



A New Haven Tradition since 1892

COUNTING ON SHAVUOT

Sefira – Counting the Omer

At the second seder, we began daily *sefirat ha-omer* (counting of the *omer*), a counting of days to Shavuot, the next major festival. The counting, preferably done each night for 49 nights, is an expression of eager anticipation, commemorating the period of expectation and preparation we experienced in the Exodus from Egypt until the revelation at Sinai. Counting is the fulfillment of a *mitzva* specified in the Torah: “You shall count from the eve of the second day of Pesah, when an Omer of grain is to be brought as an offering, seven complete weeks. The day after the seventh week of your counting will make fifty days” (Lev. 23:15-16).

The simple home ceremony appears in *Sim Shalom* and most *siddurim* (prayer books) immediately after the weekday evening service. While it is a *mitzva* prescribed for adults, *sefirat ha-omer* can also be a fun, artistic and joyous ritual for families with children.

In the days before printed calendars, calendar watches and daily newspapers, the *sefira* served to keep the liturgical calendar of the Jewish People synchronized, no simple

accomplishment given the dispersion and isolation of much of the community. The term *omer* refers to the measure (one handful) of grain that was used to create a physical relic of the counting. With a physical reminder, even illiterate people could do a recount in case they forgot the day’s number.

Families with young children may use this opportunity to help their children understand and experience anticipation, planning, counting and hope. In contrast to a “count-down,” which calls attention to the dwindling number of days ahead, *sefirat ha-omer* is a “count-up,” which enumerates the accumulation of days passed. This suggests that our past is not “lost,” but rather it is carried with us, enriching us, we hope, with lessons learned, enhanced maturity, happy experiences, the merit of good deeds, and fond memories.

Teach us to number our days, that we may attain a heart of wisdom – Psalm 90:12

Shavuot Two-Day Festival: The Jewish *Hajj*

The Festival of Shavuot (“Weeks”), one of the three major

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Country Auction

BEKI will hold a fun-filled country auction on Sunday, June 5, 5-8 p.m., featuring a silent and live auction with professional auctioneer Mark Levine of Keystone Associates (www.keystoneauctions.com). Of course there will be delicious food and drink, including a first-ever BEKI beer tasting.

Among the must-have items to be auctioned are a basket of fine kosher wines, an antique copper laundry kettle, and a

professional slide show. There will be art, Judaica, tickets to the Festival of Arts & Ideas, Yale football, and lots of shows (Long Wharf, Yale Rep, Westport Country Playhouse, Goodspeed).

Looking for an exciting getaway? How about a one-week vacation at a time-share location of your choice, a weekend

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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:

- 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

For advertising information, call the synagogue office.

Deadline for submission of ads or articles is the first of the month preceding publication.

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A Message from Rabbi Tilsen & Dear Rabbi
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Ask us about establishing a fund, trust or annuity to ensure BEKI's future.

Charitable giving strengthens our Community and provides the donor with tax savings.

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Director
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lstanger@jewishnewhaven.org

Jewish Foundation of Greater New Haven



All of us. One Foundation.

Shavuot

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pilgrimage festivals, celebrates the anniversary of the Giving of the Torah at Sinai some 3,400 years ago. The word *hag* (pilgrimage festival) is known widely by its Arabic cognate, *hajj* (which, for Muslims, means pilgrimage to Mecca). The Torah commands, “Three times a year—on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the Feast of Weeks, and on the Feast of Booths—all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place that He will choose. They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed, but each with his own gift, according to the blessing that the Lord your God has bestowed upon you” (Deut. 16:16-17).

Shavuot comes at the culmination of the counting of seven weeks from Pesah, and will be a major observance at BEKI this summer. Just as we look forward to important events in our personal lives, so too our ancestors enthusiastically and devoutly anticipated the event at Sinai. By participating in BEKI’s Shavuot observance, we re-enact the extraordinary experience of our ancestors and show our own enthusiasm for receiving Torah.

Tiqun Leil Shavuot

Our annual Tiqun Leil Shavuot Night of Study takes place on the first night of Shavuot, Tuesday, June 7. Dairy and pareve refreshments will be served. That means **cheesecake**.

The evening begins with the Minha Afternoon Service, from 8 to 8:10 p.m. in the George G. Posener Daily Chapel. The brief Festival Evening service, from 8:10 to 8:30, will be followed by presentations.

Shiurim will be presented late into the evening, beginning at 8:30p with Rena Cheskis-Gold on “The 2010 Greater New Haven Jewish Community Population Study: Who are We, Where are We Going, and What are We Doing About It?”

Rena Cheskis-Gold, a BEKI member since 1994, serves on the BEKI Board of Directors, and is Chair of the Joint Youth Commission of BEKI and B’nai Jacob. She is a demographer and principal of her own firm, Demographic Perspectives, LLC, which provides data for strategy, assessment, communications, and for managing change. At the Federation, she is a member of the Strategic Planning Com-



Rena Cheskis-Gold

mittee, and chair of the 2010 Greater New Haven Jewish Community Population Study.

Paul Bass, BEKI member and noted journalist and author and publisher of the New Haven Independent (newhavenindependent.org), will conduct an exploration with Alan Gerber, Alan Lovins and Mark Oppenheimer, “From Birth(ers) to Rapture: Why Do People Believe the Unbelievable?” The session begins around 9:45p and will end at 10:45p, if you can believe it.



Paul Bass

Alan Gerber, a BEKI member, graduated from Yale University and holds a Ph.D. in Economics from MIT.

He is Professor of Political Science and Director of the Center for the Study of American Politics at Yale University where he teaches courses on experimental methods, statistics, and American politics. His current research focuses on the application of experimental methods to the study of campaign communications, and he has designed and performed experimental evaluations of many campaigns and fundraising programs, both partisan and non-partisan in nature.



Alan Gerber

Alan Lovins, a BEKI member, is a licensed clinical psychologist with over 35 years experience in counseling families, couples, and individuals. He holds a bachelor’s degree from Yale University and a doctorate in clinical psychology from Columbia University. He has a master’s degree in sacred theology and is an ordained rabbi. Dr. Lovins has been an associate clinical professor at Yale University. He has served on the board of directors of the UConn Family Business Program and has facilitated groups of entrepreneurs. His work with family businesses includes succession planning, conflict resolution, communication strategies, inter-family issues, sibling dissention, gender issues, extended-family councils, off-site retreats, strategic planning, leadership transition, extended-family dynamics and retirement plan-



Alan Lovins

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Shavuot

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ning, and has served on family boards.

Mark Oppenheimer, a BEKI member, is the author of three books, most recently *Wisnheimer: A Childhood Subject to Debate*. He writes a biweekly column about religion for *The New York Times*, and is a writer for *The New York Times Magazine*, *Slate*, *Mother Jones*, *Tablet*, *The Forward*, and many other publications. He is an editor of *The New Haven Review* and an occasional commentator on NPR. He is a lecturer in the English and Political Science departments of Yale University. He holds a doctorate in religious studies and is currently the director of the Yale Journalism Initiative.

Jennifer Myer, a certified psychiatrist, specializes in mental and behavioral health.

At 11 p.m., Moshe Meiri, a BEKI member, will present "The Torah, Translated and Improved: Human Nature and the Halakhic Development of Civil Procedure." The evolution of the legal prin-



Mark Oppenheimer



Moshe Meiri

ciple of "*mode be-miqtsat*," "partial concession" or "partial agreement," provides insights not only into the development of law, but also exposes a fundamental understanding of the origin and nature of Torah, including the origins of the written text of the Humash.

Shavuot Mornings

The Shavuot First Day Festival Shahrut Morning Service begins at 9:15 on Wednesday, June 8. The service includes the full recitation of Hallel. The afternoon and evening services begin at 5:45.

The Shavuot Second Day Morning service begins at 9:15 on Thursday, June 9. The Festival service includes a *Shahrut* morning service, *Hallel* (Psalms of praise), a Torah reading and *Haftara*. Following the *Haftara* (prophetic reading), the Yizkor Memorial Service is held. The Yizkor memorial service is one of four such services during the year that help us recognize our feelings of loss, which are sometimes especially intense during the Festival season, and to honor the memories of our loved ones.

Following Yizkor, the Book of Ruth is read to a uniquely beautiful and ancient melody based on the same system of *ta'amei hamiqra* ("trope") found in most of the Hebrew Bible. Then the Festival *Musaf* additional service is recited.

Some Congregants may leave during qiddush for a hike to the top of West Rock. Weather permitting, bring appropriate shoes and leave with friends from the lobby.

The Festival Mincha service is held in the George G. Posener Daily Chapel from 5:45p to 6:05p.

LifeCycle

Benei Mitzva

Maya Lew, daughter of Yaron & Liora Lew, June 24-25, *parashat Qorah*

Benjamin A. Levine, son of Daniel & Karen Levine, July 8-9, *parashat Balaq*



Maya Lew

Mazal Tov to

Rena Cheskis-Gold on being awarded the Jewish Federation of Greater New Haven's Community Service Award
Daniel Ben-Chitrit and Tsvi Benson-Tilsen, MAKOM graduates

Torah Fund

The Torah Fund Campaign funds we raise here at BEKI, by sale of cards and donations, help to ensure the future of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS).

Your Torah Fund contributions strengthen and perpetuate Conservative Judaism throughout the world.

The JTS began training rabbis in 1887. More than one hundred years later it remains the pinnacle of rabbinic training for the Conservative movement. Small donations remain a vital part of support for this great institution.

Please support the JTS with the purchase of cards for all occasions. Call Barbara Cushen at (203) 407-0314 and your card is sent right out for you. Just \$4 each and that includes postage.

Thank you to everyone who did send cards and donations during the past academic year. Please continue to support the JTS.

Barbara Cushen
Torah Fund Chair

In Memory of:

- Charlotte Gralla to Howard Gralla from the Hesed Committee, Barbara Cushen, Stanley Saxe
- Sandy Luger to Joanne Goldblum from the Hesed Committee
- Sam Kantrowitz to Violet Ludwig from Noel & Harriet Barstein
- Bernie Nitkin to Linda Lambert & family from Sheila Caplan
- Sarah Pilver to Michele Croonenberghs from Barbara Cushen & Stanley Saxe
- Rae Webber to Malcom Webber & family from Barbara Cushen
- Joseph London to Sharon Bender & family from the Lew family

Cards for own use:

- Rabbi Murray Levine

Mazel Tov to:

- Grace Geisinger on her 100th birthday from all her friends in Sisterhood

Notice of Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting will be held Wednesday June 29 at 6:30 p.m., following afternoon and evening services. Featuring a report on the year gone by, welcoming new officers and directors, the coronation of the new president, and refreshments. All are welcome. Duration: About 90 minutes.

Free Yoga

For people born in 1956 or earlier, Monday Morning Yoga with Debby Kahan, weekly, 10a to 11a, free to BEKI members, \$5 for others, in the Claire Goodwin Youth Room.

Read In the Desert

To read Torah from BeMidbar (Numbers, or “In the Desert of Sinai”) contact Darryl at kuperst@aol.com.

High School Class of 2011

The Service and Qiddush following Shabbat morning services on June 4 will honor members of the high school class of 2011. Graduates include Sarah Bass, Daniel Ben-Chitrit, Tsvi Benson-Tilsen, Lauren Buckman, David Friedman, Allie Graham, Alex Shragis, Leah Winter, Gabbie Wynschen. Any others? For info contact Eva at eshragis@hotmail.com.

20s-30s Havura

For people born after 1970. Shabbat Evening (Friday Night) Dinner June 10 following 6 o'clock service at BEKI, dinner off-site, RSVP to inas@snet.net.

Buying Groceries?

Use gift cards for Peapod, Stop & Shop, Shop Rite and Westville Kosher Market, available at face value – no additional cost to you – and BEKI receives a significant commission. Available from Gloria Cohen and from Office.

Minyan Makers on Call

To be alerted when members have specifically requested that a minyan be present, join the Minyan Makers list by sending a blank message to minyan-subscribe@beki.org. Participation also entitles you to make requests from that same group.

Publication Deadlines

Submissions for the July-August combined edition of the Bulletin should be sent to jjtilsen@beki.org or office@beki.org and are due June 1. Submissions for the mid-month mailing should be sent to office@beki.org (or delivered to Peggy) and are due by noon on the ninth of the month; please let Peggy know in advance if you plan to submit material. Submissions for “This Week at BEKI” (a.k.a. Happenings) (email) should be sent to happenings@beki.org and are due on noon Wednesday (late submissions are included when possible). Submissions for Shabbat announcements should be sent to announcements@beki.org and are due at noon on Wednesday (late submissions are included when possible).

Cup of Joe – Hova

Have a free cup of coffee or tea on the house after fulfilling the obligation of daily prayer at a morning or evening service. Start your day with a spiritual jolt, or calm yourself with the qetoret bisamim. Coffee is normally \$1 a cup; tea is 50¢ a cup, unless you don't pay, in which case it is free.

Sundays 9 to 9:35 a.m.; Mondays, 7 to 7:50 a.m.; Tuesdays and Wednesdays 7 to 7:33 a.m.; Thursdays 8:15 to 9:11 a.m.; Fridays 7 to 7:20 a.m.; Sunday through Thursday evenings 5:45 to 6:13 p.m.

Historical note: Joe is short for Josephus.

Darshanim

Jonathan Freiman will serve as darshan on Shabbat parashat Shelah Lekha, June 18.

Maya Lew, bat mitzva, will serve as darshanit on Shabbat parashat Qorah, June 25.

Ben Levine, bar mitzva, will serve as darshan on Shabbat parashat Balaq, July 9.

Gila Reinstein will serve as darshanit on Shabbat parashat Matot, July 23.

Shabbatot

Shabbat Shalom Learners' Minyan

The "Shabbat Shalom Learners' Minyan," which meets every other Saturday morning at 10:45 in the office, is an ideal setting for veteran and novice shul-goers alike to become more comfortable and proficient in the Shahrut (morning) and Torah services in a supportive setting.

Expertly led by **Steven Fraade**, **Rabbi Alan Lovins**, **Rabbi Murray Levine**, **Rabbi Eric Silver**, **Nadav Sela** and others, the Shabbat Shalom Learners' Minyan

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 services. Everyone is welcome to par-

ticipate regardless of religious status or background.

Mondays

New -- Rashi Study Group: Book of Joshua

Interested adults and mature youth are invited to be part of a new venture in weekly Torah study beginning in May.

Monday mornings following the 7 o'clock service, from approximately 7:45 to 8:30 (sharp), we read *Sefer Yehoshua* (The Book of Joshua) along with the commentary of Rashi. The Rashi Study Group (RSG) will meet every Monday morning except those coinciding with major Jewish Festivals. (On federal holidays when the Monday morning service begins at 9 o'clock, the RSG will meet following that service until 10:30).

The RSG began in January 1994 with the first verse of Genesis and concluded the final verses of Deuteronomy in April 2011. *Sefer Yehoshua* is the sequel to Deuteronomy, sometimes known the "Sixth Book of the Five Books of Moses" and a natural next step as well as a good starting point for new participants.

Knowledge of Hebrew is not necessary but helpful. Rashi purported to explain the *peshat* of the text, i.e., the meaning in its historical, literary and linguistic context. Most participants attend the service before the Study Group. With Jon-Jay Tilsen.

Tuesday Night Shavuot

Tiqun Leil Shavuot

A night of adult studies, Tuesday, June 7. See entry in the Shavuot sec-

tion of this issue.

Wednesdays

Word for the Day

The Wednesday morning service (shahrut) features a 90-second "Hebrew word for the day" 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. The Word for the Day often relates to the weekly scriptural readings, enhancing personal study and public Torah discussion. The Wednesday morning service normally begins at 7 and ends at 7:31. (The service ends later on Hol HaMoed, Hanuka, Rosh Hodesh and other holidays; Word for the Day is not presented on those occasions or on Isru Hag.)

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 other's experience and insight. The study group meets Wednesday mornings in the Rosenkrantz Family Library but is on summer recess until after the haggim. For more information, call Rabbi Murray Levine at (203) 397-2513.



Jon-Jay Tilsen



Steven Fraade



Alan Lovins



Murray Levine

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Adult Studies

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Thursdays

Mini Morning Learning Service

The Thursday morning services are dedicated to encouraging those learning to serve as ba'alei tefila (precentors or prayer leaders), ba'alei qeri'a (Torah readers), gabbaim and other leaders, and are sometimes supplemented with commentary and teaching relating to the history, themes, choreography and language of the daily morning service. Shaharit service is from 8:15 to 9:05 a.m. on Thursdays; on other weekdays, the service begins at 7 o'clock.

Sanhedrin Talmud Study Group

The *Sanhedrin Talmud Study Group* meets weekly on Thursdays during the lunch hour (12:30 to 1:30). 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. Knowl-



Isaiah Cooper

edge of Hebrew or Aramaic is helpful but not required.

The Sanhedrin Study Group meets in BEKI's Rosenkrantz Family Library. For information, contact Isaiah Cooper at his law office icooper@cooperlaw.net.

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." For a complete list, see <http://beki.org/hungry.html>.

Auction

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in a beautiful Vermont country home, or a week in a rustic cabin on a scenic lake in Nova Scotia?

If you'd prefer an adventure closer to home, Professor Rob Forbes will lead a walking tour of historic downtown New Haven, and Grove Street Cemetery docent Daniel Lovins will take you and a few of your lucky friends to see where Noah Webster, Eli Whitney, and other distinguished former New Havenites rest. For a more active outing, you can bid on a round of golf at the Yale Golf Course, a plane ride, and a boat trip around the Thimble Islands.

Some of BEKI's beloved members will offer their expertise. Star of stage and screen Bruce Altman will give a one-hour private acting lesson, musician/physician Bob Oakes will teach you to play the recorder, and anthropologist Roger Colten will take you behind the scenes at the Peabody Museum. Artist Bruce Oren will create an original pencil portrait of your best beloved (or your whole family), and Isaiah Cooper will perform a romantic jazz serenade to win his or her heart.

For the career-minded, Roz Ben-Chitrit will help you polish your resume, and Sarah Bass will bake a cake to celebrate the fabulous job it brings you. To solidify your newfound success, Andrew Weiss will give you financial

advice and Isaiah will provide a legal consultation for your business.

Interested in self improvement? Bid on private pilates, aerobics or yoga sessions, as well as hypnosis and psychological counseling. Or math tutoring with Professor Yair Minsky and a seminar on China at your home or office with expert Rebecca Weiner.

If antiques are your passion, you will be able to bid on and – if you're lucky – bring home an antique hat pin holder, Blue Maple Leaf sugar jar set, and more than one ceramic "hair receiver." Perfume bottles, powder boxes, and many more essential items await.

For the college-bound, Yale admissions officer Marcia Landesman will speak about what colleges really look for, at a gourmet brunch hosted by Elayne Dimenstein. Journalist Carole Bass will then help you write your application essay – or edit your job application letter or other important piece of writing.

And to cap it all, you will be able to bid on Shabbat dinner at the home of the Benson-Tilsens, where the conversation is always thought-provoking and inspiring.

Tickets in advance are \$18 and \$25 at the door. Each BEKI member will be able to bring a non-member free. Teenagers are welcome to come, browse, and bid (but not drink the beer).

Contributions (make checks payable to "Cong. Beth El-Keser Israel")

Rabbi's Tzedaka Fund

- Howard & Willa Needler expressing sincere condolences to Howard Gralla at the death of his mother Charlotte Gralla
- Jonathan, Gabriel, Elijah and Caleb Freiman for mekhirat hamets
- Rachel & Lawrence Schonberger in support of the Congregation
- Harold & Bobbie Miller for mekhirat hamets

Qiddush Sponsors (Minimum \$280)

- Dan & Beth Weintraub
- Rebecca Weiner & Mike Rastelli
- The Monday morning Rashi Study Group: Barbara Cushen, Miriam Helfer, Evelyn Maze, Stanley Saxe, Ruth & Morton Silver, Stephen Wizner and Gloria Cohen
- David & Joanne Goldblum
- Stephen & Joanne Rudof

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

- To Joni Weintraub in honor of her Bat Mitzva by Joanne Foodim & Rob Forbes
- To Sharon Bender, Jonathan London and family with sympathy on the passing of Joseph London by Seth Pauker
- To Sharon & David Bender and family with sympathy on the passing of Joseph London by Anthony Debrizzi
- To Sharon & David Bender and family with sympathy on the passing of Joseph London by Jay Sokolow & Ina Silverman
- To Mimi & Effie Glenn with sympathy on the passing of Jonathan Gordon by David & Darryl Kuperstock
- To Grace Geisinger in honor of her 100th birthday by Violet & Charlie Ludwig
- To Joni Weintraub in honor of her Bat Mitzva by Barbara Becker & Jonathan Bilmes
- To the Goldblum family with sympathy on the passing of Sandy Luger by Joanne Foodim & Rob Forbes
- To the Goldblum family with sympathy on the passing of Sandy Luger by Jay Sokolow & Ina Silverman
- To the Goldblum family with sympathy on the passing of Sandy Luger by Morris Bell & Raina Sotsky
- To the Goldblum family with sympathy on the passing of Richard Samuel by the Lettick family
- To the Goldblum family with sympathy on the passing of Sandy Luger by the Lettick family
- To the Goldblum family with sympathy on the passing of Sandy Luger by the

Rothman family

- To Howard Gralla & Linda Schultz with sympathy on the passing of Charlotte Gralla by Steve & Rachel Wizner
- To Howard Gralla & Linda Schultz with sympathy on the passing of Charlotte Gralla by Herb & Hannah Winer
- To Howard Gralla & Linda Schultz with sympathy on the passing of Charlotte Gralla by Jonathan Freiman
- To Howard Gralla & Linda Schultz with sympathy on the passing of Charlotte Gralla by David & Darryl Kuperstock
- To Grace Geisinger in honor of her 100th birthday by Denis & John Seiffer
- To Grace Geisinger in honor of her 100th birthday by Leslie & Michael Nabel
- To Howard Gralla & Linda Schultz with sympathy on the passing of Charlotte Gralla by the Labowe-Stoll family
- To Howard Gralla & Linda Schultz with sympathy on the passing of Charlotte Gralla by Sharon & Dan Prober
- To Howard Gralla & Linda Schultz with sympathy on the passing of Charlotte Gralla by the Lettick family
- To Howard Gralla & Linda Schultz with sympathy on the passing of Charlotte Gralla by Ina Silverman & Jay Sokolow
- To Howard Gralla & Linda Schultz with sympathy on the passing of Charlotte Gralla by Joanne Foodim & Rob Forbes

Synagogue Fund (minimum \$10) to support synagogue operations

- To Sharon & David Bender and family with sympathy on the passing of Joseph London by Lauri Lowell & Isaiah Cooper
- To the Goldblum family with sympathy on the passing of Sandy Luger by the Botwick Ries family
- To the Bender family with sympathy on the passing of Joseph London by the Botwick Ries family

Hesed Fund

- To Sharon & David Bender and family with sympathy on the passing of Joseph London by the Palumbo family
- To Howard Gralla & Linda Schultz with sympathy on the passing of Charlotte Gralla by Gila Reinstein

SATO (Social Action/Tikkun Olam)

- To Phil Bleich with sympathy on the passing of Linda Bleich by the staff at Robert E. Shure Funeral Home

Ari Nathan Levine Library Fund

- To the Goldblum family with sympathy on the passing of Sandy Luger by Sid & Donna Levine

The Barzillai Cheskis BEKI Youth Israel Scholarship Fund

- To Howard Gralla & Linda Schultz with sympathy on the passing of Charlotte Gralla by Rena Cheskis-Gold & Marty Gold
- The Harold & Arthur Ratner Memorial Fund
- To the BEKI community with thanks for the Purim baskets by Betsy & Mikki Ratner
- To Howard & Shilo Ratner in honor of their 34th birthdays by Betsy & Mikki Ratner
- To Jimmy Wolf with wishes for a speedy recovery by Betsy, Howie & Shilo Ratner

Benei Mitzva Qiddush Committee

- To Katya Labowe-Stoll in honor of her Bat Mitzva by Sid & Donna Levine

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

- In memory of Marvin "Mendy" Spielman by James Spielman
- In memory of Sherwin Brotman by Jay & Lynn Brotman
- In memory of Lillian Gell by John & Marcia Gell
- In memory of Samuel Herschderfer by Sherman & David Herschderfer
- In memory of Max Jack Gad by Martin & Lana Gad
- In memory of Matthew Lettick by Robert & Janice Lettick
- In memory of their parents Rose & Louis Katz and Maurice & Esther Prober by Sharon & Daniel Prober
- In memory of Harry Spiegel by Arlene & Howard Gold
- In memory of Belle Avrin by Susan & Robert Spear
- In memory of Bess Flamer by Mickey & Bud Chorney
- In memory of Phillip Kantrowitz by Violet & Charlie Ludwig
- In memory of Benjamin Ludwig by Charlie & Violet Ludwig
- In memory of Morris "Moishe" & Susan Schnitman by Helene & Edward Vanderhoef
- In memory of Michael Freiman by Jonathan, Gabriel, Elijah & Caleb Freiman
- In memory of Minnie Abramowitz by Joseph Alper
- In memory of Howard Sugarmann by Richard & Marcie Sugarmann
- In memory of her grandmother Ida Brunswick by Barbara Cushen
- In memory of Bluma Spongan Soloway by Lewis Kaufman

MICHAEL MARTONE
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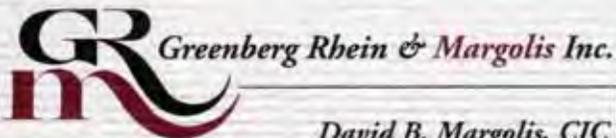


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Dear Rabbi

An occasional column featuring answers, advice and helpful household hints

Dear Rabbi,

I am a survivor of Hebrew School. I had a torturous experience in childhood, which bordered on being emotionally, religiously and spiritually abusive, in Hebrew School [outside of Connecticut]. But here I am, a synagogue member as an adult, and I like it a lot. I don't think most of my classmates survived – they were turned off to Judaism. Isn't it time to abolish Hebrew school and find a better way to raise the children?

Signed, Survivor

Dear Survivor,

I'm a survivor, too. My Hebrew School experience was in an era when Jewish Education was moving from the 14th century to the 19th or 20th, and I think I saw some of the worst and some of the best. Many of today's teachers and principals are survivors, too, who like me saw the potential for good schools and have worked to create them.

Many hospitals, prisons and schools of 30 or 50 years ago were torture chambers compared to the best of what we have today, but I would not abolish hospitals, prisons or schools for that reason. If I had a bad experience with my third grade teacher in public school, I wouldn't forever avoid schools or refrain from enrolling my children.

The classrooms of our "BEKI Religious School" are for the most part filled with happy, busy, learning children. The School's hours are limited, and it is designed only to supplement and reinforce the Jewish experiences and learning the students are having at home, Jewish summer camp such as Ramah, or day school such as Ezra Academy. It takes more than three to five hours twenty-four weeks a year to train and educate a Jewish child, especially in the sophisticated ideology of Conservative Judaism. Students learn a few words, a few songs, a little liturgy, a few Jewish skills and arts, adopt values, develop an awareness of history and of modern Israel, and make friends.

Our youngest son, an Ezra Academy student, visited BRS while in Kindergarten and wanted to enroll, so he's been coming Sunday mornings for three years. It's a double

degree program. He learns different material here than at Ezra (the universe of Jewish learning is vast), he sees his friends, and enjoys the activities. What more do you want?

Dear Rabbi,

I understand that Conservative Judaism looks at halakha [Jewish Law] in light of modern sensibilities, experiences and circumstances. Is there an example of where Conservative Judaism has taken a more strict approach because of society today?

Signed, Strictly Academic

Dear Strictly,

Defining the term "strict" is not as simple as might appear at first glance. Questions of law usually demand weighing apparently competing or conflicting rules. "Thou shall not kill," but "you shall rise up and kill him first" -- if we are strict about one law, we may necessarily be acting leniently about the other. Do we sound the shofar on Rosh HaShana when it coincides with Shabbat? Hold an obligatory brit mila feast on the Biblical fast days of Tisha BeAv or Yom Kippur? Do we uphold the law of Levirate marriage in the face of the *taqana* prohibiting polygyny? Do we uphold the sort-of mitzvot of public worship on Shabbat even if it means overriding Shabbat boundaries (*erubin*) or the operation of a bicycle, electric or internal combustion vehicle as a means of transport? Most often, in commercial law or torts, what is "lenient" to one party is a "stricture" to another. It is not always simple to determine whether a particular ruling is a leniency or a stricture, and this fact is noted in several Talmudic discussions.

In the time of the Mishna, the shofar was sounded on Rosh HaShana coinciding with Shabbat; in our day, we do not do that. Is this a stricture? We are lenient about the Biblical requirement to sound the shofar on Rosh HaShana, but strict about the rabbinic enactment that prohibits using musical instruments (or carrying) on Shabbat. Being "lenient" about the period in which a husband and wife must refrain from intimate relations is at the same time a "stringency" with respect to the husband's obligation to provide sexual

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Strict

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services to his wife on a regular schedule.

Our sages, going back to the Mishnaic period or earlier, warned against attempting to impose excessive strictures on the public, and indeed some called doing so a transgression unto itself. One guiding question is, “Is this act really forbidden under Torah law, or is there some other good reason to prohibit it” and if not, the rabbis should be wary of creating a new prohibition. We have 613 mitzvot, not 6,130. You would think that the rabbis would be strict about Torah-based rules and more lenient about rabbinic enactments or impositions, since the Torah-based rules are from a “higher authority,” as directed by the principle “safeq de-oreita le-humra, safeq de-rabbanan le-qula – uncertain cases of Biblical law are treated strictly, those of Rabbinic rules leniently.” But it turns out (as discussed explicitly in the Talmud, Ket. 56a and elsewhere) that sometimes exactly the opposite occurs: “Ve-hahamim asu hizuk le-divreihem yoter mishel Torah – The sages enforced their rules more than the Torah’s.” This happens supposedly because the rabbis were confident that people would follow the Torah rules, but believed harsh methods had to be imposed to gain compliance with rules based merely on rabbinic authority which were necessary for the well-being of society.

When you ask, “... a more strict approach,” in the common sense of that word, I understand that you mean a rule or policy that is more strict *today* than it was in the past. I am sure that we can find many examples, all depending on what time and place we are comparing. We should make a distinction between interpreting laws more strictly or, alternatively, stricter enforcement or promotion of existing laws. We might also make a distinction between “policy” and specific *pesaq halakha* (legal determination).

The procedures for *gerut* (conversion) as described in *Masekhet Gerim* and in the Shulhan Arukh are exceedingly lenient by today’s standards. However, what I am calling strictness could be viewed as a “leniency” in some cases. Take the case of a doubtful conversion. If we say that a putative conversion was not valid, then we are essentially saying the subject is not obliged to follow the rules of the Torah at all – and what could be a greater leniency? Anyone who rejects the validity of a “doubtful conversion” is, arguably, engaging in a dangerous leniency, as it could lead

the subject or others to great sin if the subject erroneously behaves or is treated as a non-Jew. In common language, it is being strict about the rules of recognizing conversion but at the same time lenient about the status of the putative convert.

Our rules for kashrut are far more stringent than those followed in Mishnaic times or even in recently decades. In Mishnaic times, one might determine if a pot of meat soup into which milk had fallen was still kosher by *tasting* it: if one couldn’t taste the milk, the meat soup was still kosher. We’d never do that today. A hundred years ago, simple items such as bread made by non-Jews on their utensils might be eaten based on the principle of *rov shimush* (normal use), or on some other basis; today, we rarely rely on that rule and, partly in recognition of the vastly increased complexity of the food industry, we require a much greater degree of supervision and control. In past generations Jews did not worry about enzymes in cheeses, and ate most of the same dairy products as everyone else; today, cheeses either require supervision or at least are more suspect due to added ingredients or shared production lines with non-kosher products such as “cheddar with ham bits.” In our day, the federal government does not ensure that food products are free of insects and other contaminants, and so in some cases we require greater supervision of production or inspection before use. We haven’t really interpreted law more strictly, but rather have promoted procedural strictures aimed at ensuring compliance.

The Rabbinical Assembly (the rabbis of the Conservative Movement) in particular has been as a matter of policy promoting the adherence to the laws requiring that consumer products be produced in accordance with Jewish law and with civil law, an adherence which itself is a requirement of halakha, according to the doctrine of *dina de-malkhuta dina*. Those laws have to do with labor rights, worker safety, environmental impact and other elements.

As a matter of *pesaq halakha* (legal determination), the Rabbinical Assembly has been strict in requiring people with disabilities such as impaired hearing, speech or sight to fulfill mitzvot from which in other times (and presently in some other communities) they were exempt. This development is in response to either changed technology or attitude, or improved ability to compensate for the impairment.

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Strict

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Really, though, the law has not changed; what has changed is what we must do to comply with the law.

There is a growing concern about the application of the Torah-based rule of *bal tashhit*, the prohibition against certain forms of ecological degradation. As the consequences of environmental degradation (such as global warming and extinctions) become more severe and apparent, there is now an incipient trend toward greater compliance with existing rules of *bal tashhit* as well as more strict, or expansive, application of these rules. Fifty years ago it might not have mattered (or people didn't know it mattered) if they left the lights on when not in use, but today leaving the lights on when not in use is a violation of this prohibition. This could be a case of a stricter interpretation and more stringent application of law due to modern society's situation.

Fifty years ago cigarette smoking was permitted; today it is prohibited by Jewish law. The law has not changed, but due to our changed understanding of science and medicine, what we must do to comply with the law has changed. Does this constitute a stricture?

In a purely symbolic realm, the practice of placing Hanuka candles in an internal room was permitted because of the danger in public displays of Jewish identity. Today, in most of America at least, we no longer rely on that leniency, but instead more strictly observe the mitzva of displaying Hanuka candles so that they can be seen by the public (*persuma nesa*). The law itself has not changed, but what we must do to comply with the law has changed due to circumstances.

The counting of women in a minyan in general, a true Conservative Movement modernism, creates a couple of strictures. One is that now a gathering of (say) five men and five women in tefila (prayer) is viewed as obligated to fulfill the rituals prescribed for public worship. It creates a new obligation, which you might call imposing a stricture, at least on common terms. This stricture would have a severe consequence should that same set of ten people find themselves in a situation where martyrdom is required of them but only in the presence of a minyan.

I am sure that Conservative communities also will perform a required public Torah reading in a circumstance when some non-Conservative communities, absent a male

reader, would skip the reading instead of having it read by a woman. The latter may occur simply out of ignorance of long-standing precedents for women to read Torah publicly in such situations (going back to the time of the Mishna and affirmed in later generations), or due to some leniency non-Conservative communities might follow in their rules for Torah reading.

These are a few cases that come to mind, but I am sure we could identify many, either comparing our practice today to that of past generations, or our Conservative communities' practices with those of non-Conservative communities.

Some of the broad philosophical differences over the approach to halakha between the Rabbinical Assembly and much of orthodoxy are similar to, and in some instances the same as, the differences between the liberal and the conservative schools of thought represented on the US Supreme Court. Some of the halakhic issues over which our movements disagree are ancient disputes, and I would suggest that most or many of the positions of the Rabbinical Assembly represent the mainstream approach of the rabbis over the past 2,000 years, although the other opinions are legitimate (valid) even if unwise or mistaken. Much of the orthodox rabbinate, particularly the Government-sponsored rabbinate in Israel, is fundamentally reactionary in its world view, which is expressed in its theoretical approach to law and in its specific application. I believe that most of the mainstream rabbis in the past 2,000 years have tended to be more liberal or progressive in their world view, if we can use these terms and make sweeping generalizations. Maimonides for example advocated an extremely liberal policy toward the non-Jewish wives of Jewish men in North Africa, just as our Masorti Conservative colleagues have done toward non-Jewish Russians and other spouses of our Jews in Israel in our day.

But don't take my word for it – read the rabbis' writings yourself with an open mind and make your own evaluation. Don't rely on the biases of rabbis (other than me), but form your own informed opinion.



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June 2011

28 Iyar 5771 - 28 Sivan 5771

Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday

Mark Your Calendar

Yom Yerushalayim: June 1
 High School Grads Qiddush: June 4
 Bidding for BEKI: June 5
 Tiqun Leil Shavuot: June 7
 Shavuot First Day: June 8
 Shavuot Second Day: June 9
 Darshan: Jonathan Freiman, June 18
 Bat Mitzva: Maya Lew, June 24-25
 Pre-Kadima Ice Cream Sundae Sunday: June 26
 Annual Meeting: June 29

			1 Yom Yerushalayim 28 Iyar/43 L'Omer	2 12:30pm Talmud Study Group 29 Iyar/44 L'Omer	3 Rosh Hodesh 8:02pm Candle Lighting 1 Sivan/45 L'Omer	4 10:45am Children's Programs 10:45am Learner's Minyan Qiddush: Families of Graduating Seniors 5:45pm Minha 2 Sivan/46 L'Omer
5 5:00pm "Bidding For BEKI" Live & Silent Auction 3 Sivan/47 L'Omer	6 4 Sivan/48 L'Omer	7 Erev Shavuot 8:00pm Shavuot Services 8:04pm Candle Lighting 5 Sivan/49 L'Omer	8 Shavuot Office Closed 9:15am Festival Service 6 Sivan	9 Shavuot II (Yizkor) Office Closed 9:15am Festival Service 7 Sivan	10 Office Closed 6:00pm 20's/30's Havura Friday Night Dinner (off-site, reservations required) 8:06pm Candle Lighting 8 Sivan	11 10:45am Children's Programs Qiddush: Golub 5:45pm Minha 9 Sivan
12 1:00pm Pomegranate Guild 10 Sivan	13 7:45am Rashi Study Group resumes 7:30pm Executive Board Meeting (off-site) 11 Sivan	14 12 Sivan	15 13 Sivan	16 12:30pm Talmud Study Group 14 Sivan	17 8:09pm Candle Lighting 15 Sivan	18 Darshan: Jonathan Freiman 10:45am Children's Programs 10:45am Learner's Minyan Qiddush: Wizner & Kliffeld 5:45pm Minha 16 Sivan
19 17 Sivan	20 18 Sivan	21 19 Sivan	22 20 Sivan	23 12:30pm Talmud Study Group 21 Sivan	24 Maya Lew Bat Mitzva 8:11pm Candle Lighting 22 Sivan	25 Maya Lew Bat Mitzva 10:45am Children's Programs Qiddush: Lew 5:45pm Minha 23 Sivan
26 Kadima Ice Cream Sundae Party (off-site, reservations required) 24 Sivan	27 25 Sivan	28 26 Sivan	29 6:30pm BEKI Annual Meeting 27 Sivan	30 12:30pm Talmud Study Group 28 Sivan		

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