

A New Haven Tradition since 1892

BEKIbulletin

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From Pesah to 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.

Teach us to number our days, that we may attain a heart of wisdom

– Psalm 90:12

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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: 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.

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A Message from Rabbi Tilsen & Dear Rabbi
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From Pesah to Shavot

LaG BeOmer Kumsitz

On Monday evening 15 May 2006, from 6:10p to 8:00p, everyone is invited to a LaG BeOmer Kumsitz campfire sing-along at the residence of Robert Forbes & Joanne Foodim, 2055 Chapel Street at Alden.

Bring a kosher dessert or beverage, instruments and song sheets. In case of rain, the sing-along will take place indoors at the same location.

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.



Book of Life Dinner to Honor Ruth Greenblatt

Ruth Greenblatt will be honored as a "Woman of Valor" at the Sisterhood **Book of Life Dinner** at 6:30p on Tuesday 13 June 2006. Reservations can be made by contacting Peggy at 389-2108 x14 or office@beki.org.

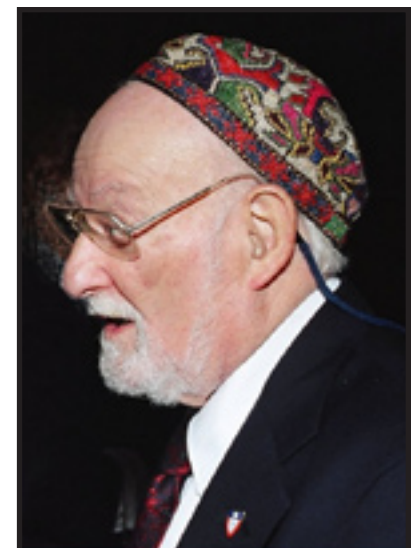


Earl Banquer Concert in June



The Earl Banquer Woodwind Ensemble will present a festive family concert at BEKI on Sunday night 11 June at 7:00p in the downstairs Social Hall.

Tickets for the concert are \$18 per person. Proceeds will be used to support the work of the Hessed Committee and the general operations of the synagogue.



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Benei Mitzva in May

Chloe Lerman, daughter of Rob & Suzi Lerman, Shabbat 6 May 2006,



parashat Aharei-mot Qedoshi. Chloe is a granddaughter of Paul Goodwin and a niece of Richard Goodwin & Rachel Lampert. She is a student in the Benei Mitzva Program.

Emma Golub, daughter of Robert & Dianne Golub, Shabbat 12-13



May 2006, *parashat Emor*. Emma has moved several times, coming to Connecticut from Columbus, Ohio in 2004. The following year she and her family attended services at BEKI and soon after became members of this congregation. Emma is a sixth grade student at Ezra Academy. An avid reader, she chose a mitzva project related to books, and is collecting gently used books to send to a school system in Carmiel, Israel. Emma lives in Bethany with her parents and younger sister Anna. She enjoys horseback riding, playing guitar and spending time with her friends and family.



Jared Levine, son of Daniel & Karen Levine, Shabbat 19-20 May 2006, *parashat BeHar-BeHuqotai*. Jared is a student in the BEKI Religious School and Benei Mitzva Program.

Daniel Ben-Chitrit, son of Cobi & Roz Ben-Chitrit, Shabbat 26-27 May 2006, *parashat BeMidbar Sinai*. Daniel is a student in the BEKI Religious



School and Benei Mitzva Program.

Mazal Tov to

Geoffrey Hartman on winning the 2006 Truman Capote Award for Literary Criticism for *The Geoffrey Hartman Reader*, (2004) co-edited by Geoffrey Hartman and Daniel T. O'Hara. Hartman is the Sterling Professor Emeritus of English and Comparative Literature at Yale and co-founder of the Fortunoff Video Archives of Holocaust Testimonies, whose archivist is BEKI member Joanne Rudof. Hartman's book was selected for the Capote Award by an international panel of prominent critics and writers.

Judith & Dominic Aprile on the arrival of Jade Alexandra Aprile, and to grandparents Ralph Friedman and Irene Friedman. Jade is the great-granddaughter of the late Rev. Louis Friedman.

With sorrow we note the passing of Haya Carmi, grandmother of Iris (& Adam) Gafni-Kane

Planted in the House of the Lord

Following the *bar mitzva* observance of our son Tsvi in February, I traveled with him and my father, Bob Tilsen, to Israel for ten days. My dad lives in Minnesota and Florida, so we see him only on holidays and during vacations. I really wanted us to be together, so that I could be with my dad, and so my son could get to know his grandfather better, and so my dad could be as proud of Tsvi as I am. As three generations traveling together, we heard many kind or curious remarks, from everyone from passport control to store clerks. We rented a car and followed our own schedule, visiting archeological, historical, natural, religious and cultural sites.

Although our trip was personal, among my pleasant rabbinic duties was visiting some of the BEKI youth in Israel on educational programs. Jochai Ben-Avie, son of Michael & Sascha, was an extraordinary spokesperson for a high-school year in Israel program; Tsvi was ready to sign up on the spot, but of course he is not quite ready for high school. Jochai was very much at home in Jerusalem. Seeing him thriving made the whole journey worthwhile.

Edward Abramovitz, one of our star *benei mitzva* tutors, was thriving at a Jerusalem Yeshiva with other college students. He was trying to get a little more Talmud under his belt before beginning college next year. I was glad to be able to bring back a good report to his parents, Alan & Sally. Seeing Edward thrive made the whole journey worthwhile.

Judi Bartosiewicz, a professional student doing a semester-long architectural internship, was absolutely glowing in a upscale neighborhood in Ranana. Her mother, Betty, was concerned for her being so far away, but understood how important it was for Judi to be in Israel. Like Jochai and Edward, Judi seemed very much at home. Seeing Judi thrive made the whole journey worthwhile.

As it turned out, Lauren Kempton was in Israel at the same time, and in addition to seeing Jochai and Edward, she was able to visit with Danielle Rothman, Stephen & Sherry's daughter, in Jerusalem. Her assessment of these young people matched my own.

We spent just a couple of hours with my distant cousin Beth and her children in Jerusalem. (Her husband could not get out of the clinic early enough to join us.) We met in the food court in the Malha Mall, a huge three-storey complex. It was strange to be at the mall. Twenty-five years ago I had lived for a school year in a house on a dirt road in Malha. Shepherds grazed sheep, and occasionally a camel wandered by. Beyond our little house was undeveloped land, a railroad track from the Ottoman era, and the Judean Desert. Today, where that idyllic house once stood, there is a Burger King, and the biggest mall in the Middle East.

But it was great to see my cousin and her three children, Adi, Gilad, and Kessem, each matching the age and gender of our oldest children Gilah, Tsvi and Tova. Beth and I share a common ancestor, Dov ben Zev (Berel

ben Velvel), who lived in Tsefat, northern Israel, about 180 years ago. Of course, through the unfolding of time and Jewish history, his descendants found their way to Minneapolis, and Beth found her way back to Israel, where she has three beautiful, bright and good children. Seeing her family thriving there made the whole journey worthwhile.

At the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, we saw the Shrine of the Book, an exhibit about the Dead Sea Scrolls. The one Biblical book found in its entirety in the caves of Qumran was the Isaiah Scroll, a facsimile of which was on display in full at the shrine. It so happens that Tsvi's *bar mitzva haftara*, which he had read just days earlier at BEKI, was also from the scroll of Isaiah. As Hebrew orthography has not changed that much since the days of the Dead Sea Cult at Qumran, we were able to locate that passage, and Tsvi read it directly from the Qumran scroll. That second rendition of his *haftara* made the whole journey worthwhile.

A few days later, Tsvi climbed up to the cave at Qumran where the scroll was found. (He did not notice the sign that says, in Hebrew, "Deadly Hazard! Loose Rocks! Do Not Climb Here!" until he was on the way down.) I climbed half way up. My dad waited near the bottom, not wishing to add to the eighty-one years of wear on his knee.

We spent a good deal of time at Qibbutz Yizra'el and in New Haven's sister-city Afula. We went from one end of the country to the other, from

A Message from Rabbi Tilsen

Majdal Shams in the far north, to Acco in the west (not really far), to Eilat in the south. Israel is small enough that we were able to drive from one end of the country to the other on a single tank of gas. (Small country, small car, big gas tank.) Both my dad and Tsvi especially enjoyed the tank museum (basically a big parking lot for tanks) at Latrun and the (formerly) Syrian and Israeli bunkers in the Golan.

A highlight of our travel was a visit with Dr. Elaine Solowey of the Arava Institute at Qibbutz Qetura just north of Eilat. More accustomed to meeting researchers and graduate students than rabbis, retired home builders and bar mitzva boys, she gave us a close-up and technical tour of her attempts to figure out what you can do that is socially productive and economically feasible with basically a lot of sun, sand and salty soil. We saw several projects, some successful, some abandoned.

We received VIP treatment at the Institute through the grace of Dr. Sarah Sallon, a Hadassah Medical Center researcher whose project on medicinal plants is of special interest to California industrialist and philanthropist Lou Borick, a close friend of my father since boyhood. Dr. Sallon's project is to collect and test plants from around the world that, according to local folk practices, have medicinal properties. As some minority cultures, as well as rare plant species, are in the process of disappearing, this is an urgent program that can preserve their medical heritage for the benefit of future generations. Some fruits of her research are now FDA-approved and available



globally. So Lou had put us in touch with Dr. Sallon, and she said that as long as we were going to Eilat, we must see Dr. Solowey's work. And seeing her life-long efforts to make the dessert productive, for the benefit of all humanity, made the whole journey worthwhile.

The most extraordinary sight came at the end of our visit to the Institute, in a quarantined greenhouse. There in a plain pot was "Methusaleh," a sapling sprouted a year ago from a nearly 2000-year old date seed found in a pot at Mesada (see Steven Erlanger, "After 2,000 Years, a Seed from Ancient Judea Sprouts," *NYT* 12 June 2005). The archeological evidence and carbon dating proved its age. This was quite an accomplishment, as a seed that old – or anything like it – had never been successfully germinated. That one seed embodied the story of the Jewish People's rebirth in the Land of Israel.

But its significance went beyond being a mere feat of botanical prowess. Like apples, date palms come in many varieties. If you don't know anything about apples, then you might

just know that there are red apples and green apples. If you *do* know about apples, then you know that there are many distinct varieties, each with its own flavor, texture and aroma. Dates come in many distinct varieties, too.

Like poodles, Judean date palms are a cultivated variety. They do not exist in the wild; they are bred that way. If there were no people breeding dogs, there would be no packs of wild poodles running around. Cultivated dates depend on people for care and reproduction. The Judean date, which appears on the ancient coins of Israel, was a national symbol. But within a couple of generations after the destruction and depopulation of Judea by the Romans in the second century, Judean dates became extinct. No one has tasted one of these Biblical fruits in about 1,700 years. Should this sapling (or its undocumented sibling growing nearby) prove to be a female, then in another four or five years, Dr. Sallon, Dr. Solowey, Lou Borick and eventually all of us will taste Judean dates. Seeing Methusaleh thrive made the whole journey worthwhile.

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A Message from Rabbi Tilsen

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Upon our return, Bob, Tsvi and I enthusiastically began to tell of our adventures to anyone who asked. On our first Shabbat back, Tsvi was telling Morris Cohen about some of the things we did and people we saw. Morris asked him, "What was the best part of your trip to Israel?" Perhaps an obvious question, but one I had not thought to ask him myself. Tsvi said, "Spending the time with my Grampa Bob." Hearing that made the whole journey worthwhile.

*The righteous bloom like a date-palm;
They thrive like a cedar in Lebanon;
Planted in the house of the Lord,
They flourish in the courts of our God.
In old age they still produce fruit;
They are full of sap and freshness;
Attesting that the Lord is upright;
My rock, in whom there is no wrong.
Psalm 92*



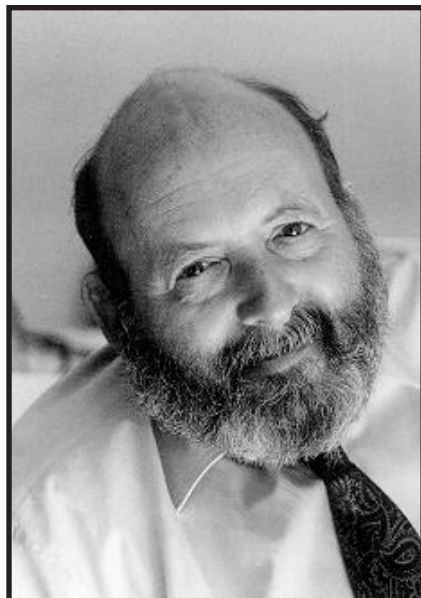
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Library News

Book Review

**By Rabbi Moshe
"Murray" Levine**

The Personhood of God
by Dr. Yochanan Muffs
(Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005)



I remember Dr. Yochanan Muffs, now a Professor of Bible and Religion at The Jewish Theological Seminary, when we were students together more than 50 years ago. He was always a jovial, scholarly and compassionate human being. It is no wonder that he wrote this collection of essays over a period of many years and now edited them for this book on Jewish theology. Like many texts it not an easy-read but requires study.

The theme of this collection highlights the importance of understanding God through His "relationship through acts of love." "God," writes Muffs, is a "most human God." He may be characterized through "the triad of power, love and justice." "The God of Israel is a ... democrat, for He is friendly not only to kings but with commoners." Muffs concludes, "it is clear, then, that we are dealing with a most human God."

In reading this scholarly text, one cannot help but be impressed with Muffs's familiarity with primary and secondary Jewish and non-Jewish sources. It is my pleasure to contribute this book to the BEKI library for all to read.

Youth News

We are excited to announce the Annual BEKI/BJ USY Shabbaton at Camp Laurelwood on 19 – 21 May 2006. The weekend promises to be a great event, this is an excellent opportunity to meet new people and catch up with old friends. Call Daphne Lew (203)389-1048 or Karen Sutin (203)393-3059 to reserve your spot ASAP.

Leave a Legacy

Dear Donna,

I know you've been pushing this "Leave a Legacy" idea, that everyone should leave something to charity in their will. I don't disagree, but I've already signed my will and it was such a big project to get done that I really don't want to have to redo it. I don't have life insurance or retirement accounts on which I can name BEKI as the beneficiary. I keep putting off dealing with this; is there an easy way for me to "Leave a Legacy"?

*Sincerely,
Estate Plan Complete*

Dear Estate Plan Complete:

If you are willing to share a copy of your will with me, and tell me the amount or percentage of your estate you would like to leave to BEKI, I would be pleased to prepare a codicil adding the necessary language to your will at no charge. Wouldn't it be nice if every BEKI member did this? Please contact me at 787-1633 or sdsij@aol.com, or you can send me a fax at 787-9162. Please just do it!

Sincerely,
Donna Levine
deduction on your income tax return in the year of the gift. The Foundation will accept a charitable gift annuity of as little as \$5,000. If this idea appeals to you, please contact Lisa Stanger at the Jewish Foundation (387-2424) or contact me (Donna Levine 785-8079 sdsij@aol.com) to assist you with your planning.

Donna

Service Times for Spring /Summer

Sundays:
9a Shaharit
5:45p Minha-Maariv

Mondays:
7a Shaharit
5:45p Minha-Maariv

Tuesdays:
7a Shaharit
5:45p Minha-Maariv

Wednesdays:
7a Shaharit
5:45p Minha-Maariv

Thursdays:
8:15a Shaharit
5:45p Minha-Maariv

Fridays:
7a Shaharit
6p Minha-Maariv

Saturdays:
9:15a Shaharit
5:45p Minha

May 2006

3 Iyar 5766 - 4 Sivan 5766

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

<p>1 7:45am Rashi Study Group</p> <p>3 Iyar/18 L'Omer</p>	<p>2 Yom Hazikaron</p> <p>4 Iyar/19 L'Omer</p>	<p>3 Yom Ha'Atzmaut 8:30am Rabbi's Study Group 9:30am NHBOR 4:00pm Religious School 4:45pm Benei Mitzva Program</p> <p>5 Iyar/20 L'Omer</p>	<p>4 12:30pm Talmud Study Group (off-site) 2:00pm Writing Group 8:00pm A.A.</p> <p>6 Iyar/21 L'Omer</p>	<p>5 6:00pm Minha, QS & Maariv 7:35pm Candle Lighting</p> <p>7 Iyar/22 L'Omer</p>	<p>6 9:15am Chloe Lerman Bat Mitzva 10:45am Children's Programs Qiddush: Lerman 5:45pm Minha</p> <p>8 Iyar/23 L'Omer</p>
<p>7 9:00am Religious School 10:00am MAKOM Mishna with Moshe 11:00am Ivrit with Margolit</p> <p>9 Iyar/24 L'Omer</p>	<p>8 7:45am Rashi Study Group</p> <p>10 Iyar/25 L'Omer</p>	<p>9</p> <p>11 Iyar/26 L'Omer</p>	<p>10 8:30am Rabbi's Study Group 10:00am Yom Iyun 4:00pm Religious School 4:45pm Benei Mitzva Program</p> <p>12 Iyar/27 L'Omer</p>	<p>11 12:30pm Talmud Study Group (off-site) 2:00pm Writing Group 8:00pm A.A.</p> <p>13 Iyar/28 L'Omer</p>	<p>12 Pesach Sheini 6:00pm Emma Golub Bat Mitzva 7:42pm Candle Lighting</p> <p>14 Iyar/29 L'Omer</p>
<p>14 9:00am Religious School 10:00am MAKOM Mishna with Moshe 11:00am Ivrit with Margolit</p> <p>16 Iyar/31 L'Omer</p>	<p>15 7:45am Rashi Study Group 6:10pm LaG BeOmer Kumisitz (off-site) 7:30pm Executive Board Meeting</p> <p>17 Iyar/32 L'Omer</p>	<p>16 LaG B'Omer</p> <p>18 Iyar/33 L'Omer</p>	<p>17 8:30am Rabbi's Study Group 4:00pm Religious School - Hike for LaG BeOmer 4:45pm Benei Mitzva Program</p> <p>19 Iyar/34 L'Omer</p>	<p>18 12:30pm Talmud Study Group (off-site) 2:00pm Writing Group 8:00pm A.A.</p> <p>20 Iyar/35 L'Omer</p>	<p>19 6:00pm Jared Levine Bar Mitzva 7:49pm Candle Lighting</p> <p>21 Iyar/36 L'Omer</p>
<p>21 9:00am Religious School Graduation 10:00am MAKOM Mishna with Moshe 11:00am Ivrit with Margolit</p> <p>23 Iyar/38 L'Omer</p>	<p>22 7:45am Rashi Study Group</p> <p>24 Iyar/39 L'Omer</p>	<p>23</p> <p>25 Iyar/40 L'Omer</p>	<p>24 8:30am Rabbi's Study Group</p> <p>26 Iyar/41 L'Omer</p>	<p>25 12:30pm Talmud Study Group (off-site) 2:00pm Writing Group 8:00pm A.A.</p> <p>27 Iyar/42 L'Omer</p>	<p>26 Yom Yerushalayim 6:00pm Daniel Ben-Chitrit Bar Mitzva 7:55pm Candle Lighting</p> <p>28 Iyar/43 L'Omer</p>
<p>28 Rosh Hodesh 10:00am MAKOM Mishna with Moshe 11:00am Ivrit with Margolit</p> <p>1 Sivan/45 L'Omer</p>	<p>29 Office Closed/Memorial Day 9:00am Shaharit 9:45am Rashi Study Group 7:30pm General Board Meeting</p> <p>2 Sivan/46 L'Omer</p>	<p>30</p> <p>3 Sivan/47 L'Omer</p>	<p>31 8:30am Rabbi's Study Group</p> <p>4 Sivan/48 L'Omer</p>		

Shabbatot

Shabbat Shalom Learners' Minyan

The "Shabbat Shalom Learners' Minyan," which meets every other Saturday morning at 10:45a in Classroom 4, is an ideal setting for veteran and novice shul-goers alike to become more comfortable and proficient in the *Shaharit* (morning) and Torah services in a supportive setting. Expertly led by **Steven Fraade, Rabbi Alan Lovins, Rabbi Murray Levine** 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 for the services. Everyone is welcome to participate regardless of religious status or background.

Sundays

MAKOM Mishna with Moshe

MAKOM for Jewish Teens is presenting *Mishna with Moshe Meiri* on Sunday mornings from 10:00a to noon in the Posener Chapel Library. For information, contact Dr. Arnold Carmel at a.carmel@jewishnewhaven.org or (203) 387-2424 x316.

Ivrit with Margolit

Adults who wish to learn basic Hebrew meet with Margolit Kern on Sundays from 11:00a to noon. For information, contact Dr. Lauren Kempton at lkempton@beki.org or 389-2108 x13.

Mondays

Rashi Study Group

Each Monday morning from 7:45a to 8:30a adults meet to read Rashi's commentary on the Torah. It is possible to join the study group for a single meeting or to begin at any time. Knowledge of Hebrew is not necessary. Rashi purported to explain the *peshat* of the text, i.e., the meaning in its historical, literary and linguistic context. Visitors and new participants are welcome. The Rashi Study Group meets immediately following the 7:00a *shaharit* morning service. The group is in the book of Numbers.

Wednesdays

Rabbis' Study Group

Wednesdays with Murray is a weekly study group exclusively for rabbis, facilitated by Rabbi Moshe 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. For more information, call Rabbi Moshe Murray Levine at (203) 397-2513.

Thursdays

Sanhedrin Talmud Study Group

The "Sanhedrin Talmud Study Group," hosted by Isaiah Cooper, meets weekly on Thursdays during the lunch hour (12:30p to 1:30p) with Rabbi Tilsen at a downtown New Haven professional office for Talmud study. The Group has met weekly since 1999. For some participants, this is their first direct experience with Talmud text. The Group

focuses on the issues raised in the Talmud, with less attention to the technical aspects of the text. Knowledge of Hebrew or Aramaic is helpful but not required. For location or information, contact Isaiah Cooper at 233-4547 or icooper@cooperlaw.net.

Writing Group

The Writing Group meets each Thursday in the Chapel Library from 2:00p to 4:00p. Interested writers gather to share the short pieces that they have written: memoirs, poetry, children's stories and short stories. The goal of the group is to encourage writing, critique of written pieces, and publishing. Each week the participants bring a piece of their writing. The writer then has a "Read-Aloud" and the group provides feedback. This community aims to generate writing and provide support and feedback for published pieces. For more information please contact Ruth Silver at bergida@yahoo.com or Dr. Lauren Kempton at 389-2108 x13 or lkempton@beki.org

AA Meeting

The *Here We Are* Group of AA meets 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. It is currently engaged in a 12 & 12 Study – Discussion. This is not a specifically Jewish recovery group, although a large proportion of participants are Jewish. For information on the weekly meeting contact Jay at (203) 387-6019 or sokolow@snet.net.

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