



# Selections from *BEKI Bulletin: The Newsletter of Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel*

## November 1999 - Kislev 5760

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### Pirqei Avot Study & Havdala Begin

Join us every Shabbat afternoon following Minha afternoon service during fall and winter for a twenty-minute Pirqei Avot Study session. Study and discuss this early collection of wise sayings of our sages, also known as "Mishna Avot" or as "Avot." "Pirque" means chapters or quotations; "avot" means "of the ancestors." Avot was edited in the second century of the Common Era by Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi and contains material from that period as well as from several centuries earlier. As Hillel says, "Do not say, 'When I have leisure, I will study,' for you may never have leisure" (Avot, 2:5). That's the same Hillel who says, "If not now, when?" (Avot, 1:14).

## New Adult Study Group

Adults interested in making a commitment to group and individual study to lead to a “*siyyum*” or “adult bar- or bat-mitzva” observance are invited to meet with Rabbi Tilsen on Sunday 21 November from 5:45p to 7:00p.

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## Shabbat Hanuka Dinner

Save the date: Friday 10 December 1999 Service 6:00p Dinner 7:00p by RSVP. Reservation forms will be mailed on 12 November, or call the office at 389-2108 x14.

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## A Message from Rabbi Tilsen

### *Doing it the Hard Way*

The keys on a typewriter or keyboard are not in alphabetical order, which is the first surprise for the beginning typist. American keyboards use the "qwerty" standard, named for the order of the first five letter-keys. Were the keyboard designed with the beginner in mind, the keys would have been placed in alphabetical order; as it is, the untrained typist is reduced to the painfully slow “hunt and peck” method of typing.

What is the logic of the qwerty layout? If you guessed that it is the most efficient layout for the typist — to minimize the finger travel and maximize potential typing speed — you'd be exactly wrong. The qwerty keyboard was designed to slow down the typist so that the keys on the old manual typewriter would not stick together. The layout was designed to accommodate a shortcoming of the mechanical device. Today, many professional typists use the “Dvorak” keyboard, which enables typing at speeds much faster than the qwerty board. The qwerty layout is still taught and used as the standard due to the overwhelming power of convention. However “irrational” the convention, changing it would be more trouble than it is worth. I learned to touch-type the old fashioned way and there is no way I'm going to relearn “Dvorak” as a second language. Voice-activated “typewriters” and scanners soon will replace most typing anyway.

Recently a ship to Mars crashed before landing. (Fifty years ago this would have been a science fiction story; today it is page 12 news.) It turns out that the flight trajectory was miscalculated because someone confused an English system measurement (miles and feet) with a metric unit (kilometers and meters). Oops. The ship cost \$125 million, which comes out to about 50 cents per American, so I figure my family lost \$2.50 right there. Virtually the entire world, except the United States, uses the metric system of weights and measures. Tens of millions of dollars are spent every year just doing the translations.

And the three failed (from their point of view) terrorist bus bombers who blew themselves up accidentally in two locations a few weeks ago in Israel were “victims” of convention. Their bombs, which were made in the Palestinian West Bank, were set to go off at 6:00a. The bombers, however, were in Israel proper, which, unlike the Palestinian West Bank, had already reverted from “Daylight Savings Time” to “Standard Time.” This change is made early in Israel, out of sync with most of Europe and America, so that the Festival Evening Services could begin (nominally) one hour earlier. The terrorists forgot to take the difference into account, so the bombs detonated exactly one hour earlier than they expected. Remember to turn your clocks back!

In the realm of secular ritual, we observe that the formal table is set with the fork on the left. That works well for the left-handed minority. It also works well for the British, who (properly) hold their knife in the right hand and fork in the left whilst cutting meat. Right-thinking (or at least right-handed) Americans, however, begin their meal by reaching across and moving their fork to the right side where they can use it, overcoming the minor inconvenience of a now meaningless ritual.

Our religious life and synagogue organization and administration are filled with rituals and methods designed or evolved long ago. Sometimes there are good reasons to resist new conventions or emerging non-conventional methods, but at other times such resistance is not in our best interest. I assert this as a person wholly committed to living according to, and promoting, the letter and spirit of halakha (Jewish law), in the most obsessive and compulsive manner practical for the Westernized mind.

“Conventions” that have been eliminated, in keeping with the process of development in halakha, include the exclusion of women from synagogue ritual (see my articles "Will the Real Judaism Please Stand Up?" and "Women and Tefillin" available at [www.beki.org/tilsen.html](http://www.beki.org/tilsen.html) or from the BEKI office), and multiple recitation of qaddish at the end of services (see "Dear Rabbi" in this issue reprinted from the October 1994 Bulletin).

Other practices that should be reexamined — and *are* being reexamined in some places — include flat-rate synagogue dues; synagogue dues themselves; selling “tickets” to High Holy Days services; five-and-a-half-hour-long services on Rosh HaShana morning; the bar- and bat-mitzva observance as a very major rite-of-passage; tzedaka (charity) directed to the Government of Israel through Israel Bonds or the United Jewish Communities; and \$8,000+ per student per year Jewish Day School tuition. If I'm not strung up or driven out of town for merely suggesting these practices deserve reexamination in an open manner, I would like to offer comments, in the future, that might serve to open discussion on these practices and others. Before I begin, does anyone wish to add to the list or say something about these before I do?

Reader response is welcomed; please address letters to “Letters, BEKI Bulletin, 85 Harrison Street, New Haven CT 06515,” or email to [letters@beki.org](mailto:letters@beki.org).

## **Dear Rabbi: Answers, Advice and Helpful Household Hints**

Dear Rabbi:

Why can't we chew gum and eat candy during services? Does the Torah forbid that, too?

Signed, Bazooka Yosi.

Dear Bazooka Yosi,

I hate to be the one to burst your bubble, but the Torah does forbid you from chewing gum and eating during services. As the Good Book says, "My mouth shall be filled with praises of the Lord." Now, if your mouth is stuffed with gum, candy, or other illicit substances, it could not possibly be completely filled with praises of the Lord. Therefore we are forbidden to chew gum or eat during prayer.

You might point out that during certain parts of the service, such as during the Haftara and, yes, the Rabbi's sermon, your mouth, from the halakhic point of view, is in idle, that is, it is not uttering praises. And you might assume that during that time you ought to be able to chew your gum and eat your candy. To that I can only say, you're right. God presumably — and Jewish law — would not object if you chew gum during the Rabbi's sermon. But I can tell you that if you blow bubbles during the Rabbi's sermon, the Rabbi might blow bubbles during your Haftara.

A candidate for President would not chew gum during a televised debate. An attorney would not suck candy while arguing a case before the Supreme Court. A singer would not lick a lollipop during an opera. And so a Jew does not chew, suck or lick while praising or petitioning God.

So be patient, wait for the Qiddush after services, leave your gum at home, and wag your jaw in Praise of the Lord.

*The following letter is adapted from the October 1994 BEKI **Bulletin***

Dear Rabbi,

Why do some shuls say Mourner's Qaddish so many times at the end of some services?

Signed, Late for Work

Dear Late,

Why? Because it's a tradition.

Originally only one qaddish was said, and only one person, usually a mourner, said it. There are some communities that still do it that way.

But if there were more than one mourner present, the other mourners were deprived of the honor. Qaddishes were then added so that more of the mourners would have the opportunity to say a qaddish. We can say qaddish any time there is a minyan and we recite a Psalm or other passage from the Torah or Rabbinic literature. So they simply added a Psalm and followed it by qaddish. There were now several times in a service when qaddish was said, so that several mourners would have a turn. There are some communities that still do it that way, too.

But this procedure often created a dilemma: If the number of qaddishes was limited, there might still be some who did not get to say one; if there was no limit to the number of qaddishes added, the service became burdensomely long. So after careful scrutiny the rabbis allowed all mourners to say qaddish simultaneously.

This rabbinic solution was adopted only after careful consideration, and after it was

determined that mourner's qaddish is not one of the types of public prayers that can be said by only one person at a time, such as is the case with the reader's recitation of the Amida, the Torah Blessings, or even other qaddishes.

We can see now how the practice of saying mourner's qaddish two or more times in a row evolved. First only one person said only one qaddish, then one person at a time said one of a succession of qaddishes separated by a Psalm, then everyone said several qaddishes together.

There is no logical reason to say more than one qaddish in a congregation where all mourners recite it together. The practice of saying multiple qaddishes is a remnant of an intermediate stage in the development of the liturgy.

If you say, 'the more qaddishes the better,' then why stop at three? Why not say ten or a hundred? And if you had to say qaddish after every Psalm, we'd say qaddish dozens of times each service. But if the intent is to have qaddish so that all who need to may say it, then it is enough to say it once early in the service in case someone leaves early, and once late in the service in case someone comes late. For the last six years at BEKI, we have practiced the earlier custom of saying only one qaddish, one of the radical reforms introduced by Rabbi Tilsen.

This, then, is a classic case of a practice persisting even when the original reason for the custom no longer exists. The custom endures by the force of tradition. So when Dear Rabbi answers your question by saying, "Because it is a tradition," you know that this is exactly the case.

## Darshanim & Benei Mitzva in November

**Dana Etra** and **J. Etra** will be called to the Torah and lead services as benot mitzva on Friday night 5 November the 6:00p service, and on Shabbat morning 6 November at the 9:15a service. Dana and J. are the daughters of **Barry Etra & Janice Wolf**.

**Adam Berlin** will be called to the Torah and lead services as a bar mitzva on Friday night 19 November 1999 at the 8:00p service, and on Shabbat morning 20 November at the 9:15a service. Adam is the son of **Mark & Cynthia Berlin**.



**Eric Beller** (pictured at left) will serve as the darshan (Torah commentator) on Shabbat morning 27 November during the 9:15a Shacharit morning services.

## High Holy Days Sermons

Selections from Rabbi Tilsen's High Holy Day's Divrei Torah (sermons) can be found at BEKI's website at [www.beki.org/tilsen.html](http://www.beki.org/tilsen.html). To request a printed copy, please call Mary Ellen at 389-2108 x14.

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## Book Discussion Group

If you would like to be notified by e-mail about the plans and schedule of the BEKI book discussion group that starts this Fall, please send an e-mail message to [Marc.Schwartz@healthcalls.com](mailto:Marc.Schwartz@healthcalls.com). The group will be meeting in BEKI's Rosenkrantz Family Library on the third Thursday of each month from 7:30p to 9:00p in the evening once a month under the auspices of the Education Committee and the Library Committee. The first meeting was held 21 October. Books that illuminate some aspect of the Jewish experience and lend themselves to interesting discussion will be selected.

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## Food Drive

Our Congregation has agreed to collect non-perishable foods (cans, boxes) for the Jewish Family Service Food Closet for the month of November. Please bring your food donations to the BEKI coatroom.

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## Singers' Group

The BEKI Singers' Group will resume its activities this Fall. The Group's purpose is to provide a meeting place for members of the Congregation to expand their enjoyment of the pleasures of liturgical singing at BEKI through the learning of new melodies, harmonies and songs for the services and through group support to sing at services with increased spiritual enthusiasm and involvement. The group also sings non-liturgical songs and rounds at its bi-weekly meetings, which are held on Shabbat mornings alternating with the Learners' Minyan. All are invited to participate. No special knowledge of music or quality of voice is required. Meetings begin after the Rabbi's announcement after the Torah reading. If you would like to be placed on the Singers' Group e-mail list to be reminded of the meetings and notified of the group's plans and progress, please e-mail [Marc.Schwartz@healthcalls.com](mailto:Marc.Schwartz@healthcalls.com) or call (387-1665).

*Marc Schwartz, MD*

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## LifeCycle

## BEKI Welcomes New Members & Their Families

- Syma Solovitch & Bruce Haynes
- Helene Sapadin & Molly
- Don & Maggie Barkin & Eve
- Jim Berger & Jennifer Klein
- Roger A. & Susan Stone Levine & Andrew
- Ira & Elizabeth Chernes & Zachary & Max
- Bruce Altman & Darcy McGraw & Anna
- Yaron & Mindy Baitch
- Steven Schwartzberg & Diane Bell & Galen & Thalia
- Robert & Lynn Kravitz & Michael, Elyse & Maddie
- Howard & Patricia Zusman

## *HaMaqom Yinahem*

With sorrow we note the passing of

- Alexander Rosenbluh, father of BEKI member Kathy Rosenbluh
- George Feen, husband of Rose Feen
- Moya Dumigan, father of George & Diane Dumigan
- Sol Rosenberg, father of BEKI member Helen Rosenberg

May the Almighty comfort all who mourn

## **BEKI Families In Israel**

Two BEKI families and one college student are in Israel this year. Here are their addresses.

- Michael Stern & Kathy Rosenbluh family, [Michael.Stern@Yale.edu](mailto:Michael.Stern@Yale.edu), c/o Dr. Avner Yayon, Dept. Molecular Cell Biology, Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovot 76100, Israel.
- Ina Silverman & Jay Sokolow family, 1 Klein Street, Apt. 13, Jerusalem Israel, [ina@aya.yale.edu](mailto:ina@aya.yale.edu).
- Dina Kuperstock, [dina326@aol.com](mailto:dina326@aol.com)

## **Kashrut Korner**

The Dannon Company has informed us that some of their yogurt products will no longer be

certified kosher by OU. These products will have “kosher gelatin” added to them and will be supervised by Rabbi David I. Sheinkopf (Orthodox). Kosher consumers who eat kosher gelatin may rely on the “K” marking on Dannon products, but these products may not be served at BEKI. The BEKI kitchen does not allow the use of gelatins in dairy products. Other Dannon products will remain OU certified. Look for the markings on each individual container.

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## **Introduction to the Friday Night Service with Kevin Mack**

On Tuesday, 16 November from 7p to 8p, participants in both [Kulanu](#) and Saul's Circle, and any interested congregants, are invited to an overview of the music for Shabbat evening service. Led by composer and keyboard artist Kevin Mack, this workshop will teach some of the major songs and prayers so popular at the late evening service.

This tuneful evening will prepare us for attending the late Friday night service on 19 November. The congregation is invited to attend to welcome members of our adult groups.

For information, call Anne Johnston at 389-2108, ext. 33.

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## **First Family Film Night**

Saturday 13 November at 7p begins BEKI's winter film series. Bring the kids, bring a friend, bring a date. Join us to watch clean, fun Jewish films. Some form of appropriate junk food will be available for purchase. The evening is sponsored by BEKI's Special Services programs.

For information or to volunteer to set up or clean up, call Anne Johnston, 389-2108 x33.

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## **Sunday Brunch**

A Sunday morning brunch is planned for Sunday 21 November at 9:30a. Mark your calendar.

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## KISS “Snow Day” Program to meet

BEKI's unique “Kids In Shul when they close the School” program, also known as the “Snow Day” program, will meet on Monday 1 November from noon to 5:00p and on Thursday 11 November from 8:00a to 3:00p in the Claire Goodwin Children's Room. The KISS program offers a fun-filled Judaic program for elementary-school aged children on a day when Ezra Academy and public schools are closed for conferences and holidays when parents may have to work. Space is limited. Call Anne Johnston at 389-2108 x33 or email her at [ajohnsto@connix.com](mailto:ajohnsto@connix.com) to reserve your space. Download a [registration form](#) in Acrobat (pdf) format or ask Anne to fax or mail you one.

While you're at it, your advance payment reserves a space for the first day the schools are closed for unscheduled “Snow Days.” Other scheduled days include Friday 24 December 1999 8:00a to 2:30p (No School) (note early closing); Monday 17 January 2000 8:00a to 3:00p (MLK Day); Friday 10 March 2000 8:00a to 2:30p (Ezra In-Service Day) (note early closing); Tuesday 28 March 2000 12:00 to 5:00p (Ezra Conferences); Monday 3 April 2000 12:00 to 5:00p (Ezra Conferences); Wednesday 14 June 2000 12:00 to 5:00p (Ezra Early Dismissal); Thursday 15 June 2000 8:00a to 3:00p (Ezra Summer Vacation); Friday 16 June 2000 8:00a to 3:00p (Ezra Summer Vacation). Some dates are subject to minimum enrollment.

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## Thanksgiving Office Closure

BEKI offices will be closed on Thursday 25 November and Friday 26 November for the Thanksgiving holiday.

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## National “Have a Minyan at Home” Day

Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel will join with other shuls in observing “National Have a Minyan at Home” day on Thursday evening 25 November. In marking this occasion no afternoon-evening service will be held at the shul so that participants may have services in their own homes. For this purpose plenty of kippot are available in your suit pockets or auto glove compartments where you have been stuffing them. Years ago, when this program was initiated, skeptics predicted it would be a real turkey, but despite their predictions the program has proved successful, for which we offer thanksgiving. As we read in Scripture, “Hodu la-shem ki tov.”

Weekday morning services on Thursday 25 November are on the Federal Holiday schedule, from 9:00a to 9:45a. For other service times at BEKI, consult our [schedule.html](#); for service

times at other Conservative-Masorti congregations in our area, see the [USCJ minyan schedule](#).

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