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BEKI bulletin

Congregation
Beth El-Keser Israel

May 2009

Iyar-Sivan 5769
Vol. 15 Issue 5

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. 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 cumulation 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

LaG BeOmer Kumsitz

On Monday, May 11, from 6:15 p.m. to 8 p.m., everyone is invited to a LaG BeOmer Kumsitz campfire sing-along. This evening will be hosted by Andy Hirshfield & Monica Starr at 145 Cleveland Road in New Haven (about one mile south of BEKI; see map at www.beki.org/map.html).

Bring instruments and song sheets, and pareve or dairy desserts or beverages to share if you wish, and a blanket or folding chair. Or just come with your voice or roasting arm and share with whom or what is there. In case of rain, the sing-along will take place indoors at the same location (*sans* campfire).

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.



Morris and Sara Oppenheim

This music program is made possible through the support of the [Morris & Sara Oppenheim Endowment for Sacred Music](#) at BEKI. For information on funding synagogue programs, please contact financial officer Donna Levine



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BEKI Bulletin

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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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All of us. One Foundation.

Pesah to Shavuot

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(985-9033), President Jay Sokolow (president@beki.org), Rabbi Tilsen (389-2108 x10 jjtilsen@beki.org) or Jewish Foundation Executive Director Lisa Stanger (387-2424 x382). For more information on the Oppenheim Endowment, see our web page at www.beki.org/endow.html.

Shavuot Two-Day Festival: The Jewish Hajj

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. 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 will feature the men who wrote the Bible.

The event takes place on the first night of Shavuot, Thursday, May 28. Dairy and pareve refreshments will be

served. That means **cheesecake**.

The evening begins with the Mincha afternoon service, from 8 p.m. to 8:15 p.m. in the George G. Posener Daily Chapel. The brief Festival Evening service, from 8:15 to 8:35, will be followed at 8:45 by a presentation by “the men who wrote the Bible.”

Presenting jointly are William Hallo and Baruch Levine.

William Hallo is Professor Emeritus of Assyriology and Babylonian Literature, Yale University, and co-author of *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, one of the most popular synagogue *Humashim* (liturgical Bibles) in the world.



Bill Halo

Bill is a (or *the*) leading authority in his field, an active member of our Congregation (and of nearby Temple Mishkan Israel), and is married to Nanette Stahl, the Judaica Curator at Yale.

Baruch Levine is Professor Emeritus of Hebrew and Judaic Studies, New York University, and author of *The JPS Commentary: Leviticus*, which serves as the basis for the commentary in *Etz Hayim Torah and Commentary*, one of the most popular synagogue *Humashim* in the world and the *Humash* most used at our congregation. Baruch is a (or *the*) leading authority in his field, an active member of our congregation, and is married to artist Corinne Levine. Baruch and Bill will address issues related to the origin and nature of our texts, ideas and practices, and will include an opportunity for questions and discussion. To submit a question in advance, please send it to Jon-Jay



Baruch Levine

at jjtilsen@beki.org or by voicemail at 389-2108 x10.

After another break for refreshments, we will receive Torah directly from Moshe our Teacher. The ever-popular Moshe Meiri will begin a late-night *shiuur* around 10 p.m. and will teach until the cows come in, which according to local farmers should be early this year.



Moshe Meiri

Shavuot Mornings

The Shavuot First Day Festival Shahrarit Morning Service begins at 9:15 on Friday, May 29. The service includes the full recitation of Hallel. Also that morning, we will recognize participants in a Chapel Haven vocational training program who were hosted at BEKI and who worked on several projects on our physical plant, including yard care, landscaping and painting. Carole Bass and Robert Spear worked as liaisons and guides for the institutional and on-the-ground aspects of the relationship.

The Shavuot Second Day Morning service begins at 9:15 on Shabbat, May 30. The Festival service includes a *Shahrarit* morning service, *Hallel* (Psalms of praise), a Torah reading and *Haftara*. Following the *Haftara*, the Yizkor Memorial Service is held (yes, even on Shabbat). 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 Shabbat Festival *Musaf* additional service is recited.

A Message from Principal Ina Silverman

Shalom.

Many of us in the BEKI Religious School are wondering how time flew so quickly that we are looking at graduation already. We'd love to have you join us the morning of May 17 to celebrate BRS students' accomplishments.

This semester, BRS students and families participated in BEKI Purim festivities in unprecedented numbers. Our model seder was a model teaching event. Each class took responsibility for leading a part of the seder in a creative way. Our Israeli teachers led a Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Day) remembrance, and a combined Yom HaZikaron (Memorial Day) and Yom HaAtzmaut (Independence Day) celebration and some students tasted *hummus* for the first time.

BRS students began a new, progressive curriculum program this year emphasizing Shabbat prayers, Torah, holidays, Israel, and various electives. Next year we will institute the second year of the progression so the program builds on itself to produce knowledgeable, confident young Jews with the skills to continue their Jewish education in formal programs like Makom and on their own after graduation.

Before each BRS student minyan, we have a "Learners' Circle." BRS is honored to host Pam Reis to lead a parents' Learning Circle about the Book of Jonah on May 10 after morning minyan. Everyone is welcome. There's more to it than just a big fish!

This is the time of year when BRS begins to accept applications for next fall and answer inquiries about our school. If you know of someone who might be interested in learning about us, please let me know!



Ina Silverman



George G. Posener

BRS wishes to thank Mr. George G. Posener for another generous gift to the school. One of Mr. Posener's philanthropic priorities has long been the education of Jewish children. Among other major contributions, in 1997 he established **The George G. & Leah E. Posener Endowment for the Jewish Education of BEKI Youth** at the Jewish Foundation, which provides continuing support to our educational program. He has funded BRS graduation gifts in past years, and this most recent gift will help the school provide for additional scholarship needs in these difficult times.

Kol tuv,
Ina Silverman

Between Passion and Tradition

Or, What Chocolate had to do with Passover

Mi She-Nikhnas Adar, Marbim be-Simkhah: From the beginning of Adar, Happiness is on the Rise. And so in March, the Kadimaniks got together twice in true party mode! On the first Sunday of the month, we learned how to make our own juggling balls and then practiced the basic techniques of juggling with three balls, just in time to hit the Purim parties with our new skills.

But it was right in the middle of the month – March 15 – that we reached the highlight of the Kadima year, the now traditional, annual **Chocolate Seder**. About 20 Kadimaniks gathered at Congregation Bnai Jacob at a festive Seder table to read through a special Hagada telling our own people's story as well as the history of chocolate.

Consuming four cups of chocolate milk, dipping Karpas (green apple, this time) into chocolate syrup (in place of salt water), making Hillel sandwiches from bitter chocolate (Maror), chocolate fudge (haroset) and chocolate-coated Matza (sorry Hille!), and by noshing and noshing some more, we liberated ourselves from the typical urge for ever more chocolate ☺.

We teamed up for relay games, imitating the 10 plagues, and searched the room for the chocolate coated Afikoman with sunglasses on our noses – in our own way experiencing the "hoshekh" (darkness) that befell the Egyptians. Grand prize for the winning team was a Seder plate molded out of solid dark chocolate.

Amidst the fun and sweetness we also took a moment of silence, when we tasted the Maror – 86 percent cocoa chocolate – learning that even in our day, children our age

Continued on **Page 5**



Between Passion and Tradition

Continued from **Page 4**

are still kidnapped or sold into real slavery in cocoa-producing countries. Some of the chocolate we so much love is made with the slave labor of those children. And yet this sad reality also reminded us of our own good fortune: that we can celebrate the freedom of the Jewish people as we just did during Passover.

Nitzan, for Kadima

P.S. Thinking about joining Kadima? There is still time. Come, for example, to our Lag BaOmer Bonfire on May 11, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. or join us for rock climbing on May 17.

Just write to Kadima advisor Nitzan Stein Kokin at steinkokin@yahoo.com or call her at 752-0361 for more information about our group and our program.

BEKI/BJ Kadima Spring Calendar

New Event Sunday, May 3: Starting 1 p.m., Walk Against Hunger

Let's make a Kadima team at the Walk Against Hunger in New Haven's East Rock neighborhood. Find sponsors and raise money for the hungry in our town. More details with Kadima advisor Nitzan.

Monday, May 11: 6 to 8 p.m., Lag BaOmer Bonfire.

Roast Marshmallows, schmooze and find out more about the Carob eating rebel and mystic Shimon Bar Yochai. Location and more details in Shavuot section on LaG BeOmer.

Sunday afternoon, May 17: Get Ready for Mount Sinai. Follow in Moses' footsteps and try out your rock climbing skills just in time for Shavuot at a local indoor climbing gym. Members only. For membership information contact Kadima advisor Nitzan Stein Kokin directly at steinkokin@yahoo.com or 203-752-0361.

Sunday, June 14: USY/Kadima Final Event – regional event. Details later in the spring or at www.hanefesh.org

BEKI-BJ USY May/June Calendar

8th-12th graders welcomed

Friday, May 8: Pot Luck Shabbat Dinner

We will once again have one of our amazing, eat-good-food dinners. The evening starts at BEKI for Qab-balat Shabbat and Maariv at 6 p.m., then walk over to the Cheskis-Gold's house together for dinner at 7:15. The evening ends at the Cheskis-Gold residence at approximately 11 p.m. This is a potluck dinner, so kids and parents are welcome to do cooking of any sort that will be eaten by the USYers. For kids in grades 8-12. For more information, contact Carmi Cheskis-Gold at ccheskisgold@gmail.com or our advisor NoriAnna Cohen at Norianna.Cohen@quinnipiac.edu.

May 15-17: Shabbaton

Join BEKI-BJ USY and spend the weekend away having lots of fun, learning new things, and meeting new people. Stay tuned for details. Save the date.

June 7: Elections and BBQ

Interested in being on the board next year? Do you have great ideas that you want to share with the chapter? Elections will be held for the 2009-10 chapter board, as well as enjoy a delicious BBQ. Stayed tuned for details.

June 14: Regional Final Event-Six Flags. Details to follow.

For more information or questions please contact Nori-Anna Cohen, Beki-BJ USY Advisor, at norianna.cohen@quinnipiac.edu

Pam Reis to Speak on Jonah

Pam Reis, an independent scholar, will discuss the Book of Jonah in the BEKI office after morning minyan (about 9:40 a.m.) Sunday, May 10. It's not just a fish story! Hosted by BRS Parents' Learning Circle. All welcome.



Pamela Reis



Model Seder



Our annual Model Seder for People with Special Needs was held March 31. Led by Dr. Lauren Kempton; food donated by ACI Catering; guests and transportation coordinated by Jewish Family Service and our BEKI Sisterhood serving the food and hosting. A good time was had by all, with a positive feeling of camaraderie by all attending. May we be privileged to do it again next year.

Our "Book of Life" event will be June 27 as "Sisterhood Shabbat." Details will be in the mail soon. Your support of this Sisterhood project enhances our congregation.

Applications for The Marcel Gutman Youth Scholarship are available and are in the literature rack in the lobby. Teens in grades 8-12 who are going to Israel or engaging in a Jewish Youth Group Program during the coming summer or next academic year are eligible. Parent or guardian must be a Sisterhood member (\$25 a year).

Sisterhood gift shop has many new items for gift giving for weddings, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs and other special occasions. Open Sundays 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. and by appointment. Call Adele, 389-9599 or Mimi, 397-3851 and during office hours see Peggy.

Adele Tyson
Mimi Glenn
Sisterhood Co-Presidents

Torah Fund

Women's League for Conservative Judaism is the largest synagogue-based women's organization in the

world. Through your generosity to the Torah Fund Campaign, we support The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles, Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem and Seminario Rabinico Latinoamericano "Marshall T. Meyer" in Buenos Aires.

Women's League, through Torah Fund, gives every person an opportunity to participate in preserving and perpetuating Conservative Judaism. Even your donations to purchase cards at \$4 each help in this effort.

At this time of year with weddings, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, graduations, anniversaries, etc., sending a Torah Fund card is an easy way to make a donation.

Just call me and your card will be sent promptly: 407-0314. No need to waste time and gas when a phone call will send your greeting on its way. Thanks to all who have purchased cards during the past few months.

Barbara Cushen
Torah Fund Chair

Mazel Tov to

- Sharon Rubin on her birthday from Hyla Greenberg
- Stanley Saxe on his birthday from David Wright
- Michele on her birthday from David Wright

Thank You to

- Bernice Gilman from Hyla Greenberg

Get Well to

- Blanche Sapadin from the BEKI Hesed Committee
- Rita Sachs from the BEKI Hesed Committee

In Memory of

- Carol Chetrick to Joan Chetrick from Anna Goldberg, Bea & Milton Smirnoff
- Robert A. Levine to Bernice & Lester Margolis from the BEKI Hesed Committee
- Irving Smirnoff to Milton & Bea Smirnoff from Mildred Lidsky
- Madelyn Reich to Will Reich from Louis Petrillo
- Abraham & Miriam Goldstein to Hyla Greenberg and Myra Goldfarb from Louis Petrillo
- Carl & Helen Goldfarb to Marc Goldfarb from Louis Petrillo
- Hyman & Martha Goldenberg to Dr. Paul Goldenberg from Louis Petrillo
- Solomon Polikoff & Beatrice Polikoff Kessler to Linda Friedman from Louis Petrillo
- Naomi Zelnick to Linda Friedman from Louis Petrillo
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- Al & Mollie Golden to Jeff Golden & Irma Rosenfield from Louis Petrillo
- Julius & Sylvia Rosenfield to Jeff Golden & Irma Rosenfield from Louis Petrillo
- Sam Rafterwitz to Ruth Rafterwitz & family from Mikki Ratner, Bea & Milton Smirnoff
- Sy Siegel to Mrs. Bernice Siegel & family from Adele Tyson
- His brother to Fenmore Puklin from Claire & Bud Volain

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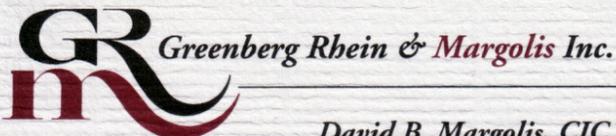


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Shabbatot

Darshan in May

Ben Lebow (bar mitzva) will serve as darshan on Shabbat morning, May 16, parashiyot BeHar-BeHuqotai

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 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 of the services. Everyone is welcome to participate regardless of religious status or background.

Sundays

Talmud for Teens with Moshe Meiri

Serious high school students are invited to delve into the depths of Talmud on Sunday mornings with Moshe Meiri this winter and spring. For more information, contact Moshe at moshe@snet.net.

Mondays

Rashi Study Group

Each Monday morning from 7:45 to 8:30 adults meet in the Library Chapel 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 a.m. *shaharit* service.

Wednesdays

Word for the Day

The Wednesday morning service (shaharit) now includes a 36-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, something not normally possible in English.

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. For more information, call Rabbi Murray Levine at 397-2513.

Mini Maariv Learning Service

The Wednesday evening services during the spring months are supplemented with commentary and teaching relating to the history, themes, choreography and language of the daily evening service. Maariv service is from 5:45 to 6:15 on Wednesdays; on other weekdays, the service ends at 6 p.m.

Thursdays

Mini Morning Learning Service

The Thursday morning services during the spring months are 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 on Fridays; on other weekdays, the service begins at 7 a.m..

Sanhedrin Talmud Study Group

The *Sanhedrin Talmud Study Group* meets weekly on Thursdays during the lunch hour (12:30 to 1:30) at the downtown New Haven professional office of attorney Isaiah Cooper 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.

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.”

Kulanu

Kulanu Discussion Group meets periodically throughout the year from 10:45 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. with Dr. Lauren Kempton. The Kulanu friendship circle is specifically for adults who are participants or graduates of schools such as our neighbor Chapel Haven. For more information, contact Lauren at 389-2108 x33 or lkempton@beki.org.

Barukh Dayan HaEmet

With sorrow we note the passing of

Robert A. Levine,
brother of Bernice (& Lester) Margolis

Joan Katz Spangler

*May the Almighty comfort
those who mourn*

Mazal tov to . . .

Mimi Glenn, Sisterhood Co-President, on being honored for her work by Marrakech, a non-profit agency providing services to children and adults with a wide variety of disabilities.

Susan Voigt, Chairwoman, New Haven Democratic Town Committee, on being honored by Casa Otonal: Strong Women Building Bridges to Home.



Susan Voigt



Ben Lebow

Upcoming Benei Mitzva Celebrations

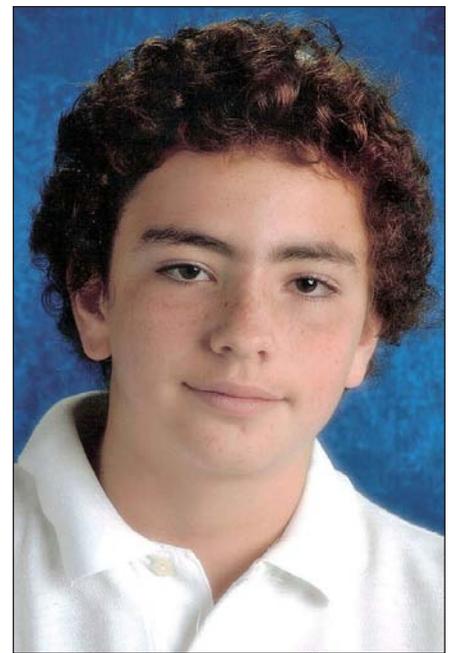
Benjamin Aaron Lebow, son of Bruce & Lauri Lebow, on Shabbat, May 15-16, parashat BeHar BeHuqotai

Evan Buckman, son of Kenneth & Linda Buckman, grandson of Ivan & Rita Sachs, Rosh Hodesh Sunday, May 24.

Eyal Minsky, son of Yair Minsky & Ada Fenick Minsky, Shabbat, June 5-6, parashat Naso

Miriam Gerber and Eva Gerber, daughters of Alan & Rachel Gerber, Shabbat, June 12-13, parashat BeHa'alotekha

Aliyah Oestreicher, daughter of David & Edina Oestreicher, Shabbat, June 19-20, parashat Shelah-lekha



Evan Buckman

Library News

The following books were purchased through generous donations to the Ari Nathan Levine Book Fun, and are housed in the Claire Goodwin Youth Room:

- Sammy Spider's First Day of School*, by Sylvia A. Rouss
- The Princess and the Ziz*, by Jacqueline Jules
- Benjamin and the Silver Goblet*, by Jacqueline Jules
- Sammy Spider's First Shavuot*, by Sylvia Rouss
- Nachshon, Who Was Afraid to Swim: A Passover Story*, by Deborah Bodin Cohen

CD and DVD Lending Library

Have you ever been ill and homebound? Lonely, isn't

it? Wouldn't you have liked something to help you pass the time pleasantly? We have come up with a solution.

We would like to create a CD and DVD lending library for stay-at-homes. If you have CDs or DVDs that you would like to loan or donate to BEKI for such a purpose, please contact us (Muriel Banquer at 787-3743 or Murray Levine at 397-2513). The collection of CDs and DVDs will be stored in the synagogue.

If you are homebound and would enjoy listening to a CD or watching a DVD, please call us now and the discs will be delivered to your home. We look forward to hearing from you. – Muriel Banquer and Murray Levine, for the Hesed Committee

Rabbi's Tzedaka Fund (minimum \$25)

- Morris & Gloria Cohen for Mekhirat Hametz at Pesah
- Deborah Ziskin & William Berson for Maot Hittin to help those in need at Pesah
- Elayne & Morton Dimenstein with prayers for refua shelema for granddaughter Shira
- David Schwartz for Mekhirat Hametz at Pesah
- Elayne & Morton Dimenstein for Mekhirat Hametz at Pesah
- Louis & Lisa Petrillo in memory of dear departed
- Jay & Lynn Brotman for Mekhirat Hametz at Pesah
- Harold & Stephanie Birn for Mekhirat Hametz at Pesah
- Evelyn Benson for Mekhirat Hametz at Pesah
- Cary Caldwell & Karen Kassap for Mekhirat Hametz at Pesah
- Ari Kaufman-Frankel & Family
- Harriet Friedman & Charles Bruce for Mekhirat Hametz at Pesah
- Gladys Lipkin marking the yahrzeit of Philip J. Lipkin
- Anon in honor of Darryl Kuperstock
- Michael Stern & Kathy Rosenbluh
- A. Steven & Deborah Spangler in memory of Joan Katz Spangler
- Trish Loving & Alan Lovins with wishes for refua shelema to Sherrie Rothman
- Trish Loving & Alan Lovins with wishes for refua shelema to Don Hackett
- For Mekhirat Hametz or Maot Hittin at Pesah: Dennis & Barbara Rader, Rabbi Moshe Murray Levine, Tina Rose, Ephrem & Mimi Glenn, Charles & Violet Ludwig, Robert & Susan Spear, David & Rayna Belowsky, Howard Zusman, Robert Silverman, Arthur & Betty Levy, Bryna Pauker, David & Wendy Chorney, Paula Hyman & Stan Rosenbaum, Roger Colten & Sarah Berry, Steven Fraade & Ellen Cohen, Stewart Frankel & Joy Kaufman,

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- To Paul Goodwin in honor of his 90th birthday by Millard Braunstein
- To Bernice & Lester Margolis with sympathy on the passing of Robert A. Levine by Janice & Robert Lettick

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

- To Stanton & Rhea Savell in honor of their 50th anniversary by Marjorie Simson
- To the BEKI community with thanks for the Purim basket by Harriet Meisel
- For the sale of Hametz by Victor & Susan Stein
- To Sherry Rothman with wishes for a speedy recovery by Fran & David Cohen
- To Bernice & Lester Margolis with sympathy on the passing of Robert A. Levine by Paul Goodwin

Youth Commission

- With thanks for the Purim basket by Sascha van Creveld & family

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Baking Matza: It's not Rocket Science

Astronauts on the launching pad sit above a rocket with enough liquid oxygen to blast the ship halfway to the moon, or possibly all the way to the moon and back, in a capsule with hundreds of thousands of highly complex precision parts, all built by the lowest bidder. It is a hazardous endeavor, and many things can go wrong.

In fact, many things always do go wrong in a launch. Parts fail, timing is off, atmospheric and human conditions change unpredictably. NASA has a team of engineers and scientists intently monitoring the launch sequence, making note of each part that fails and each condition that is not optimal, continually

calculating the risk. They have prepared an extensive fault tree analysis that indicates ways to safely overcome mishaps and enables them to quickly recognize when things have gone “too wrong.” If all of the failures and errors do not present too great a risk, the mission continues; but if the risk is too great, the mission is scrubbed and postponed to another day. A similar process accompanies the re-entry sequence, where the stakes are higher, for the re-entry cannot be indefinitely postponed. It is a life and death situation where a miscalculation, malfunction, or uncontrolled condition can cause catastrophic failure.

Many of our pious households treat our preparation for Pesah with the degree of diligence usually reserved for NASA Mission Control. We plan the seder with the dili-

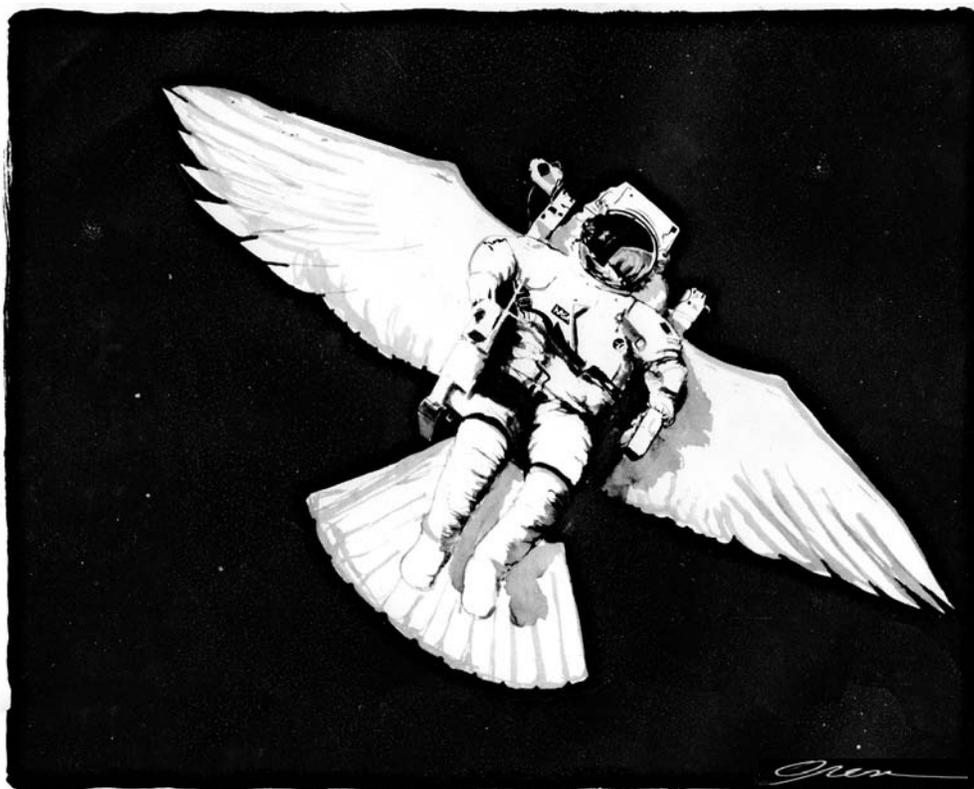
gence due a lunar mission, and treat hamets as if it were radioactive. We scrape, scrub and blowtorch our kitchen. God help any family member who unwittingly drops a crumb of hamets in sight of the *balabusta* erev Pesah. And this is as it should be, more or less, for pious Jews seeking to fully comply with the Biblical (*de-oreita*) prohibition of harbor-

ing hamets during the festival. Failure means *kareit*, a form of Divine punishment, as well as undoubtedly a cemetery full of ancestors who would be appalled at our lassitude.

And so it is not surprising that most of our households react to the suggestion of baking matza at home as if it were suggested that they operate their own nuclear reactor: *Don't*

try this at home – it is much too hazardous. Even more so for baking matza on the afternoon before the seder – the traditional time for baking matza – because if something goes wrong, you end up with hamets right when and where you least want it. It is safer to go to Stop ‘n’ Shop and get a 15-pound box packed last November “fresh” for Pesah.

But baking matza for Pesah is not rocket science. For most of our national history, until the past century, every house or village baked its own matza. Our member Sol Reichentahl, of blessed memory, used to tell us how as a boy in his village in Poland the men would gather on the afternoon before Pesah wearing white robes to bake matza



Continued on **Page 14**

Not Rocket Science

Continued from **Page 13**

for the seder while singing Psalms. Everyone generation has baked its own matza until now. How could they have done it if it was so hazardous?

A matza baker follows a detailed protocol developed by generations of bakers and sages as recorded in the *Shulhan Arukh* and other law books, taking into account both actual conditions and theoretical legal considerations. There are many things that can and do go wrong. The protocol insures that no matter what goes right or wrong there is no hamets. Water is drawn the evening before baking and stored in a cool place; grain is ground the day before to insure it does not remain warm and thereby promote leavening when it is kneaded. The protocol includes inspections, numerous washings and scrapings, controlled oven conditions, mixing and kneading rules, parameters for perforation, and precise timing. Whereas long ago the “18 minute” sudden-death time-frame for baking matza began *after* kneading was completed, we start the clock as soon as the water is added to the flour, when kneading *begins*. At each point in the process, the rules indicate what happens if something was done wrong – either the dough is thrown out, or it is acceptable – the prototype of the fault tree now used by NASA.

Consider this: If a baker *wanted* to encourage flour and water to leaven, how fast could it be done? Even with added sugar, heat and yeast, under ideal conditions, leavening does not occur quickly. If one follows the protocol described in our literature and taught by traditional bakers, with its built-in margins for error, the system is almost fool-proof. Baking matza isn't rocket science.

And so it is with much of lives as Jews. The fear of making a mistake, the dread of error, can be paralyzing, to our great detriment. We are afraid our end will be like the two sons of Aaron the High Priest who were incinerated after committing an unspecified ritual error in the desert, or Uzza who was struck down when he tried to steady the toppling ark in the days of King David.

Whether it is lighting Shabbat candles, baking a halla, leading public worship or setting up a sukka, it can be done by typical Jews at home. What can go wrong, and what is so terrible if an error is made?

I like to think of BEKI as a “learning synagogue” in the

way that the local hospital (formerly known as Grace Hospital and formerly known as Grace-New Haven Hospital) is considered a “teaching hospital.” There you find leading experts in medical diagnosis and care, as well as beginners. Inevitably, mistakes are made, even by the experts, and surely by students. Some mistakes are fatal. But this is the price we must pay in order to have trained nurses, doctors and other medical professionals. You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs. And it turns out that learning environments in some respects foster better care, even with the presence of trainees and their beginners' errors.

Here at BEKI, we enjoy a congregation that includes experts and professionals in many areas of Jewish life – liturgical music, rabbinic literature, Judaic studies, kosher cuisine, Judaic art, and more – who both “perform” and teach, along with students with varying backgrounds, aptitude and motivation. One segment of a service might be lead by an ordained cantor or rabbi or a student of a leading cantor, and the next by an “on-deck” student two weeks short of her bat mitzva observance (but of course old enough to lead the service). Windows



created by a world-renowned artist are installed in the lobby, while “stained glass” windows drawn on transparent film by elementary-age children are displayed nearby. A devar Torah is presented by a principle author of a popular *humash* or by another leading Judaica scholar one week, while the next by a List College student. While this means that not every service is “performed” perfectly, and not every presentation is well executed, the total product is quality and continuing learning. As long as we strive for excellence, tolerate error and respect those who are trying to learn, we can fulfill the highest ideals of self-reliance of our ancestors who baked their own matza before Pesah and soar to the highest spiritual heights.

PS: This year I helped BEKI member Bill Shragis bake matza the afternoon before Pesah in his kitchen. Bill is an experienced home halla baker and I was able to review the laws of baking matza and help insure compliance with all of the rules, and be part of the two-personal team that makes the job practical. It was easy enough that after watching Bill do it five times I was able to do it myself – and they say student brain surgeons at Yale operate after watching just once. The fresh matza at the seders was out of this world (okay, it tasted like moon dust), and next year it will be even better.

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