They are available on a non-lending basis in the Ari Nathan Levine Library in the Claire Goodwin

Youth Room Resource Center, and will be particularly helpful to all the parent volunteers who lead the Children's Shabbat Programs.

*Creative Movement and Song*, by Joanne Tucker  
*Lively Legends*, by Miriam P. Feinberg and Rena

Rotenberg

*Teaching Jewish Holidays*, by Robert Goodman

*Teaching Tefilah*, by Bruce Kadden and Barbara Binder Kadden

*Teaching Torah*, by Sorel Goldberg Loeb and Barbara Binder Kadden

*Torah Talk*, by Yona Chubara and Miriam P. Feinberg and Rena Rotenberg

*Teaching Virtues*, by Susan Freeman

*Jewish Every Day*, by Maxine Segal Handelman

*Parashah Plays*, by Richard J. Allen (11 copies)(this item is stored in a box in the back of the Posener Daily Chapel on the bookshelf and is available for plays for the K-2 and Junior Congregation)

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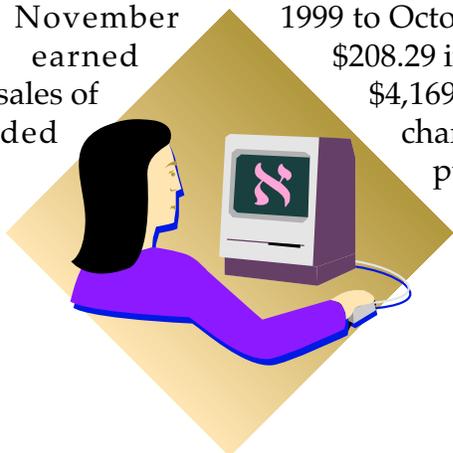
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## Buying Books?

Buying books, music, software, or electronics on the internet? BEKI earns a small referral fee for purchases made from Amazon.com when the purchaser accesses Amazon from the Amazon icon at the bottom of [www.beki.org/links.html](http://www.beki.org/links.html). From November 1999 to October 2000, BEKI earned \$208.29 in referral fees on sales of \$4,169. There is no added charge to the purchaser.



## Take Care of Your Cemetery Need

The time to take care of your cemetery need is before there is a need. Now is the perfect time to select your sites...while there is a good selection. BEKI cemeteries are located in Hamden and West Haven, within minutes of the synagogue and with easy access to main thoroughfares. Member discounts are available.

We can help you select a site and discuss payment terms. Call the BEKI Cemetery Association office today at 389-2108 x57 and arrange a meeting of one of the officers of the cemetery association. For directions to the cemeteries see our website at [www.beki.org](http://www.beki.org) under "Directions."

MICHAEL MARTONE  
MANAGER



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## Planning a bar- or bat-mitzva at BEKI?

Parents planning a bar- or bat-mitzva observance at BEKI during the next three years are urged to call the BEKI office (389-2108 x14 or [beki@snet.net](mailto:beki@snet.net)) to reserve a date and to request a copy of the "Guide to Benei Mitzva Observance at Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel, second edition." The "Guide" is also available at [www.beki.org/bmitva.pdf](http://www.beki.org/bmitva.pdf).

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