



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

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Introducing: Mary Ellen Mack

BEKI welcomes **Mary Ellen Mack** as the synagogue's new Office Manager. A graduate of San Joaquin Delta College, Mary Ellen has most recently worked at the Marlin Firearms Company in North Haven where she was the Executive Secretary to the President. Besides her many years of experience working in office settings, Mary Ellen is a former disc jockey including a stint on a 50,000 watt station in California.

Although Mary Ellen is BEKI's newest employee, she is certainly not new to BEKI. She has served as an officer of the Sisterhood and as a member of its Board. Her husband, Kevin Mack, accompanies Irving Weinstein at BEKI's late Friday night services.

If you have not yet met Mary Ellen, please stop by the office and introduce yourself. We are

very excited that she has joined us.

Stephen Pincus



New Computerized Accounting System Running

Over the past three months, our offices have completed a switch to a computer-based accounting system using software specifically designed for synagogues. This system will greatly enhance the efficiency in maintaining BEKI's accounts.

The Board of Directors would like to thank BEKI member **Sarah Serkin**, BEKI's computer consultant **Bruce Perlroth**, and BEKI's office consultant **Marcia Turner** for their many hours of work setting up this new system. The system will be maintained by **Mary Ellen Mack**, BEKI's new Office Manager.

If you notice any errors in your name, address or accounts, please notify Mary Ellen.

Stephen Pincus

New & Extended Office Hours

In response to requests by members, office hours have been extended. The office will now be open until 6p on Wednesdays, until 2p on Fridays, and the first and third Sunday mornings a month. The additional hours on Wednesday and Sunday will allow members to visit the office while United Hebrew School is in session.

New Office Hours:

Monday: 9a-12p & 1p-3p
 Tuesday: By appointment only
 Wednesday: 9a-12p & 1p-6p
 Thursday: 9a-12p & 1p-3p
 Friday: 9a- 2p
 Sunday (1st and 3rd of the month): 9:30a-12:30p

While we encourage you to visit the office during regular office hours, BEKI's Office Manager is also available to meet members by appointment on weekdays at other hours. Please call Mary Ellen Mack at 389-2108 ext. 14 or email her at beki@snet.net to set up an appointment outside of regular office hours.

Thank You

We would like to thank the following members for their many hours of work during October and November to ensure the smooth functioning of the office: Sarah Serkin, Natan

Weinstein, Carl Goldfield, Bud Volain, Steven Fraade, Rabbi Jon-Jay Tilsen, Diane Dumigan, Stephen Pincus, and Brian Karsif.

A special thanks is due to Marcia Turner, who joined BEKI's staff on short notice and has handled the day-to-day financial affairs.

Tax Statements Mailed to Contributors

Pursuant to IRS regulations, all persons who made contributions any of which were over \$250 to BEKI during calendar year 1998 will receive a letter in January stating the amount of those contributions. If you believe that your statement does not reflect all the gifts you made to the synagogue and you would like a revised statement, please write or call Mary Ellen at the BEKI office at 389-2108 ext. 14 or email her at beki@snet.net.

Stephen Pincus

BEKI e-Mail

BEKI's new email address is beki@snet.net. Messages sent to this address are read by the Office Manager, Mary Ellen Mack. You may also reach Rabbi Tilsen at jjtilsen@aol.com. For an online directory of BEKI email addresses, visit www.uscj.org/ctvalley/beki/members.html. To add your email address to that directory, send your address to Rabbi Tilsen at jjtilsen@aol.com

Information on the Counter

Literature may be placed on the counter by the coatroom by permission only. To request permission for placement on this counter or on the Community Bulletin Board, please contact Office Manager Mary Ellen Mack at 389-2108 ext. 14. After office hours, you may leave one copy of your submission, with your phone number, under Mary Ellen's door (Room 2, next to the UHS office), or you may fax it to Mary Ellen at (203) 389-5899 (24-hours). Your cooperation in maintaining a fair and respectful policy is appreciated.

No Parking

Members and visitors to BEKI are advised that parking is prohibited at all times on the East side of Harrison Street as indicated by the "No Parking" signs. Parking is also prohibited in BEKI's driveway. Parking is usually available across Harrison Street, and ample parking is available in the BEKI lot at the rear of the building.

A Message from Rabbi Tilsen

Speaking English

The way we understand Jewish concepts and terms is heavily influenced by the English words we use to express them. Sometimes the essence of the words is lost in translation. Here are some of the common terms along with my interpretation.

Torah -- literally, "a teaching." By itself it may refer to the Five Books of Moses, the entire Hebrew Bible, the entire corpus of Biblical and rabbinic writings and oral teachings, or a single idea within that corpus. Translating it as "the law" is much too limited.

Halakha -- literally, "a way," "a path." Halakha represents the correct way that a person should live. It normally refers to the body of Jewish law or a specific law within that body (just as the English word "law" serves both functions). Halakha, in that sense, at least until recently, was operative in all areas of law, including personal status, criminal law, torts, and ritual. "Jewish law" is an accurate translation of the term. But Halakha, broadly understood as "the way," is not entirely distinct from "custom." It can incorporate an element of "social engineering" or "custom-cum-law."

Tzedaka -- "righteous giving," is related to the word for "righteous" or "just." It refers to what in English is called "charity," although unlike "charity," giving *tzedaka* is viewed as a religious obligation. As such, minimums are defined, such as giving 10% of one's income annually.

Mitzva -- "a commandment" is often translated as a "good deed." But "good deed" fails to convey the obligatory or imperative nature of the idea of Mitzva. The idea of Mitzva -- "commandment" -- assumes that there is a "commander," namely, the Almighty, or at least some other source of morality if such is possible. A Mitzva is a moral imperative, a commandment, an obligation. It is more than just a "good deed."

Minyan -- a "count" or "quorum." Often the word is used to refer to a worship service, but would more accurately be reserved for describing the quorum of ten adult Jews needed for some forms of public worship. Daily services can be called "tefilot" (prayers) or by the names of the services themselves, viz. Shaharit (morning service), Minha (afternoon service), or Maariv (=Aravit) (evening service).

Dear Rabbi: Answers, Advice and Helpful Household Hints

Dear Rabbi

Why are there so many Cohens listed in the phone book?

Signed, Phoney Questioner

Dear Phoney,

Because they all have phones.

Now that's what I call an old line.

Dear Rabbi,

Why do some Jews sway while they pray?

Signed, Dizzy Davener

Dear Dizzy,

The *Zohar*, a twelfth-century book of mysticism, suggests that the soul of a Jew is attached to Torah as a candle is attached to a flame (3:218b). When a Jew studies Torah, or prays, his or her body reflects the soul's essence. Rabbi Moshe Isserles quoted Abudraham's description of it in the sixteenth century: "Those who tried to be precise would sway when they read Torah, just as people trembled when the Torah was first given, and likewise when they pray, so that all one's body will praise God" (Magen Avot OH 48:1.) In our day, the Hafetz Hayim commented on the statement of Isserles:

There are some Posqim (legal decisors) who disagree, and say that during the Amida one should not sway; but during Pesuqei DeZimra [introductory morning Psalms], the blessings before the Shema` and during study (including Oral Law) the practice is to sway. The Magen Avraham wrote concerning this, "To each his own." It should be according to the individual. If one's *kavana* [concentration and sincerity] is enhanced by swaying, then one should sway; if not, one should stand upright. The point is that one should pray with *kavana*.

Rashi Study Group's Fifth Anniversary

The **Rashi Study Group** meets every Monday morning from 7:45a until 8:30a (except on 18 January 1999, when it will meet from 9:50a to 10:30a). The Rashi Study Group is dedicated to reading each line of the Torah with the commentary of the great sage Rashi. Give it a try. Knowledge of English, Old French and Hebrew is helpful but not required. The Group has been meeting weekly for the past five years.

Library Acquisitions

The following books have been purchased through the Ari Nathan Levine Children's Library fund, and are available on a non-lending basis in the Claire Goodwin Youth Room.

- "A Hanukkah Treasury" edited by Eric A. Kimmel
- "All About Hanukkah" by Judy Groner and Madeline Wikler
- "Bim and Bom: A Shabbat Tale" by Daniel J. Swartz
- "Brainteasers From Jewish Folklore" by Rosalind Charney Kaye
- "Chanukah in Chelm" by David A. Adler and Kevin O'Malley
- "God in Between" by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso
- "Here Come the Purim Players" by Barbara Cohen
- "In Our Image: God's First Creatures" by Nancy Sohn Swartz
- "Maccabee Jamboree: A Hanukkah Countdown" by Cheri Holland
- "Matzo Ball Moon" by Leslea Newman
- "Miriam's Cup: A Passover Story" by Fran Manushkin
- "On Hanukkah" by Cathy Goldberg Fishman
- "Sammy Spider's First Shabbat" by Sylvia A. Rouss
- "Shabbat" by Miriam Nerlove
- "Starlight and Candles: The Joys of the Sabbath" by Fran Manushkin
- "Terrible, Terrible" by Robin Bernstein
- "The Angel's Mistake: Stories of Chelm" by Francine Prose
- "The Menorah Story" by Mark Podwal

"The Never-Ending Greenness" by Neil Waldman

"The Very Best Book" by Dina Rosenfeld

"When Zaydeh Danced on Eldridge Street" by Elsa Okon Rael

Letters

1939 New York World's Fair

My name is Eva Landau, and I am in eighth grader at West Hills Middle School. I am looking for information on the 1939 New York World's Fair for my History Day Project. If anyone was there and has time to be interviewed by me, please call me at 389-9594. Thank you very much.

Eva Landau

Dear Rabbi Tilsen,

When we left New Haven a little over a year ago, I started a small project that I am now sending to you. Whenever I bought a Jewish cookbook, I bought a second copy, which I am now donating to BEKI's Rosenkrantz Library. It was during our time at BEKI that I started my own Jewish cookbook collection which I have so enjoyed having. I hope these cookbooks will educate and inspire others as they have me.

Sincerely,

Tracey Thomas

Sisterhood News

We wish everybody a Healthy, Happy and Productive New Year!

[Sisterhood](#) President Adele Tyson is looking forward to a busy and active year. A date for you to make a note to save is Tuesday 8 June 1999, for the "Book of Life" luncheon.

And don't forget the Sisterhood Gift Shop when you need a gift for any occasion: Bar or Bat Mitzvah, birthday, anniversary, new baby, etc.

If you haven't yet joined Sisterhood, it's never too late! Join us! You won't be sorry!

LifeCycle

HaMaqom Yinahem Etkhem: We Mourn the Passing of **Jack Frankel**, father of BEKI member Stewart Frankel. May God Comfort Those Who Mourn.

Bat Mitzva in January

Rebecca Rubenstein (pictured at right), daughter of Allan Rubenstein & Carolyn Kone, will participate in and lead services as a bat mitzva on Friday 15 January during the 8:00p service and on Shabbat morning 16 January during the 9:15a service. Rebecca is a student at the [United Hebrew School](#). She is the granddaughter of Marjorie & Max Rubenstein of Bridgeport and of Estelle Kone and the late Eugene Kone of New Haven. During the morning services, the children's programs and the Shabbat Shalom Learners' Minyan will meet as usual at 10:45a.



Rabbi Tilsen at GLAD

Rabbi Tilsen will lead a program for participants at the Goodwin-Levine Adult Day Center operated by the Jewish Home for the Aged on Friday 22 January 1999.

MLK Day at BEKI

Please note that morning Rosh Hodesh services will be at 9:00a to 9:50a on Monday 18 January 1999 marking Martin Luther King, Jr., Day, and that BEKI offices will be closed to the public that day for the federal holiday. The [Rashi Study Group](#) will meet immediately after the morning service until 10:30a. Evening services will be at their usual time, 5:45p.

Sponsor a Qiddush or Birthday Qiddush

BEKI is now taking reservations for sponsorship of Shabbat Morning Qiddushim through December 1999. Reserve your dates now to celebrate with your friends and family or to honor the memory of a loved one. Your contribution commemorating this life event is an act of tzedaka (charity) and is tax-deductible to the full extent permitted by law. The minimum donation to sponsor a regular qiddush is \$75.

BEKI members are also able to mark the birthdays of family members or friends at a special qiddush that will be held each month. For \$18 per honoree, members may co-sponsor the qiddush in the name of the person celebrating a birthday. For this qiddush, there will be a birthday cake in addition to the regular food items. The next birthday qiddushim are scheduled for 23 January, 20 February, 13 March, and 24 April 1999. Please contact Mary Ellen at the office (389-2108 ext. 14 beki@snet.net) to reserve your date.

Attend Daily Services

Adults and children are encouraged to fulfill their obligations for daily worship by attending the weekday Shaharit morning and Maariv evening services at BEKI. Those who are unable to attend are urged to recite their prayers wherever they can. Additional participants are especially needed for the Sunday, Tuesday and Friday morning services to help insure a minyan (quorum). Children, including infants, are always welcomed along with their parents or other adults. Veteran participants are eager to help newcomers or returnees feel comfortable by helping them find their place in the siddur (prayer book) and with other elements of the service and its etiquette. Refer to the [Schedule](#) for service times.

For more information call or write to:

Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel
85 Harrison Street at Whalley Avenue
New Haven, CT USA 06515-1724
(203) 389-2108
Fax (203) 389-5899

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Email to the BEKI Office: beki@snet.net

Email to Rabbi Jon-Jay Tilsen: jjtilsen@beki.org