

# BEKI Bulletin

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May 2002 Vol. 8 Issue 5

ק"ק בית אל-כתר ישראל

Sivan 5762

## Shavuot Festival at BEKI

### **Sefira – Counting the Omer**

At the second seder (Thursday night 28 March), 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.

The simple home ceremony is printed in most *siddurim* (prayer books), including *Sim Shalom*, 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 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.

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

The Festival of *Shavuot* ("Weeks"), one of the three major pilgrimage festivals, celebrates the anniversary of the Giving of the Torah at Sinai some

3,400 years ago. Shavuot comes at the culmination of the counting of seven weeks from Pesah, and will be the 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 reenact the extraordinary experience of our ancestors and show our own enthusiasm for receiving Torah.

### **Men's Miqva Experience**

On Thursday morning 16 May, the morning before Shavuot, the Men's Club Miqva visit will follow the 8:15a Thursday morning service, from 9:00a to 10:00a. Individual immersion for Jewish males is one way of preparing for the enhanced state of spiritual sensitivity experienced on the Festival marking our national encounter with the Almighty. Bring your own towel.

### **Shavuot Candle Lighting**

Those who are able may light Festival candles at 7:46p. It is also customary to light Yizkor Memorial candles immediately before lighting the festival candles. The blessing recited over the Festival candles is "*Barukh...asher qideshanu bemitzvotav vetsivanu lehadliq ner shel yom tov*" and the "*Shehehianu,*" both of which can be found in most *siddurim* (prayerbooks).

*Continued on page 7*

### Email Update

Please note that Rabbi Tilsen's email address is [jjtilsen@beki.org](mailto:jjtilsen@beki.org). If you would like to be added to the list of members who receive occasional email messages of lifecycle and other events, please let Rabbi Tilsen know.

Our office ([beki@snet.net](mailto:beki@snet.net)) will also be very happy to learn of your new or revised email address.

### 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 five miles-per-hour speed limit.

### May Schedule Notes

Afternoon Services on Thursday 16 May are at 7:45p (erev Shavuot).

In addition to the 6:00p Early Service, an 8:00p Late Evening Service will be held on Friday nights 3 and 10 May, with Irving Weinstein, Kevin Mack and Rabbi Tilsen.

Morning services on Sunday 12 May will begin at 9:15a (Rosh Hodesh - Lauren Rose Bat Mitzva). Morning services on Monday 27 May begin at 9:00a, and the Rashi Study Group meets from 9:45a to 10:30a (Memorial Day). The BEKI office is closed that day.

### 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: [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.

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### BEKI-Bulletin

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

Some people have said that it is not possible to distinguish between opponents of the policies of Israel's government and anti-Semites. The developments of the past few months actually make it easier to distinguish between these two groups. The former are those who collect petitions, write letters to the editor, or participate in demonstrations in Israel calling for certain changes in Israel's policies based on their ethical or political analysis or beliefs. They are acting out of love for Israel, or at least indifference to Israel's fate. The latter can now be readily identified as those who carry banners saying "Death to the Jewish dogs" or "Zionism = Nazism." Gone are the good old days of subtle anti-Semitism. Hatred of Jews is now blatant and in-your-face, whether on the streets of Paris, the meeting halls of the UN, or the editorial pages of our newspapers.

This emergence of vulgar and violent anti-Semitism, which was so troubling at last year's UN Conference on Human Rights held in South Africa, has continued in Europe and around the globe, in part in relation to the unfolding of our conflict with the Palestinians.

What are we to do in response to this rise of hatred? My answers are not innovative or creative. My response is simple and direct.

We must continue to speak with our co-workers and neighbors, so that they can see our humanity as we see theirs. It is harder to hate real Jews than the abstract Jew. We can write letters to the editor or voice our opinion by making calls to talk radio programs. We must continue to support the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and to provide material and political support for Israel.

I also believe that we must work hard to project an image of a strong, vibrant and proud Jewish community in Greater New Haven. That means we must make our Jewish identity a proud priority in our own lives and enable our institutions to reflect pride and strength. On the personal level it means staying home from work or school on the major Jewish Festivals, participating in social action projects as representatives of the Jewish community, and increasing our own level of knowledge and involvement in the synagogue community.



Rabbi Tilsen

It also means insuring that our synagogue building is attractive and well maintained. Our building is probably the single most visible Jewish institution in Greater New Haven, even though we are not the largest synagogue or institution in our area. As one realtor put it, the three most important factors to the success of an enterprise are location, location and location. More than 1000 cars per hour pass by BEKI on any weekday. Our façade is recognized as a landmark and is visible for miles. While our Congregation has never placed appearance above substance, it is nonetheless important that when people drive by, they see a synagogue that projects the message that its community cares about it and is proud of it. When people enter for a wedding, bar mitzva, funeral, Holocaust memorial or other event, they should come away with that same impression. The alternative, a dilapidated building, says to visitors, "the owners don't care, they are not strong." The local police suggest that a well kept, well-lighted home deters crime. The physical appearance of our building is linked to our physical as well as spiritual security.

## USY News

Our BEKI-BJ Chapter of United Synagogue Youth (USY) was named a "Chapter of Excellence" at the Hanefesh Region Spring Kinnus. This distinction marks our chapter as one of the best in the region, covering Connecticut Valley, including Western Massachusetts. Our USY chapter of 38 teens from BEKI and B'nai Jacob was chosen as one of the top three in the region for excellent programming, contributions to tzedakah, and enthusiastic participation in USY. We are extremely proud of this award! An excellent scrapbook put together by Yael Schochat and Sarah Oren contributed to BEKI-BJ winning the award, and Sarah's expertly crafted 10-minute video on our USY year clinched the award for the chapter.

Mazal tov to Aliza Kuperstock on her election to the Hanefesh Region presidency for 2002-2003. As region president, Aliza will have many opportuni-

ties to develop the USY program in our region and beyond. Aliza is a daughter of David & Darryl Kuperstock. Outgoing Regional President Karen Nahary was given an award for her outstanding leadership. We are very proud of all of our strong USY leaders.

USY continues with exciting activities this semester. We had a wonderful Shabbaton at BEKI before Pesah, which included a Chocolate Seder, study about slavery, and an evening of disco roller-skating. In May and June we will be assembling craft kits for Childrens' Hospital, traveling to New York City for the Israel Day Parade, having a barbecue at the Reis home, and joining other chapters at Six Flags.

Join us! BEKI-BJ USY is open to second-semester eight graders thru twelfth graders. Call us at 389-6077, or e-mail our Membership VP at [clem1010@aol.com](mailto:clem1010@aol.com).



## LifeCycle

With sorrow we note the passing of Eric I.B. Beller, husband of Marsha Beller, father of Elisa, Sarah and Jonathan

May the Almighty comfort those who mourn



Eric Beller

—

## Mazal tov to

- Ivan & Rita Sachs on the birth of their granddaughter Melanie Sachs and to uncles and aunts Mark & Ilene Sachs and Ken & Linda Buckman.



Susan Voigt

- Susan & Phil Voigt on Susan's election to Chairperson of the New Haven Democratic Town Committee

## Calendar Meeting

There will be a calendar planning meeting on Monday 6 May from 09:30a to 11:15a in BEKI's Rosenkrantz Family Library. All officers, chairpersons and project leaders at BEKI are urged to attend so that our upcoming year of events can be coordinated. Please call Mary Ellen at 389-2108 x14 (beki@snet.net) or Jon-Jay at x10 (jtilsen@beki.org) for more information.

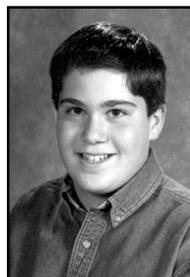
## Benei Mitzva in May

On Sunday Rosh Hodesh Sivan, 12 May, Lauren Rose will lead and participate in services as a bat mitzva. Lauren is a daughter of Dr. Tina Rose and of Dr. Aron & Stacey Rose. She is a graduate of the BEKI Benei Mitzva Program and a student at Ezra Academy. The service that morning begins at 9:15a, a special time.



Lauren Rose

On Shabbat morning 25 May, Zachary Olmer will lead and participate in services as a bar mitzva. Please join Zack's family, Elaine Olmer-Luther & David Luther, and Morris & Ruth Olmer, on this special day. The service begins at 9:15a. Zack is a graduate of the BEKI Benei Mitzva Program and a student at Ezra Academy.



Zachary Olmer

On Friday night 31 May & Shabbat morning 1 June, Rachel Foodim-Forbes will lead and participate in services as a bat mitzva. Rachel is the daughter of Robert Forbes & Joanne Foodim and a student at Ezra Academy.



Rachel Foodim-Forbes

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## A Post Passover Purim Postscript

This year's Purim Baskets project had more than the usual number of errors and has convinced me (I didn't need much convincing) that it was time for me to retire from this project. I want to take this opportunity to thank all the congregants who have helped over the years. I must also apologize for the errors (all mine) this year. So if you have not received a basket from a friend or have not been acknowledged, do not be hurt or angry. It is probably due to a careless key stroke on my part. But take heart. Next year the project will be under the chairmanship of that dynamic duo, Ina & Bryna (Silverman and Pauker, respectively).

Gloria Cohen

*Editor's note: Our congregation expresses appreciation to Gloria Cohen for her fine efforts over the years, including this year, in making this important project a wonderful success.*

## Library News

The following new books, by Sylvia Rouss, have been added to the Ari Nathan Levine Children's Library.

- *Sammy Spider's First Purim*
- *Sammy Spider's First Rosh Hashanah*
- *Sammy Spider's Passover Fun Book*
- *Sammy Spider's Hanukkah Fun Book*
- *Sammy Spider's First Hanukkah*
- *Sammy Spider's First Passover*

## 20s-30s Havura Enjoys Dinner, Brunch

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 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.

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### Tiqun Leil Shavuot

Thursday evening 16 May at 7:00p, the Tiqun Leil Shavuot Night of Study will begin with a "Family Program" at 7:00p, meeting in the Goodwin Youth Room, and, at the same time, a period of adult Torah Study with Rabbi Joshua Gutoff, in the George G. Posener Daily Chapel.

The brief Minha Afternoon Service, from 7:50p to 8:00p, will be followed by the special refreshments of Shavuot, which may include Popsicles, fruit, cheesecake, coffee, tea and soft drinks. The brief Festival Evening service, from 8:40p to 9:00p, will be followed at 9:00p by "Paths to Peace & Security for Israel: Perspectives on the Situation," with Steven Fraade and Isaiah Cooper, moderated by Paul Bass. The program is intended to create an opportunity for concerned members of our community to hear and express thoughtful and respectful perspectives on the situation in Israel.

After another break for refreshments, exploration of Torah continues with additional presentations, including R' Moshe Meiri on "Avot 1:1" from 10:30p to 11:15p and another engaging lesson from 11:30p to 12:15p.

### Friday Shavuot Shaharit Services

The Friday Shavuot Festival Shaharit Morning Service begins at 9:15a on Friday 17 May 2002. The service includes the full recitation of Hallel as on the first day. Following the Haftara (prophetic reading), selections from the Book of Ruth will be 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.

### Shabbat Shavuot Morning Recognizes BMP Participants

#### Yizkor Memorial Service to be Held

The Shabbat Shavuot Morning service, which begins at 9:15a on 18 May 2002, will recognize the class of BEKI's Benei Mitzva Program participants. The benei mitzva celebrants will lead and participate in services and present a qiddush following services. Appreciation will also be expressed to Amy Pincus and Liora Lew for developing a wonderfully meaningful and successful program for our students.

The Festival service includes a Shaharit morning service, *Hallel* (Psalms of praise), a Torah reading and Haftara, and the Musaf additional service, and concludes by noon. The Yizkor memorial service is one of four such services during the year that help us recognize our feelings of loss, which are often especially intense during the Festival season, and to honor the memories of our loved ones.

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## Toda Rabba: Thank You! To:

- Willa Needler, Sarah Serkin, Esther Serkin, Shoshana Cohen-Fraade, Sarah Beller, Ruth Greenblatt and Michael Stern for reading Song of Songs on Pesah
- Herbert Etkind for repairing the etz hayim of a Torah scroll
- Charles & Violet Ludwig for opening and closing for selected services
- Sisterhood for providing Ongei Shabbat at Late Friday Night Services

BEKI operates largely by force of extraordinary volunteer effort. The list above does not include the many who read Torah, lead children's services and Shabbat morning services, help in the Religious School, support Kadima & USY, and other programs. There is still more to be done! If you would like to become more involved, contact Brian Karsif at 387-9268 (bkarsif@yahoo.com), Lauren Kempton at 389-2108 x33 (lkempton@beki.org), Mary Ellen Mack at 389-2108 x14 (beki@snet.net) or Rabbi Tilsen at 389-2108 x10 (jtilsen@beki.org).



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

Darshan (Torah Commentator) in May

Rashi Study Group



Neil Berro

Neil Berro, Executive Director of the Jewish Federation of Greater New Haven, will serve as darshan on Shabbat morning 11 May, parashat BeMidbar.

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 participate for a single meeting or to begin at any time. Knowledge of Hebrew is not necessary. Rashi purported to explain the peshat of the Biblical text, i.e., the meaning in its historical, literary and linguistic context. Visitors and new participants are welcome. The Rashi Study Group has been meeting weekly since 1994.

### Book Discussion Group

BEKI's monthly Book Group meets next on Shabbat 1 June 2002 following qiddush (about 1:00p to 2:30p) in BEKI's Rosenkrantz Family Library. The book to be discussed is *Postville: A Clash of Cultures in Heartland America* by Stephen G. Bloom, about the Lubavitcher community in a tiny Iowa town. If you order the book from Amazon.com, BEKI receives a small commission. (BEKI gets the commission only if you go to Amazon through the link at [www.beki.org/links.html](http://www.beki.org/links.html) or wherever you see the Amazon icon on BEKI's web site.) Information on purchasing these books, and an updated list, can be found at [www.beki.org/books.html](http://www.beki.org/books.html). For further information, contact Helen Rosenberg at 389-9594.

### AA Meeting

A Thursday night AA meeting is held at BEKI every Thursday night at 8:00p. The weekly 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. For information on the weekly meeting call Jay at (203) 387-6019 or email Jay at [drjays.nai@rcn.com](mailto:drjays.nai@rcn.com).

### Reading Torah at BEKI

Darryl Kuperstock is coordinating the readings for *BeMidbar* (Numbers). If you would like to read Torah, or learn how to read Torah, call Rabbi Jon-Jay at (203) 389-2108 x10 ([jjtilsen@beki.org](mailto:jjtilsen@beki.org)) or Darryl Kuperstock at (203) 387-0304 ([kuperst@aol.com](mailto:kuperst@aol.com)).

### Shabbat Shalom Learners' Minyan

The "Shabbat Shalom Learners' Minyan," which meets every other Saturday morning at 10:45a in BEKI's Rosenkrantz Family 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.

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# BEKI Events

## May - Iyar - Sivan

5762

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			19 Iyar      1	20 Iyar      2	21 Iyar      3	22 Iyar      4
Shaharit=Morning Minha =Afternoon Minha-Maariv=Evening SSLM=Shabbat Shalom Learners' Minyan BRS=BEKI Religious School KISS=Kids in Shul when there's no School	BEKI phone numbers: (203) 389-2108 Fax (203) 389-5899 Mary Ellen-Office x14 Religious School x13 Rabbi x10 Dr. Lauren Kempton x 33	Office Hours: Mon 9a-12 & 1p-3p Tue by appt. only Wed 10a-12 & 1p-6p Thu 9a-12 & 1p-3p Fri 9a-2p	7:00a Shaharit 4:00p Religious School 4:15p Benei Mitzva Pgm 5:45p Minha-Maariv	8:15a Shaharit 5:45p Minha-Maariv 8:00p A.A.	7:00a Shaharit 6:00p Minha-Maariv 7:33p Candles	9:15a Shaharit <i>Kiddush Sponsor: Marge Wiener</i> 10:45a Children's Programs 10:45a Cosmic Conversations 10:45p SSLM 5:45p Minha
23 Iyar      5	24 Iyar      6	25 Iyar      7	26 Iyar      8	27 Iyar      9	28 Iyar      10	29 Iyar      11
9:00a Shaharit 9:00a Religious School 5:45p Minha-Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 7:45a Rashi Study Grp 8:00a-3:00p KISS 9:30a Calendar Meeting 5:45p Minha-Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 5:45p Minha-Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 4:00p Religious School 4:15p Benei Mitzva Pgm 5:45p Minha-Maariv	8:15a Shaharit 5:45p Minha-Maariv 8:00p A.A.	7:00a Shaharit 6:00p Minha-Maariv 7:40p Candles 6:30p 20s/30s Havura Dinner 8:00p Late Service	9:15a Shaharit <i>Darshan: Neil Berro</i> <i>Kiddush Sponsors: Joe &amp; Ravit Avni-Singer</i> 9:15a Shaharit 10:45a Children's Programs 5:45p Minha
1 Sivan      12	2 Sivan      13	3 Sivan      14	4 Sivan      15	5 Sivan      16	6 Sivan      17	7 Sivan      18
<i>Rosh Hodesh Mother's Day</i> 9:15a Shaharit <i>Lauren Rose Bat Mitzva</i> No Religious School 5:45p Minha-Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 7:45a Rashi Study Grp 5:45p Minha-Maariv 7:45p General Bd.	7:00a Shaharit 5:45p Minha-Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 4:00p Religious School 4:15p Benei Mitzva Pgm 5:45p Minha-Maariv	8:00a-3:00p KISS 8:15a Shaharit 7:00p-1:00a Tiqun Olam 7:45p Minha 7:46p Candles 8:40p Maariv <i>Erev Shavuot</i>	<i>Shavuot Office Closed</i> 9:15a Festival Svc 6:00p Minha-Maariv 7:47p Candles	<i>Shavuot - Yizkor</i> 9:15a Shaharit <i>Kiddush Sponsor: Benei Mitzva Class 5762</i> 10:45a Children's Programs 10:45a Cosmic Conversations 10:45a SSLM 5:45p Minha
8 Sivan      19	9 Sivan      20	10 Sivan      21	11 Sivan      22	12 Sivan      23	13 Sivan      24	14 Sivan      25
9:00a Shaharit 9:00a Religious School 5:45p Minha-Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 7:45a Rashi Study Grp 5:45p Minha-Maariv 7:45p Executive Board	7:00a Shaharit 5:45p Minha-Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 4:00p Religious School 4:15p Benei Mitzva Pgm 5:45p Minha-Maariv	8:15a Shaharit 5:45p Minha-Maariv 8:00p A.A.	7:00a Shaharit 6:00p Minha-Maariv 7:54p Candles	9:15a Shaharit <i>Zachary Olmer Bar Mitzva</i> 10:45a Children's Programs 5:45p Minha
15 Sivan      26	16 Sivan      27	17 Sivan      28	18 Sivan      29	19 Sivan      30	20 Sivan      31	
9:00a Shaharit 9:00a Religious School 5:45p Minha-Maariv	<i>Memorial Day Office Closed</i> 8:00a-3:00p KISS 9:00a Shaharit 9:45a Rashi Study Grp 5:45p Minha-Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 5:45p Minha-Maariv	7:00a Shaharit 4:00p Religious School 4:15p Benei Mitzva Pgm 5:45p Minha-Maariv	8:15a Shaharit 5:45p Minha-Maariv 8:00p A.A.	7:00a Shaharit 6:00p Minha-Maariv <i>Rachel Forbes Bat Mitzva</i> 7:59p Candles	Office: beki@snet.net Rabbi: jjtilsen@beki.org Religious School/Education Director: lkempton@beki.org website: www.beki.org

## Paul Goodwin Provides for BEKI's Future

George G. Posener, Rabbi Murray Levine, Marvin Missan and Rabbi Jon-Jay Tilsen are among those who have informed BEKI that they have included the Congregation as a beneficiary in their estate plans or wills. We are pleased to announce that Paul "Pat" Goodwin is also among the ranks of these distinguished leaders.



Paul Goodwin

Pat Goodwin, a "Founding Father" of the Congregation in its modern form, is a past president and has served the Congregation in numerous capacities over the years. In recent years, Pat has been a leader in Long-Term Planning and Income Development for the Congregation.

Pat and his late wife Claire raised their children in the Congregation and provided a model for commitment to community. Unless he is away, Pat attends every Shabbat evening and morning service as well as frequent daily morning services. His children, Rick & Rachel, Susan & Rob and Debi,

who are also BEKI members, have also been wonderful supporters of the Congregation.

Paul's brothers, Louis, Sonny and Robert, all of blessed memory, and their wives and children have also served as leaders of the Congregation. The Robert Goodwin Memorial Endowment for BEKI was created in 1995 to serve as a lasting memorial to Robert and provides continuing funding for the Congregation's activities.

Wills and estate plans are not just for the wealthy. Financial advisors suggest that anyone with children – regardless of age – and anyone who cares what happens to their financial resources or property after their death, must have a formal will or estate plan. Even if a donor leaves just 10% or 5% or even 1% to BEKI, it can make a big impact on the Congregation's future. Designating BEKI as a beneficiary in one's will demonstrates to one's heirs and neighbors the importance of *tzedaqa* (charity), of BEKI, and of the continuity of the Jewish People.

If you would like information on including BEKI in your estate planning or current planned charitable giving, please contact your financial advisor or estate planning attorney and BEKI officer 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 David Tein at The Jewish Foundation at 387-2424 x304 ([dtein@jewishnewhaven.org](mailto:dtein@jewishnewhaven.org)) for a confidential discussion.

## Dear Rabbi

Dear Rabbi

In some synagogues, couples are called up for *aliyot* [Torah blessing honors]. This is a lovely tradition. Why isn't this allowed at BEKI?

Signed, Questioning Couple

Dear Couple,

Numerous references in the law codes and in case history governing Torah reading practice indicate that only one person at a time may read the Torah, and by extension, recite the Torah blessings, in public worship. The codes, based on the Talmud (and in this case also the Jerusalem Talmud), apply the rule the halakhic rule of "*trei qalei la mishtamei* -- two voices are unintelligible" to the issue of joint aliya. As a legal category, this rule means that were two or more voices to join in reciting the blessing or reading Torah, it "wouldn't count" as a proper reading. Calling up more than one person simultaneously might also violate the rule against *berakha le-vatela*, a blessing said in vain, also considered a significant ritual offense (cf. *Biur Halakha* on 141:2 "le-vatala.")

The case law is instructive. A question arose concerning a Monday morning service when there were two bridegrooms present, neither of whom was a Kohen or Levi. The question was, who was entitled to the third aliya? The Kohen and Levi were needed for the *Minyan* (quorum), so they could not leave, and they were entitled to the first and second aliyot by virtue of their tribal status. That created competing claims for the one remaining aliya, viz., the third aliya, by each of the two bridegrooms.

Had this been Shabbat, they could have simply added an extra aliya so each could have one. But on weekdays there is a rule that prohibits adding an aliya lest services be lengthened, which might make people late for work. Numerous solutions were proposed, including those that "bent" the rules, and ultimately a solution was found. But the idea of two people sharing an aliya was not even suggested, as it clearly violated firmly established procedure.

The problem experienced by the modern Bar or Bat Mitzva family is not a new problem. What do you do when you have a lot of people whom you want to honor? Too many uncles and aunts, too few honors. Whenever there was a need to provide more honors, more aliyot were added on a Shabbat morning. This has always been the solution to the scarcity of aliyot. Never were two called at once.

The prospect of joint aliya would create numerous additional halakhic problems. None of these is overwhelmingly important in and of itself, but they are worth noting.

For example, it is the custom among many Ashkenazic communities (although not at BEKI) not to allow relatives of the first degree to have consecutive aliyot. That is, you cannot call up two siblings or a parent and child one after the other. The reasons for not calling them in succession would apply even more for calling them simultaneously.

Another problem, one that would apply at BEKI, is that we determine a woman's tribal status for pur-

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MICHAEL MARTONE  
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**Dear Rabbi**

Continued from page 15

poses of aliya based on her father's tribe, i.e., we call a daughter of a Kohen or Levi for the Kohen or Levi aliya. There is also a convention that says a Kohen and Levi must get the first and second aliya, respectively, and the next aliyot are reserved for people who are not a Kohen or Levi. Under this system, a couple of different tribal status could not have an aliya together. Joint aliya creates a series of new unsolvable problems. We would be creating a situation in which some but not all couples could have a joint aliya, or, alternatively, we would violate the privilege extended to the Kohen or bat-Kohen.

A person having an aliya is supposed to follow along with the Torah Reader in the scroll. That is why the Torah Reader shows the honoree the spot where he or she is reading, and that is why the Torah Reader always uses a pointer in the scroll. If there were a pair or a group of people standing around the table, it could become impossible for all of them to see the Torah and perform their aliya properly.

If there were no limit on the number of people who may go up for an aliya at once, then what if a Bar or Bat Mitzva family were to want to send up a group of five or ten at once? And what if two groups of ten are called up in succession? The result might violate even our minimal demands of decorum. If we were to limit joint aliya to two people per aliya, then on the one hand we would run into some family that will be just as disappointed with that limit as some families might be with the limit of one person per aliya. We put ourselves in the untenable position of setting a limit based on a committee's sense of "decorum" while ignoring the halakha. That would be a dubious way to make Synagogue policy, and one liable to create discontent and foster contempt for law and tradition as well as for the Synagogue leadership.

I agree with Rabbi Avram Israel Reisner's *teshuva* (responsum) "Joint Aliya" approved by the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly, the highest halakhic body in the land, on 28 October of 1992, that prohibits the practice of joint aliya. Rabbi Reisner simply could not find a legal

justification for joint aliya. While there have been teshuvot written that justify the practice, they are not, in my judgment, persuasive.

If a synagogue is going to abandon the traditional halakhic framework in the realm of Shabbat Torah reading, then there are a lot of things that could be done. We could have the Torah Readings on Friday night, which might be more convenient for some people. We could read only one verse per aliya, making the reading shorter and easier. We could read the same verse repeatedly, so the Bar Mitzva has to learn only one verse. We could read it in English, or out of a Humash, which is much easier. We could even give an aliya to a goldfish. These practices are no more (and no less) prohibited by halakha than joint aliya. If we are willing to go beyond the established rules, then there is a lot we can do, including some things that we might agree are desirable. But if we want to run the services according to law, then we can only have one person called for an aliya at a time.

The historic origin of joint aliya, dating to the 1950s through 1970s in various communities, had to do with the development of the role of women in synagogue ritual. As recently as the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, women were not allowed to participate in synagogue ritual in many communities. As the calls for women's presence on the bima increased, it was decided, in some places, that a woman could ascend the bima for one of the seven aliyot if, and only if, she were accompanied by a man (a spouse, fiancé or brother). This was done in order to expand the role of women in the service.

A woman could be allowed to go to the bima for a "joint aliya" because she didn't count. The theory that permitted joint aliya for a woman with a man was that since she didn't count, there was no concern that the practice violated any of the rules described above. She was viewed, at least for the purpose of the law, as if she were not there at all. I have found no evidence from any written teshuvot from that era for permission for two men to share an aliya. The only "Joint Aliya" ever authorized was for a woman *with* a man.

## Dear Rabbi

I witnessed a “joint aliya” in a Connecticut Conservative congregation. The elderly *gabbai* (usher) called the couple up to the Torah with this language: “*Ya`amod Ploni ben Ploni `im ishto – Come up, Mr. So-and-so with his wife.*” The woman was called not as an equal but as an appendage.

Joint aliya played a legitimate role in the progress toward equality for women. It got women up on the bima for the first time, overcoming what for some was a major psychological barrier to women’s participation in synagogue ritual. Now that era has passed. Now women count. A woman does not need to go up with her husband, fiancé or boyfriend for an aliya; she can have her own if she wishes.

Three reasons are given for wanting joint aliya. First, it allows a celebrant’s family to hand out more honors. But when joint aliya is allowed, celebrating families to whom the Synagogue extends the honor of selecting the honorees could be under even greater pressure to include everyone. As it is, if such a family may pick only a limited number of people to honor, everyone who does not receive an honor understands that the family was limited. However, if the family is essentially unlimited, by being able to call up more than one person at a time for an aliya, then anyone who is not called up has greater grounds to feel slighted.

A second reason for wanting joint aliya is that one of the proposed honorees does not know the blessings. In such cases, I strongly urge the individuals to learn to recite the blessings for themselves. We offer a photocopy of the blessings, a cassette tape, and a tutor to review the blessings with them. If someone does not know the blessings well enough, they should learn. Only then can they have an aliya. We impose very minimal standards on those receiving aliyot in our congregation – they just have to be Jewish. But they must at least be willing to say the berakha on their own, or even with coaching. If a 12- or 13-year old can find the courage to stand in front of their elders, and before the Throne of Glory, and lead prayers, then the aunts and uncles or grandparents must find the courage to stand up and recite three Hebrew sentences. To say that someone who would not even read the blessings in transliteration had an “aliya” detracts from the honor of all other olim (honorees) and of the congregation. In addition, it would be in violation of the law (Shulhan  
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Arukh OH 139:2). For people with special needs, there are ways for them to perform the aliya within the law.

The third reason for wanting joint aliya is that some people simply think it is nice for a couple to go up together. We allow a couple to open the ark and take out the Torah together, or lift and bind the Torah together, serve as Torah reader and honoree together. There are many other ways couples can do things together in the service. There are many ways people can be involved as couples and be fully in keeping with law and tradition.

While there are people who are disappointed that they could not have a joint aliya, there are also people – especially women – who as a result of these rules mustered the courage to have an aliya for the first time. For these people, that first aliya was daunting, but also exhilarating and inspiring. It was emotionally and spiritually satisfying. People have thanked us afterwards for “forcing” them to do it. Had there been joint aliya, these people might never have taken this important step.

Furthermore, this position, whether one agrees with it or not, is based on a clear analysis of the law as well as an evaluation of the implications of the policy for this Congregation. I have always been willing to talk about it with anyone interested, and I am always open to evaluate any special circumstances or alternative viewpoints. At the same time, we respect the right of other congregations to follow alternative practices, which may be fitting for their own unique circumstances or values.

In short, calling more than one person up to the Torah is prohibited by several rules of Halakha and standard procedure. The problems that joint aliya seeks to solve can be addressed through other means. Joint aliya for women had its place in history, but it is inconsistent with a Congregation that upholds equality of men and women.

When our children go to camp and college and participate in the larger Jewish world, I want them to be able to know that what they learned and practiced at BEKI was the traditional, normative way to do things. And when our mothers and daughters go up to the bima for an aliya, I want everyone to know that their voices count.