

BEKI Bulletin

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May 2000 Vol. 6 Issue 5

ק"ק בית אל-כתר ישראל

Iyar 5760

Torah for the Hungry Mind

Mishna Sanhedrin Study Group

An ongoing BEKI Mishna & Talmud Sandhedrin Study Group meets in downtown New Haven every Thursday from noon to 1:00p. If you are interested in participating or for more information contact Eric Beller at eibbpc@aol.com or 782-2250 (w) or 387-4657 (h). Tractate Sanhedrin primarily deals with rules of criminal procedure, particularly for capital cases.

Theory & Practice of Jewish Prayer

An eight-week class on the theory and practice of Jewish prayer begins on Sunday night 7 May at 6:10p to 7:15p in BEKI's Rosenkrantz Family Library. Everyone is welcomed. The class is part of the Siyyum 2001 project. Registration for the class is \$18.

Shabbat Shalom Learners' Minyan

The "Shabbat Shalom Learners' Minyan," which meets every other Saturday morning at 10:45a in BEKI's Rosenkrantz Library, is an ideal setting for veteran and novice shul-goers alike to become more comfortable and expert in the Shaharit (morning) and Torah services in a supportive setting. Lead by **Steven Fraade** and **Rabbi Alan Lovins**, the Shabbat Shalom Learners' Minyan has helped many feel a deeper sense of awe born of greater understanding while increasing the level of comfort through nurturing step-by-step practice in a non-threatening multi-generational setting.

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.

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

or see our web page created by Phill Simon:
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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Editor	Rabbi Jon-Jay Tilsen
Associate Editor	Donna Levine
Associate Editor	Donna Kemper
Circulation Manager	Saul Bell
Production Editor	David Golden
Advertisement Editor	Sheila Gardner
Photographer	Charles Ludwig

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 May, 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

Recently a reporter from the Jewish *Ledger* asked me to comment on the decision of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (the association of Reform rabbis) to permit its members to perform commitment ceremonies for same-sex couples. While not a spokesperson for the Conservative Movement, I tried as best as I could to explain our Movement's perspective on this issue. While speaking, I realized that what I was saying was somewhat incoherent. But then I realized that in that way it was an accurate expression of our Movement's position.

Be that as it may, the CCAR's decision raises a number of important questions, most of which I hope to avoid as far as possible. Instead, I would share a few thoughts on related issues that are raised by the CCAR's policy.

On Rosh HaShana 1994, in the discussion after my *Devar Torah* (sermon) at BEKI, I was asked for my position regarding the New Haven Board of Alderman's consideration of recognizing gay and lesbian domestic partners for purposes of employment benefits. At that time, I stated that in principle I would support such a policy.

Regardless of my personal feelings on the matter, the policy of the Rabbinical Assembly (the association of 1600 Conservative-Masorti rabbis worldwide) prohibits me from performing "same-sex marriages." Since neither Connecticut state law nor Jewish law recognize a same-sex marriage, I have no legal authority to perform such ceremonies, either in the eyes of the state or the eyes of the Jewish People. Left somewhat undefined is exactly what would constitute a prohibited "commitment ceremony," where such ceremony is intended to have symbolic but not legal effect.

Recent court decisions have awarded parental rights to same-sex partners after the relationship terminated. This suggests that some form of legal partnership (if you don't want to call it marriage) exists already in common law, even where the state does not formally provide for such a partnership. Would a judge be more inclined to award parental rights to an ex-partner of a couple who had held a "commitment ceremony"?

The Reform policy permits this commitment

ceremony only if both partners are Jewish. This, despite the Reform rabbinate's willingness to perform a (heterosexual) marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew. The result is a quirky double standard — not that I am in a position to complain.

The policy of the State of Israel is even more inconsistent. The State of Israel will recognize the marriage of two men or two women, where at least one is Jewish, performed by a secular or religious authority outside of Israel. But the State of Israel will not recognize a marriage between a Jewish man and a Jewish woman performed by a Conservative (or Reform) rabbi in Israel. (I am not making this up.) Remaining to be decided is whether the State will recognize a marriage performed by a Conservative or Reform rabbi in the soon to be declared State of Palestine, or in the "buffer zone" that may be established between Israel and Syria.

One reality in our day is that many couples, whether heterosexual or homosexual, live together without a state- or synagogue-sanctioned marriage. Questions of parental rights, inheritance, and decision-making in medical care situations are undefined in these partnerships. Would we be better off if those rights and responsibilities were clarified by formalizing the commitments of a "commitment ceremony" or homosexual marriage?

A traditional Jewish marriage includes a large and explicit set of commitments, responsibilities and rights that the partners have toward each other, their children and toward society. This is not necessarily the case in a civil marriage. For example, many states have no law against adultery, something explicitly forbidden in a Jewish marriage. Just what obligations a couple undertakes when entering a civil marriage is not clearly defined. It would be important to know just what are the commitments being celebrated in a "commitment ceremony."

The Hebrew Bible explicitly condemns a specific male homosexual act as being repulsive and defines it as a capital crime. Eating non-kosher food is also called repulsive, and gathering sticks or

Continued from page 3

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lighting a match on Saturday are also capital offenses. While we have record of at least one person being executed for gathering sticks on Saturday, we have no evidence that anyone was executed for male homosexuality. There is no explicit reference to female homosexuality in the Hebrew Bible, although rabbinic law classified it as being a form of "rebellion" punishable by lashing. In the Talmud, the sages derided the Greeks and Romans for recognizing same-sex marriages.

The *halakhic* (Jewish legal) issues surrounding homosexuality are multi-faceted but hardly complex. Finding homosexual commitments and relationships to be within Jewish law would be somewhat of a stretch, especially in the case of male couples, but hardly a greater stretch than we've seen on other issues. Any such reinterpretation, though, would definitely overturn centuries of precedent and popular opinion, and signify a major change in Jewish culture.

It may turn out that homosexuality is to some degree genetically programmed. If that is the case, ironically, Jewish practice may have actually encouraged the propagation of those genes by forcing would-be homosexuals into "conventional" marriages and producing offspring. In contrast, most of Christianity permits or encourages "celibacy," meaning that

homosexuals were not forced to marry, their genetic tendencies not being passed on to subsequent generations.

There is a need for a reevaluation of the meaning and rules for heterosexual marriage, as well as a reevaluation of the rules for homosexuality and homosexual marriage. Things have changed. No longer are women dependant on marriage to provide them with income, property or status. Half of all marriages end in divorce. Years ago, a dissatisfied husband could simply wait for his wife to die in childbirth, or an unhappy wife to lose her husband in battle or to disease; typical life expectancy was 35 to 40 years. "Till death do us part" — never a Jewish vow — was thought of as being at most twenty or twenty-five years away. Having sexual relations or raising children outside of marriage carries little stigma. "Immaculate conception" is now commonplace as technology severs the link between sex and procreation. Extended families — and the financial and emotional support that comes with them — are now the rarity. The very social fabric by which "conventional" marriage etiquette was woven, for better and for worse, has come undone. What will we weave in its place?



Reader response (for publication) is invited to jjtilsen@beki.org or by mail to "Editor, BEKI Bulletin, 85 Harrison Street, New Haven CT 06515."

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BEKI Sisterhood News

The Seder for People With Special Needs, held 6 April, was very successful and enjoyed by all who attended.

The annual Book of Life luncheon will take place on Tuesday 6 June at noon. There will be a delicious meal and enjoyable program. Details will be forthcoming soon. Gladys Lipkin, longtime devoted Congregation and Sisterhood member, is this year's "Woman of Valor." President Adele Tyson asks, when you receive the luncheon mailing, that you respond promptly with your reservations.

Don't forget the Sisterhood Gift Shop for beautiful gifts for all ages and all occasions.



Thanks A Lot

Thanks to all who helped prepare, carry out, and clean up after the Purim Seuda. Noting that it is best to at least try to thank everyone by name, we apologize for any omissions: Janet Brown, Chair, Food Committee; Lynn Brotman, Chair, Decorations Committee; Adele Tyson and Rose Feen and the entire Sisterhood; Clarence and Mary Ellen; Anne Johnston and Ruth Silver, and the entire cast, Purim Shpiel; Amy Pincus, Singalong; Andy Weinstein, Magician; Elliot Rose, Yo-Yo Show; Ruth Greenblatt, Cutesie the Clown, face-painting and balloon sculptures; Helpers: Gwen Weltman and Netanya Lerner; Ellen Dixon; Janet Felton; Naomi Gilens; Carole Bass; Jay Sokolow; Gilah Benson-Tilsen; Deren Manassevit and Alan Rosner; Robert Lettick; Yaron, Liora, Daphne, Dana, and Maya Lew; Aaron Brotman; Barbara Cushen; Stan Saxe; Seth & Bryna Pauker

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Recent Additions to the Rosenkrantz Library

Donated by Rabbi Murray Levine

God and Evil – David Birnbaum
Suicide in Rabbinic Literature – Sidney Goldstein
A Treasury of Jewish Tradition – Lamm and Wurzbarger
Blood Accusation – Maurice Lamm
Judaism p.b. Isidore Epstein
The Course of Modern Jewish History – Howard Sachar
The Structure of Jewish History – Heinrich Graetz
Dubnov Nationalism and History – Koppel Pinson
Judaism p.b. Michael Fishbane
What Is Man? P.b. Arnold Wolf
A Sense of Duty p.b. Simcha Kling
The Modern Meaning of Judaism – Roland Gittelsohn
Understanding Jewish Theology p.b. Jack Neusner
The Diary of Captain Alfred Dreyfus
Modern Hebrew Literature – Simon Halkin
The Torah U-Madda Journal p.b. 1993
Judaism and Human Rights – Milton Konvitz
A History of God – Karen Armstrong
Tuesday The Rabbi Saw Red – Harry Kemelman
The Jewish Family and Jewish Continuity p.b. Bayme
 and Rosen
In Search of Sugihara – Hillel Levine
When Children Ask About God – Harold Kushner
Encounter Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy
 – Emil Fackenheim
Jewish Values p.b.
Jewish and Christians – James H. Charlesworth
A Tzaddik in Our Time – Simcha Raz
Protestant, Catholic, Jew – Will Herberg
The Thirteen Letters of Ben Uziel – Samson Raphael Hirsch
The Golem of Prague – Gershon Winkler
Studies in Judaism – Solomon Schechter (3 volumes)
Catskill Culture – Phil Brown
Borscht Belt Bungalows – Irwin Richman
Conflicts and Contradictions – Meron Benvenisti

Children's Shabbat Havura

The Children's Shabbat Havura meets every Shabbat morning from 10:45a to noon in the Claire Goodwin Youth Room. Designed to address the spiritual and social needs of preschool children, the Havura meets concurrently with Junior Congregation for older children, a Learners' Minyan for adults and the main Sabbath service. Following the half-hour of songs, stories, prayers and dance, the children have their own qiddush refreshments and then enjoy supervised play until they join the adult worship for the Concluding Service and qiddush.

The Havura enjoys strong support from parents and the Synagogue. Currently about 60 children and their parents actively participate in the Havura. Visitors have come from across New England to observe this program as a model for their own synagogues.

Meeting the spiritual and social needs of preschool children is an obligation of the Jewish community and an important part of the Synagogue's mission. The *Havura* (Friendship Circle) links the children to one another, to other concerned Jewish parents, and to the Synagogue. The Havura enjoys the active participation of parents who themselves are enriched by the experience. For many adults, the Children's Shabbat Havura serves as their introduction to active participation in the Synagogue Community.

If you are interested in learning more about the BEKI Children's Shabbat Havura, come any *Shabbat* (Saturday) morning at 10:45a and see for yourself. Or contact Miriam Benson at 389-6137 or mirbenson@aol.com, who along with Ellen Cohen coordinates the program.

Junior Congregation

Junior Congregation meets most Shabbat (Saturday) mornings from 10:45a to noon to address the spiritual, educational and social needs of children in grades 2-6. The Junior Congregation is lead cooperatively by a group of talented and dedicated parents and educators.

BEKI Events

May - Nisan - Iyar

2000

5760

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
26 Nisan 1	27 Nisan 2	28 Nisan 3	29 Nisan 4	30 Nisan 5	1 Iyar 6	
Shaharit=Morning Minha =Afternoon Minha-Maariv=Evening SSLM=Shabbat Shalom Learners' Minyan	7:00a Shaharit 7:45a Rashi Study Grp 5:45p Minha-Maariv 7:45p Special General Board Meeting <i>(Deadline for June Bulletin submissions)</i>	<i>Yom Hashoah</i> 7:00a Shaharit 5:45p Minha-Maariv 7:00p Yom Hashoah Community Service	7:00a Shaharit 10:30a Play Group 4:15p Relig.School 5:45p Minha-Maariv	8:15a Shaharit (NEW TIME) 5:45p Minha-Maariv 5:45p Benei Mitzva 7:30p A.A.	<i>Rosh Hodesh</i> 7:00a Shaharit 6:00p Minha-Maariv 7:35p Candles 8:00p Late Service	9:15a Shaharit 10:45a Children's 10:45a SSLM 5:45p Minha
2 Iyar 7	3 Iyar 8	4 Iyar 9	5 Iyar 10	6 Iyar 11	7 Iyar 12	8 Iyar 13
9:00a Shaharit 9:30a Relig. School 5:45p Minha-Maariv 6:00p Torah For Hungry Mind Adult Education	7:00a Shaharit 7:45a Rashi Study Grp 5:45p Minha-Maariv	<i>Yom Hazikaron</i> <i>Israel Memorial Day</i> 7:00a Shaharit 5:45p Minha-Maariv	<i>Yom Ha-atzmaut</i> 7:00a Shaharit 10:30a Play Group 4:15p Relig.School 5:45p Minha-Maariv 7:30p Exec. Board <i>(Deadline for mid-month mailing submissions)</i>	8:15a Shaharit (NEW TIME) 5:45p Minha-Maariv 7:30p A.A.	7:00a Shaharit 6:00p Minha-Maariv 7:43p Candles 8:00p Late Service	9:15a Shaharit <i>Darshan: Marc Schwartz</i> 10:45a Children's 10:45a Singers' Circle 10:45a Cosmic Conversations 5:45p Minha <i>Kiddush Sponsors: Marty Gold & Rena Cheskis-Gold</i>
9 Iyar 14	10 Iyar 15	11 Iyar 16	12 Iyar 17	13 Iyar 18	14 Iyar 19	15 Iyar 20
9:00a Shaharit 9:30a Relig.School 5:45p Minha-Maariv 6:00p Torah For Hungry Mind Adult Education	7:00a Shaharit 7:45a Rashi Study Grp 5:45p Minha-Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 5:45p Minha-Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 10:30a Play Group 4:15p Relig.School 5:45p Minha-Maariv	8:15a Shaharit (NEW TIME) 5:15p Benei Mitzva (Last Class) 5:45p Minha-Maariv 7:30p A.A. 7:30p Book Group	7:00a Shaharit 6:00p Minha-Maariv 7:50p Candles 8:00p Late Service	9:15a Shaharit <i>Darshan: Eric Beller</i> 10:45a Children's 10:45a SSLM <i>Kiddush sponsors: Mimi & Ephrem Glenn</i> 5:45p Minha
16 Iyar 21	17 Iyar 22	18 Iyar 23	19 Iyar 24	20 Iyar 25	21 Iyar 26	22 Iyar 27
9:00a Shaharit 9:30a Relig. School 5:45p Minha-Maariv 6:00p Torah For Hungry Mind Adult Education	7:00a Shaharit 7:45a Rashi Study Grp 5:45p Minha-Maariv 6:30-8:00p Campfire Singalong @ Felton-Gilens	<i>Lag B'Omer</i> 7:00a Shaharit 5:45p Minha-Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 10:30a Play Group 4:15p Relig. School 5:45p Minha-Maariv 7:45p Gen. Board	8:15a Shaharit (NEW TIME) 5:45p Minha-Maariv 7:30p A.A.	7:00a Shaharit 6:00p Minha-Maariv 7:56p Candles	9:15a Shaharit <i>Darshanim: Ruth & Morton Silver</i> 10:45a Children's 10:45a Singers' Circle 10:45a Cosmic Conversations 5:45p Minha
23 Iyar 28	24 Iyar 29	25 Iyar 30	26 Iyar 31			
9:00a Shaharit No Religious School 5:45p Minha-Maariv	<i>Memorial Day - Office Closed</i> 9:00a Shaharit 9:45a Rashi Study Grp 5:45p Minha-Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 5:45p Minha-Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 10:30a Play Group 4:15p Relig. School 5:45p Minha-Maariv	BEKI phone numbers: (203) 389-2108 Fax (203) 389-5899 Mary Ellen-Office x14 Relig.School x13 Rabbi x10 Kulanu x33	Office Hours: Mon 9a-12 & 1p-3p Tue by appt. only Wed 10a-12 & 1p-6p Thu 9a-12 & 1p-3p Fri 9a-2p	BEKI email: Office: BEKI@snet.net Rabbi: jttilsen@beki.org website: www.beki.org

Lag BeOmer Kumsitz (Campfire Singing)

On Monday evening 22 May, from 6:30p to 8:00p, everyone is invited to the LaG BeOmer campfire singalong at the residence of Martin Gilens & Janet Felton, 162 Cleveland Road, New Haven, after dinner.

Bring a kosher dessert or beverage, instruments and songsheets. In case of rain the singalong will take place indoors at the same residence.

LaG BeOmer is the thirty-third day of the counting of the Omer, the period between Passover and Shavuot, and marks the end of a semi-mourning period between the two festivals.

This music program is made possible through the support of the Morris & Sara Oppenheim Endowment for Sacred Music at BEKI.

Yom HaShoah: Holocaust Memorial

The community Holocaust Memorial service will be held at BEKI on Tuesday 2 May 2000 beginning at 7:00p.

Darshan in May

Marc Schwartz will serve as *darshan* (Torah commentator) on Shabbat morning, 13 May, during the service that begins at 9:15a.

Eric Beller will serve as *darshan* (Torah commentator) on Shabbat morning 20 May, during the service that begins at 9:15a.

Morton & Ruth Silver will serve as *darshanim* (Torah commentators) on Shabbat morning 27 May, during the service that begins at 9:15a.


Memorial Day Schedule

Shaharit Morning services 9:00a, Rashi Study Group 9:45a to 10:30a. Office Closed. Mincha Afternoon service 5:45p



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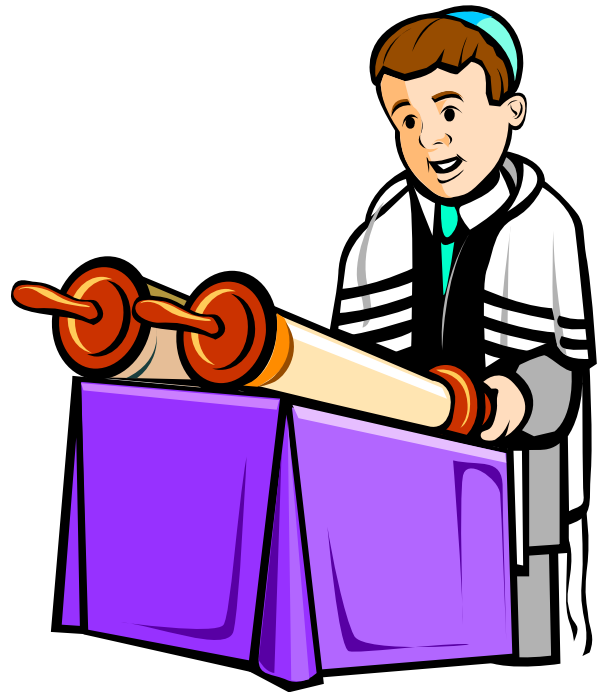
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Planning a bar- or bat-mitzva at BEKI?

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) 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/bmpolicy.html.



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