

A New Haven Tradition since 1892



BEKI

Congregation
Beth El-Keser Israel

bulletin

November 2008

Heshvan-Kislev 5769

Vol. 14 Issue 10

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Bagels & Ballots

A POST-ELECTION BRUNCH TALK

Obamanomics? The McCain/Palin Doctrine? For a deeper understanding of the presidential campaign and what it means for our future, join us on Sunday, Nov. 9, for a post-election brunch and discussion with BEKI's very own pundits, Alan Gerber and Don Green.

Alan and Don, professors in the Yale political science department, are experts on political campaigns and voter behavior. Co-authors of *Get Out the Vote! How To Increase Voter Turnout*, they have studied public opinion and how advertising, news coverage, and social pressure influence turnout.

Join us for Sunday minyan at 9 a.m. and brunch immediately afterward (about 9:45). No reservations are required; a \$5 donation is suggested to cover food costs.





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BEKI Bulletin

The newsletter is published monthly by Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel for the benefit of its members. Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel is affiliated with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

To contribute articles or for inquiries regarding membership:

- Call the Synagogue office: (203) 389-2108
- Write: 85 Harrison Street, New Haven, CT 06515-1724
- Email: jttilsen@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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Editor	<i>Rabbi Jon-Jay Tilsen</i>
Associate Editor	<i>Donna Levine</i>
Associate Editor	<i>Donna Kemper</i>
Associate Editor	<i>Herbert Winer</i>
Circulation Manager	<i>Saul Bell</i>
Photographer	<i>Charles Ludwig</i>

Shabbat Sukkot Dinner

Friday, Oct. 17, at 6:45 (following evening service)

In the Sukka (indoors in case of rain or snow)

Advance reservations and payment

Adults \$18, Children \$15, Families \$55

389-2108 x14 office@beki.org Volunteers welcome

Benefit Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel

Ask us about
establishing a fund, trust or annuity
to ensure BEKI's future.

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

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Chairman,
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Director
203 387-2424 x382
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Jewish Foundation of Greater New Haven



All of us. One Foundation.

The King Is Dead – Long Live the Queen

Many thanks to Yedidya Ben-Avie for coordinating the Torah Readings for the Book of Deuteronomy, which we completed on Simhat Torah in October.

Paula Hyman is coordinating the Torah readings for the Book of Genesis. If you would like to read from the Book of Genesis (Oct. 25 to Jan. 10), contact Paula Hyman paula.hyman@yale.edu 432-0834. Beginners are welcome; the minimum length of the readings is three verses. If you wish to read after that date, please contact Jon-Jay Tilsen at jjtilsen@beki.org.

Cemetery News

The cost of gravesites at both BEKI cemeteries, Farwell Street in West Haven and Warner Street in Hamden, will increase as of Jan. 1. New prices will be \$1000 for BEKI members and \$1,500 for non-members. If you are considering buying plots, do it now to avoid the price increase. Contact David Sagerman, Cemetery Committee Chairperson, at 248-0048 or cemetery@beki.org for information or to arrange a site visit.

Ark Dedication

Sunday, Nov. 2 at 9:30 a.m., join the BEKI Sisterhood, Religious School and congregation in dedicating the new aron qodesh (ark) in the beit midrash, which was commissioned by the Sisterhood for the congregation.

Is it Kiddush Yet?

Advanced orders are now being taken for Is it Kiddush Yet?, a collection of over 180 recipes from the BEKI Kiddush Committee. Each book will cost \$18. Anticipated publication date is Nov. 3. Look for order forms in

the mid-month mailing, in the office, on the BEKI website at www.beki.org/forms.html, in the literature rack or by email from Darryl (kuperst@aol.com).

They're Back!

USY Pumpkin and Apple Pies for Thanksgiving

Pareve, frozen ready-to-bake fresh pies are made by our USYers as an active part of their Social Action/Tikkun Olam programming. Buy a pie (or more) and donate a pie (or more) through BEKI/BJ USY to the Connecticut Food Bank ... top off your holiday and someone else's, and support our local youth. All profits go to the USY Social Action/Tikkun Olam fund. Pies produced under the strict supervision of KINAHARA Kosher (www.kinahara.org). Order deadline is Oct. 29. Order forms are in the mail and will be available at www.beki.org/forms.html. Questions? Contact Darryl Kuperstock 387-0304 kuperst@aol.com.

Kisei Ram veNisa

We have an immediate need for ten high chairs, new or used in good condition for use in the upstairs and downstairs social halls. Please deliver your new or used high chair donation during office hours.

Token of Generosity

Your donations to the pushkes (charity boxes) in the Beit Midrash (Daily Chapel – Library) support the Louis Friedman Scholarship Fund (metal box) and the Rabbi Andrew Klein Scholarship Fund (as marked on the receptacles). A third pushke (new) accepts transit tokens and other tokens and foreign coins and currency (as well as US cash and checks), and supports the Rabbi's Tzedaka Fund (as

marked).

Operation Isaiah

Re-usable bags are available in the lobby through Thanksgiving to enable and encourage members and guests to bring non-perishable food packages to help provide for neighbors in need. The bags are re-usable in an effort to integrate conservation into our ongoing Tiquun Olam efforts.

Directories

The BEKI Membership Photo Directory is available from the BEKI office. Information included in the directories is for private use only and is not to be used for any commercial purposes. For more information, contact Marsha Beller (mbellereco@aol.com) or the BEKI office.

Go Figure

During the month of Tishrei, there were seven major and six minor festival days, plus four Shabbatot, for a total of sixteen holidays in that thirty-day month. In Heshvan, there is one minor festival day (Rosh Hodesh) and four Shabbatot, for a total of five holidays.

Liturgical Notes: From now until Pesah, we include the line "mashiv ha-ruah..." "You cause the wind to blow..." in each recitation of the amida.

Beginning Sunday, Nov. 2, our public daily worship at 5:45 p.m. will include only the Maariv evening service; Minha should be recited in the afternoon.

Vote Early and Often

Tuesday, Nov. 4, is election day. Please exercise your democratic right through this democratic rite to shore up the republic.

Barukh Dayan HaEmet

With sorrow we note the passing of

Goldie Sotsky,

mother of Raina Sotsky (& Morris Bell)

Patricia Levy Zusman,

wife of Howard Zusman

Rabbi Moshe Cotel,

son-in-law of Barzillai Cheskis, brother-in-law of Rena Cheskis-Gold (& Martin Gold)

May the Almighty comfort those who mourn

Welcome New Members and Their Families

- Robert & Susan Spear
- Harriet Friedman & Charles Bruce and Sophia, Aaron and Benjamin
- Eva & H. Benjamin Geertz and Henrietta
- Richard & Marcie Sugarmann

Mazal tov to

- Paulette Lehrer & Sam Bobrow on their *nisuin*, Jewish marriage under a huppa
- Howard I. Gralla on winning the 2008 Connecticut Book Award for Design, for the work *Drawn to Enchant* (Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University), which he designed
- Alan Gerber on being named the Charles C. & Dorathea S. Dilley Professor of Political Science at Yale University, an endowed professorship
- Stephanie & Daniel Jacoby and Benjamin on the birth of their son and brother David Morris Jacoby during Sukkot
- Nadav & Rita Sela on the birth of their grandson Baby Boy Sela, born to Alisha & Rabbi Ahud Sela, in California
- Menachem Elimelech on receiving the 2008 Lawrence K. Cecil Award for outstanding contribution to the fields of chemical and environmental engineering from the American Institute of Chemical Engineers
- Sarah Beller and Scott Rechler on their engagement; and to Sarah's mother, Marsha Beller



Baby Boy Sela



David Morris Jacoby

Torah Fund

Torah Fund is a grassroots campaign that raises close to \$3 million each year to support the students and programs of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles and the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem. It is through synagogues such as BEKI that this dedicated support continues and ensures the future of Conservative Judaism.

Consider becoming a Benefactor at \$180 or a Guardian at \$300 and receive the 5769 pin in recognition of your generous support.

(See the October BEKI Bulletin about the 2008-09 theme.)

All donations to Torah Fund are appreciated, so purchase cards, \$4 each for all occasions and save gas & time. Call me at 407-0314 and your card will go out promptly.

Barbara Cushen
Torah Fund Chair

Sisterhood News

Our gift shop is now stocked with many new items for gift giving and Chanukah. Visit on Sunday mornings and Wednesdays at 5:30 p.m. and by appointment.

Applications for the Marcel Gutman scholarship are now being accepted. Students can apply to go to Jewish-oriented venues. They are available on the BEKI web site or in the lobby.

BEKI Sisterhood will be one of the sponsors of an Inter-faith service for the Thanksgiving Holiday on Sunday, Nov. 23 at St. Aeden's Church (in the gym) on Fountain Street.

Please mark your calendars and bring your family and friends.

Our annual BEKI Sisterhood-Religious School Chanukah party will be on Sunday, Dec. 21.

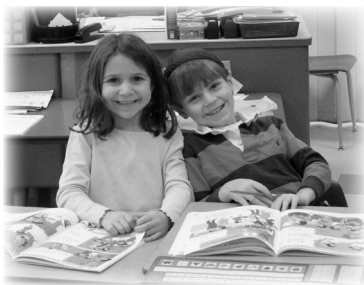
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Shabbatot

Darshanim in November

On Nov. 8, a special guest will serve as darshan.

On Nov. 24, a special guest will serve as darshan.

Shabbat Shalom Learners' Minyan

The "Shabbat Shalom Learners' Minyan," which meets every other Saturday at 10:45 a.m. in BEKI's Library Chapel, 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, Isaiah Cooper, Nadav Sela** and others, the Shabbat Shalom Learners' Minyan is a nurturing exploration of practice and theory presented in a participatory, non-threatening and multi-generational setting. Many members who take advantage of this unique offering feel a deeper sense of awe born of increased understanding and appreciation for the services. Everyone is welcome to participate regardless of religious status or background.

Kulanu Discussion Group

Adults who take part in the Kulanu Friendship Circle and the Saul's Circle outreach programs are invited to participate in a Shabbat morning discussion group which meets on selected Shabbat mornings from 10:45 to 11:45 with Dr. Lauren Kempton. For information, contact Lauren at 389-2108 x33 or lkempton@beki.org

Shabbat Minha Study Break

Each Shabbat following the Minha afternoon service during the autumn and winter, there will be a 30-minute study of Maimonides' *Mishne To-*

rah: Laws of Kings and Their Wars, before the Maariv evening service and havdala. All are welcome.

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 autumn and winter. In this semester, the class is exploring chapter two of *Masekhet Ketubot*, "Halsha She-Nitarmela." Students are expected to have studied some Mishna and be familiar with the Hebrew alphabet. An acquaintance with Rashi's commentaries is helpful. Texts are vocalized for easy reading and are accompanied by an English commentary and translation. The classes meet Sunday from 10 to noon. Instructor's permission required; students wishing to enroll should speak with Moshe and should register with the office (office@beki.org). The class is open only to students in grades 8-12. This class is taught in an academic Jewish Studies style. Disciplined attendance is expected. Registration and materials fee is \$100 for the semester. Moshe may be reached 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, now in the opening chapters of Deuteronomy. 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

Rabbis' Study Group

Wednesdays with Murray is a weekly study group exclusively for rabbis and clergy, facilitated by Rabbi



Murray Levine

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.

Thursdays

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.

The Sanhedrin Study Group is reading chapter eight of Sanhedrin, "The Rebellious and Obnoxious Boy." It is a perfect time for new participants to join.

SAME SEX MARRIAGE IN HALAKHA

The question of the legitimacy of same-sex marriage in Jewish law is not affected by the recent Connecticut court ruling establishing the constitutional right of same-sex couples to the status and label of “married,” nor was it affected by the legislature’s creation of a “civil union” relationship. Nor, for that matter, was it affected by the papers endorsed by the Conservative Movement’s Committee on Jewish Law and Standards.

The legal question of same-sex marriage under Jewish law is really quite simple (as distinct from the social question, which a different issue altogether). As a legal institution, *nisuin* (marriage) is essentially a contract between a single man and a single woman, eligible to be married to each other, that stipulates that the couple is bound by the (legal) conventions of Jewish marriage, and further stipulates any particular conditions of this marriage that the parties wish to include. This contract can be written as a single document (usually called a *ketuba*, Hebrew for “written contract”) or in multiple documents, such as pre-nuptial agreements. While there are “standard form” contracts available at any Judaica shop, a couple can use any wording or language that accomplishes the essentials of the law. Like most contracts, the *ketuba* does not spell out every point of the agreement; rather, it refers to an existing set of conventions.

It was long ago established that a marriage contract can be effected by either a monetary transaction, a written document, or a conjugal relationship, and that ideally all three are implemented. Indeed, if a couple marries without a *ketuba* (written document), there is a continuing obligation to sign a *ketuba* as long as the couple stays married. This is considered above all a legal protection for the parties involved, and particularly that of the woman. In the same way, *le-havdil*, it would in most circumstances be unwise to rent an apartment without a written rental agreement.

There is nothing in law that would prevent two men, or two women – even siblings – from undertaking a contract in Jewish law that provides the parties with essentially the same set of obligations and rights, and refers to the same set of conventions, as would obtain in *nisuin*. These include rights of inheritance, medical decision-making, and shared property. Indeed, people have undertaken such contracts all along. There is nothing new here.

There are a few conventions of *nisuin* that could not, under law, apply “as is” to a same-sex couple (or to any other couple not eligible for *nisuin*). One is the process of dissolution (*gittin* or divorce), for the simple reason that



this process is asymmetrical under current Jewish law. That is, men and women are not treated equally under our law. Under this new contract, an equitable process would need to be stipulated, or possibly just left to the courts to decide.

A second convention that could not be adopted directly is conjugal rights, which would not be enforceable in any form in our courts. But these and other minor issues are nothing that a good contract lawyer could not resolve.

Such relationships could hardly be more legally complicated than polygamous marriages, concubinage, levirate marriages, or slave-marriages that were provided for in Jewish law, or the vastly complex legalities of major corporate mergers.

The Connecticut high court, along with some other state courts, have found that same-sex couples have “always” had the right to the state institution of marriage; they just didn’t realize it until now. Similarly, in Jewish law, no court decision is needed; contract law has always permitted a great variety of relationships.

A set of government benefits, tax consequences and social benefits are at stake in defining marriage or civil union under state and federal law. But in Jewish society, little of that comes into play. Most centrally, there is no legal disability to children of parents who are not married (although there is a disability in some circumstances to the progeny of an adulterous relationship). In our congregation, a “household” membership unit may include adults under one roof regardless of their relationship – married, partners, parental, civilly united. The key is that they are, functionally, a “household.” While male-female couples who are married under Jewish law are honored for that status, there are few legal consequences or benefits to their union under Jewish law, other than prohibiting them from sexual or romantic contact with others.

There is no particular legal reason not to celebrate the formalization of a relationship, just as people celebrate graduating from college, winning a major prize or promotion, signing that big contract, getting engaged or celebrating a marriage. “Celebration” can include reference to symbolic Jewish words and items, such as the blessing over wine or a *huppa* (canopy) (the latter of which was used in our recent dedication of the ark commissioned by the Sisterhood). Being freed from the legal conventions of “traditional” Jewish marriage, which has some serious problems (such as the inequality in divorce proceedings and obligations), same-sex couples have the opportunity to create new and improved conventions, which may someday be demanded by non-same-sex couples.