



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

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A Message from Rabbi Tilsen

Smile, You're on Candid Camera or Big Brother is Watching You

The hidden camera installed by the father records the home day care worker sodomizing a 2-year-old ward.

A high school security camera records a student clutching her stomach and entering the women's washroom, where she delivers and discards her baby into the trashcan.

A home video buff turns his attention from his backyard subject to record a group of police officers ruthlessly beating to a pulp a helpless suspect.

A police hidden camera records a dentist sexually abusing his anesthetized patient.

"Smile, You're On Candid Camera!" It used to be that hidden cameras caught people in silliness or sentimentality, bringing out the lighter, endearing side of the human personality. Now hidden cameras are used to record what many used to think were unthinkable acts of depravity, violence, and violation of trust.

Jewish judicial codes actually favored the robber who takes in the open to the burglar who steals in secret, for while both violate the law against stealing, the latter commits the

additional blasphemy of believing that "no one" sees.

To change the metaphor, one who speaks *lashon hara`*, slander, against another person in front of a large group, commits a sin that may be less severe than one who speaks *lashon hara`* before a small group. This is because with the large group the sinner sins openly, while with a small group the sinner may commit the additional blasphemy of believing that "no one" hears.

For us to live with *qedusha*, a sense of sanctity in our lives, we must conduct ourselves each minute with the knowledge of before whom we stand. As is inscribed above our *Aron Qodesh*, the Holy Ark in our small chapel: *Da` lifnei Mi ata `omed* — Know before Whom you stand.

It appears that sinners are not punished in this world. People can commit these terrible sins and if they are never convicted by a court of law, nothing seems to happen. God doesn't go and strike them down.

But the same is true of one's parents. Unless one is a child, one's parents may have little say over what one does. Parents lose their power to punish as the child grows. But a decent child would feel shame before his or her parents if that child did wrong.

Every act I do, every word I say: I must ask myself, would my mother or father be proud of me, or deeply embarrassed? Let us test ourselves against this standard.

Every act I do, every word I say: I must ask myself, would *Avinu SheBeShamaim* (our Father who art in Heaven) be proud of me, or deeply embarrassed? Let us test ourselves against this standard as well.

*Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi said:
Ponder three things and you will avoid committing an aveira [sin].
Keep in mind what is above you:
An Eye that sees,
An Ear that hears,
A Book in which all your deeds are recorded.*

(Avot 2:1)

Dear Rabbi: Answers, Advice and Helpful Household Hints

Dear Rabbi,

In Birkat Ha-Mazon, there is a line that says: "Anahnu modim lakh, u-mevarkhim otakh." Isn't this a feminine grammatical construction, while the rest of the prayer is in the masculine or plural? To whom or what do "lakh" and "otakh" refer?

Baffled Bentsher

Dear Befuddled Blessor,

No, this is not a case of a transgendered God. In classical (Biblical) Hebrew (and other

Semitic languages), short vowels are often lengthened (changed into "long" vowels) when they are "in pause," i.e. at the end of a phrase or verse, and final vowels are often dropped when the phrase or verse ends in an open syllable. This is for phonetic reasons.

Thus, the sheva (English: Shewa) represented by "e" in "lekha" becomes a long vowel, the qamatz represented by "a" in "lakh," and the long vowel "a" at the end of "lekha" drops off altogether. "Lakh" and "otakh" are thus masculine singular forms, as we know from the rest of the sentence.

Shabbat Shira

On Shabbat Shira, "the Sabbath of Song," BEKI member Jeremy Golding will lead the Congregation in nigunim (songs). Long ago our sages recognized the power of music to touch a deep spiritual point within each human heart, helping us to feel God's presence and express our awe of Creation. Come on Shabbat Morning 7 February for this "special edition" of our weekly service.

JTS Shabbat

On Shabbat morning 14 February, [Jewish Theological Seminary](#) Rabbinical Student Daniel Rosenberg will serve as guest darshan, Torah discussion leader, as part of a nation-wide observance of Seminary Shabbat. BEKI has provided continuing support to the Seminary, particularly through the [Sisterhood Torah Fund Campaign](#). Several members of the Congregation, including Rabbi Murray Levine, Rabbi Alan Lovins, Jennifer Rosenberg and Rabbi Tilsen are graduates of Seminary programs, and Shulamith Sharfstein Chernoff's father was a distinguished faculty member. The Seminary serves as the academic flagship of the worldwide Conservative-Masorti Movement.

Malik: Paul Bass's Perspective

On Shabbat morning 21 February [New Haven Advocate](#) Associate Editor and BEKI member Paul Bass will comment on the weekly Torah portion in relation to the events surrounding the shooting of Malik Jones, a New Haven resident killed by East Haven police after a chase last summer. See Rabbi Tilsen's view of the shooting, "[Malik: Martyr or Menace?](#)" in the December 1997 BEKI *Bulletin*.

What is the Rabbi's Tzedaka Fund?

The Rabbi's Tzedaka Fund is maintained to support families in need, provide educational materials for adults and children, and meet special needs of the shul and community. Contributions are tax-deductible and may be directed to the attention of Rabbi Tilsen. All gifts are appreciated and donations of \$25 or more are noted in the BEKI *Bulletin*.

LifeCycle

With Sorrow we note the passing of

- Libbie Dworski *sister of Tillie Horwitz*
 - Rabbi Richard Thaler *brother of Rebbetsin Judy Thaler Kane*
-

Ramah Video in Library

A promotional video introducing Camp Ramah is available for loan from BEKI's Rosenkrantz Library. Camp Ramah is the camping arm of the Conservative-Masorti Movement. Camps Ramah are found in all regions of the United States, Canada, Israel, Latin America and Russia, and deserve the reputation for excellence that they enjoy.

Computers needed

The United Hebrew School and BEKI offices are in need of several computers. 486-based units (or better), color monitors and laser printers can all be put to good use. If you or your company has used equipment to donate, please contact Rabbi Tilsen at 389-2108 ext. 10 or email jjtilsen@beki.org.

For more information call or write to:

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