



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

July 1997 Tammuz 5757 -- Vol 3 Issue 7

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### Special Needs Adults Target of BEKI Outreach Initiative

Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel has received a two-year grant from the Jewish Foundation of Greater New Haven for a pilot project called ["The Kulanu Ke'Ehad Havura: The All as One Study & Friendship Circle for Adults with Special Needs at Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel"](#) to enable adults with developmental disabilities and special needs to live richer lives as Jews in their own homes and to participate more fully in the synagogue community.

Under the direction of BEKI member and special educator Anne Johnston, *Kulanu* is developing two classes for adults with special needs and a volunteer program for both special needs adults and other community members. Participants are involved in the Congregation through an associated volunteer program and through congregants' hosting of participants for home rituals. *Kulanu* seeks to enhance the inclusiveness of the congregational community, helping to realize the vision of a united people, *kulanu ke'ehad*,

all as one. *Kulanu* is being thoroughly documented so the materials and program model can be disseminated through publications, conferences and appropriate organizations.

BEKI has taken a lead regionally in programs for adults and children with special needs. The BEKI [Sisterhood](#) has offered an annual [Special Needs Seder for Adults](#) in cooperation with the Jewish Family Service and Abel Caterers since 1983. BEKI is uniquely situated to serve this segment of our community as residents and clients of Chapel Haven, an assisted living program, have been involved with the congregation to varying degrees for some time, in part because Chapel Haven is located only a block from BEKI. In addition, residents of the Parents Foundation for Transitional Living in New Haven are involved in the synagogue. In 1992 the Congregation became the first in our region to offer a Special Education Hebrew School, the [Talmud Torah Meyuhad](#), which it founded as part of our United Hebrew School which is run cooperatively with the Westville Synagogue.

These limited programs have led the congregation to observe that simply welcoming adults with special needs is not enough. For them to be actively involved in congregational life in an adult capacity, with all the honors open to such, they need specialized instruction, sensitive to their particular learning challenges and respectful of their place in our community. Only recently has Jewish education become flexible enough to accommodate children with special learning needs; thus many special needs adults were bypassed as children and did not acquire the basic ritual skills of the Jewish home or synagogue. *Kulanu* therefore incorporates a component to explore how participants can make Jewish observance more a part of their home lives, just as they may learn in their residential and guided-living programs how to live independently.

*Kulanu* can needs your help in welcoming individuals into your home for shabbat and holiday observances, planning and operating classes, and raising additional funds to support the program. If you might be able to help in any of these ways please call Anne Johnston at 389-9184 [anne@beki.org](mailto:anne@beki.org) or Rabbi Tilsen at 389-2108 [jtilsen@beki.org](mailto:jtilsen@beki.org). To read more about this program see a description at [kulanu.html](#) or call Anne Johnston for printed material.

## "Hello Neighbor" Outreach Initiative

Congregation Beth El-Keser has received a one-year grant from the Gateways Outreach Program of the [Jewish Theological Seminary of America](#) for an innovative approach to reach out and involve interfaith couples and other unaffiliated Jews and interested non-Jews. Approximately 51% of the Congregation's membership resides in the City of New Haven, mostly in the Westville (06515), Edgewood (06511) and Beaver Hills (06511) neighborhoods. ([Click here to see map of neighborhoods](#)). These neighborhoods have the highest concentration of Jewish residents in the region. As the only Conservative congregation in the City of New Haven, and in the absence of any Reform or Reconstructionist congregations, the BEKI community takes seriously its role as a center of Jewish religious culture and its responsibility for the religious well-being of the people of New Haven.

In the autumn of 1995 the Congregation undertook a visioning and long-term planning process called "BEKI 2000." As part of that process in-progress the Congregation has renewed its commitment to welcoming and integrating interfaith families, who it is supposed make up a large proportion, if not majority, of the Jewish residents of the area. While only about 10% of the Congregation's membership is interfaith couples (about 15% of its couples

are interfaith), those constituent families express that they enjoy an extremely positive relationship with the Congregation. The Congregation currently has 28 families participating in its Interfaith Discussion Group which vice-president Diane Dumigan has organized, and has had success in reaching out to interfaith couples through its [Shabbat Shalom Learners' Minyan](#), [Children's Shabbat Havura](#), [LaMaazel](#) and other ongoing programs. The Congregation is religiously and socially prepared to welcome and indeed reach out to additional interfaith families and to other unaffiliated Jews, but it lacks data on which to base a systematic plan of action.

In considering potential "outreach" strategies, the "BEKI 2000" planning group realized that it lacked a basic tool necessary to reach those families: the knowledge of who they are, where they are, and what they want. Rough estimates, the sight of menorahs and Christmas trees in the neighborhood and anecdotal evidence suggests the presence of hundreds of such interfaith families within a two-mile radius of the Congregation. And by all accounts the majority of New Haven Jews are not affiliated with any synagogue. But until we have their names, addresses, and have spoken with them to find out "who they are," and until they have had direct personal contact with the Congregation, programs for them are at best based on guesswork.

"Hello Neighbor" will be a professionally-designed and executed survey intended to (1) gather data on interfaith families and unaffiliated families in up to three neighborhoods of the City of New Haven to serve as a basis for subsequent programs of outreach aimed at this segment of the community; (2) deliver the message door-to-door (and through other means) that the Conservative Congregation BEKI in New Haven cares about interfaith and unaffiliated families, wants to know their concerns and seeks to welcome and integrate them into the Congregation; and (3) create a fully-documented and replicable model for other communities.

The survey would seek to identify these families, their children's ages, their religious and ethnic origins and current self-identity. An attempt will be made to gauge their level of interest in family education, adult education, children and youth programs, support and discussion groups, home havurot and home observance, cultural, Men's Club, Sisterhood, social action and other aspects of synagogue community life. This data would aid the Congregation in designing and prioritizing its outreach efforts and program development, and would allow the Congregation to target its particular outreach programs to those most likely to be interested. Knowing, for example, which families have preschoolers would enable a volunteer (perhaps another family member with children the same age) to call the prospective participants and invite them to a specific program for preschoolers and their parents. Knowing which adults are most interested in expressing their Jewish identity or their relationship with the Jewish community through social action projects would enable the Congregation to invite and welcome them to take part in ongoing efforts. The personal approach has proven a key element to the Congregation's successes in involving interfaith and unaffiliated families; Hello Neighbor will make it possible to bring those successes to a new level and invite many more people into a welcoming community.

If you would like to volunteer to design, execute or more fully fund this project, please contact Steven Fraade at 397-9430 [steven.fraade@yale.edu](mailto:steven.fraade@yale.edu) or Rabbi Tilsen at 389-2108 [jtilsen@beki.org](mailto:jtilsen@beki.org). If you would like to help in other areas of membership outreach please contact Diane Dumigan at 393-1815 [dgdumigan@aol.com](mailto:dgdumigan@aol.com).

## Registration Opens for United Hebrew School

Registration is open for the [United Hebrew School](#) for children entering K through 7th grade this fall. Registration deadline is 15 August; after that date a late-registration fee is required. Classes begin Sunday 7 September 1997 for all students. Classes will meet at BEKI in refreshed classrooms.

Terri Stern will continue to serve as UHS Principal. Ms Stern is a BEKI member along with her husband and has children enrolled in the school. Terri has retained a superb faculty with some changes and continuing educational excellence is expected.

In addition, several BEKI members are serving as officers on the UHS Board. Shoshana Zax is Chairperson of the UHS Board; Barbara Stern is Recording Secretary; and Natan Weinstein is Treasurer. Rabbi Tilsen sits on the Board as well. We also expect additional BEKI members to be recruited to serve on the Board during the summer. If you would like to volunteer to serve on the Board or in another capacity, please contact Barbara Stern at 387-0056.

Again this fall the United Hebrew School will offer the Talmud Torah Meyuhad for students with special education needs. If your child might benefit from this program, please call Ms Stern (387-9268) at your earliest opportunity. Talmud Torah Meyuhad is supported by the Department of Jewish Education of the Jewish Federation of Greater New Haven.

The tuition parents are charged represents only a portion of the actual cost to Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel. If you can contribute to BEKI toward the cost of operating the School, your generosity would be appreciated and would be tax-deductible to the full extent provided by law.

A limited number of Louis Friedman Scholarships are available to students whose families have demonstrable financial need. To apply please complete the Scholarship Application form which is included in the BEKI UHS registration packet. The deadline for Scholarship applications is 15 August 1997. Due to the limitation on funds, we must receive Scholarship application by that date for your child(ren) to be considered. The Scholarship funds will be fully distributed at that time so do not miss the deadline. All scholarship applications are strictly confidential.

We urge your children's participation in either the [Children's Shabbat Havura](#) (for kids up to first grader) or [Junior Congregation](#) every Shabbat morning year-round at 10:45a. There is no additional charge for these programs, which reinforce and supplement the School's curriculum.

For registration material or additional information please call the BEKI office at 389-2108 or visit during office hours.

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## A Message from Rabbi Tilsen

*What Shul Do You Belong to?*

I looked through my high school yearbook and made a Jew count. (A Jew count is when you look through a list of names and pick out the Jewish ones.) Since I knew personally every

one of my Jewish classmates, and the majority of my total 498 classmates, my count was probably accurate to the person.

Of the 39 Jewish kids in my class, myself included, all but one or two belonged to a synagogue. Most belonged to the Temple of Aaron, a Conservative "mega-shul" in St. Paul, Minnesota. A few belonged to Mount Zion, a Reform "mega-shul," also in St. Paul.

In the Midwest, the majority of adults Jews are members of a synagogue. But in Connecticut, only a minority of adults Jews belong to a synagogue. While several explanations have been put forward to explain this difference, I would like to point to one of them.

In some Jewish communities there is an expectation of belonging. Sure, many adults in their college years and first few years thereafter went to shul on their parents' tickets, but even singles under 30 were shul members. Upon meeting another Jew from elsewhere in the Metropolitan area, it was not considered impolite to ask, "What shul do you belong to?"

Whether or not one is "religious" or "observant" in any sense of the word, belonging to a synagogue is an important affirmation of one's Jewish identity, and even more, a concrete act of support for the continuity of Judaism and the fulfillment of our mission. Belonging is something that everyone should do.

Therefore I want to propose that each of us, when we meet other Jews in the community, ask, "What shul do you belong to?" I'm not suggesting that we offer lectures on why they should belong. I'm simply positing that by asking the question we create the idea that there is an expectation for Jews to belong.

This is also an opportunity to invite others to visit BEKI. Fortunately, we in the Greater New Haven area are blessed with a number of fine synagogue communities, so someone can find the place right for them. Even if they are not interested in joining BEKI, they ought to be joining somewhere else. So please ask politely, "What shul do you belong to?"

*Reader responses are welcomed and may be addressed to Bulletin Editor, 85 Harrison St., New Haven CT 06515 or [jjtilsen@beki.org](mailto:jjtilsen@beki.org).*

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

Dear Rabbi,

Why do people use the back side of the shovel at funerals? Is this a law?

Signed, *Dying to Know*

Dear Dying,

The back side of the shovel is used, at least for one shovelful, to indicate that this digging is different in kind from any other. This distinction makes it clear that one is performing the act in order to fulfil a specific mitzva. It is an old custom but not a requirement.

Dear Rabbi,

How can children lead services before their bar- or bat-mitzva?

Signed, *Davening to Know*

Dear Davening,

At BEKI minors (pre-benei-mitzva youth) are allowed, indeed encouraged, to read Torah (with some exceptions and reservations). This is not the case in most communities because generally children do not know how to read Torah or because it is an honor reserved for adults, not as a matter of law but as social etiquette. There is no legal barrier to minors reading Torah or having an aliya (again, with certain restrictions). Minors may not lead the shaharit morning service or musaf additional service. However, any Jewish child who has reached the age of bar-mitzva (13 for boys) or bat-mitzva (12 for girls), whether or not they have celebrated a "bar- or bat-mitzva" ceremony, are adults for this purpose by virtue of their age and may lead all services.

Dear Reader,

Dear Rabbi has a few questions of his own and would be happy to receive written answers.

1. When someone posts a "Vote For Candidate X" bumper sticker on a "Stop" sign, do they intend to promote or to "stop" that candidate?
2. When one shampoo bottle says "for shiny manageable hair" and the second says "for dry damaged hair," who buys the one that makes their hair dry and damaged?
3. When the orange juice carton advertises "squeezed orange juice," how else might they have gotten the juice out?
4. When one person will not come to services if there is already a minyan as they are "not needed," and another will not come unless they are sure there will be a minyan, how should we answer the question, "will there be a minyan?"

Signed, *Dear Rabbi*

*Readers may write to Dear Rabbi at "Dear Rabbi, 85 Harrison Street, New Haven CT 06515" or [jjtilsen@beki.org](mailto:jjtilsen@beki.org). Due to the volume of mail received, Dear Rabbi cannot answer all inquiries. Dear Rabbi is produced for the benefit of the BEKI community; others should consult their own rabbi for decisions of a legal nature.*

## **Food policy**

Congregants are reminded that food may be brought into the Synagogue only with the advance arrangement of the Synagogue Office and under the supervision of Rabbi Tilsen. In order to maintain our high standards of kashrut (dietary laws) and cleanliness, your cooperation is very much appreciated. All foods brought into the building must be produced under Rabbinic supervision, with the exception of fresh fruits and vegetables.

## **LifeCycle**

***Berukhim HaBaim:***

## BEKI Welcomes New Members & Their Families

Lewis Borofsky

### ***HaMaqom Yinahem***

With sorrow we note the passing of **Sara Oppenheim**, mother of Gerald Oppenheim. May God Comfort All Who Mourn

### **Mazal Tov**

Mazal Tov to Andrew "Drew" and Elizabeth "Liz" Alexander (formerly Allison and Shanks) on their *nisuin* (Jewish wedding) at Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel on Sunday 22 June.

Mazal Tov to Rabbi Murray Levine and Leona on their *nisuin* (Jewish wedding) with Rabbi Tilsen on Sunday 29 June.

Mazal Tov to Jack & Laura Yakerson on the birth of their grandson Betzalel Mordekhai (Jason Maxwell) to David & Beth Yakerson on 18 May.

Mazal Tov to Robert Johnston on completing his program at BEKI's School of Judaism for Conversion and his gerut (conversion) under the supervision of the Beit Din. His Hebrew name is Avshalom Elqana ben Avraham Avinu ve-Sara Imenu.

### **Address Change:**

Howard's Service, operated by Noel & Harriet Barstein, has moved to 501 Boston Post Road at Liberty Square in Orange, 795-1188.

### **Social Action Happening**

Our [Wardrobe Closet](#) is finally in action. A group of BEKI members as well as members of the New Haven County Bar Foundation met Monday evening 12 May at BEKI to sort and hang many women's clothing. Thus enabling a group of women from Employment readiness program of the Community Action Agency to come on Wednesday 14 June in the evening to choose the clothes they need for their job interviews. The program was coordinated by Carolyn W. Kone and her able committee of Saul Bell, Betty Goodwin, Charles Ludwig, Elsie Morris, Clararose Voigt, Susie Voigt and Robert Forbes. As of this writing we need more clothes in sizes 20, 22, 24 good work professional suitable for office. Also more volunteers are needed for Wednesdays that the clients will be coming to choose clothes. If you are interested in helping or for more information on this project please call Carolyn Kone at 624-8335, Charles Ludwig 389-0349 or Mimi Glenn 397-3851.

### **Where There's A Will...**

Tradition recommends that one bequeath at least 10% of their estate to Tzedaka (charity) such as to Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel, although in many cases financial advisers and estate lawyers have shown how such gifts can be increased through careful planning that

takes tax policies into account. Willing a proportion of one's estate to the Congregation is a concrete way of demonstrating one's commitment to Judaism and establishing a moral example for others.

How would you like to earn a guaranteed 8% or more annual return for life on a secured investment and help the Synagogue? With as little as \$10,000 you can make a charitable remainder gift that allows you and your spouse or other loved one to receive a guaranteed annual interest payment for the rest of your life, all or much of which is tax-free.

If you would like more information on how to make a bequest or a charitable remainder gift for the benefit of BEKI, contact your own attorney or financial consultant, or call estate planning attorney Donna Levine at 787-1633. Attorney Levine will donate her time to help you establish a will or trust for the benefit of the Congregation. You may also contact BEKI Treasurer Stephen Wizner at 432-4800 or Rabbi Tilsen at 389-2108 for more information on bequests and endowment opportunities.

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### Special Projects Wish list

Our Synagogue has several needs that are beyond our conservative budget. Among the priority items identified by the Officers, Staff and Rabbi are replacement of broken windows, radon abatement in the school building, and a fire alarm safety system. Each of these is in the \$2,500 to \$7,000 range. The Congregation also has many needs for annual sponsorships, named endowments and Building Fund debt retirement. If you would like to fund any of these or if you would like more information please contact BEKI Treasurer Stephen Wizner at 432-4800 or Rabbi Tilsen at 389-2108.

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### Letters

I wish to thank all those members of the United Hebrew School and Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel who planned and arranged the Sabbath reception in my honor for funding the [George G. & Leah E. Posener Endowment](#) which will financially assist the [United Hebrew School](#) to continue to offer a liberal Jewish education to our children.

I was envious and thrilled to see and hear the young pupils read and chant from portions of the Torah and participate in services. The future of our Synagogue is safe and secure when we pass the torch to these well-educated United Hebrew School-trained children, who someday will replace us.

Sincerely,

*George G. Posener*

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### BEKI Sisterhood News

The Book of Life Luncheon was the culmination of [Sisterhood's](#) activities for the year 1996-97. But we're not idle, we're already looking ahead to 1997-98.

We hope those ladies who have resisted joining Sisterhood will do so. Even if you can't be active, your payment of Sisterhood dues will help us in our commitments to our beloved BEKI. Please --join us!

During the summer months, don't forget the Sisterhood Gift Shop if you need a gift for anybody for any occasion. Please keep in mind that the wonderful Sisterhood Cook Book is still available and makes a terrific gift.

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### **The Joke That Waited 77 Years to Get a Laugh**

This true story comes out of my recent genealogical research. I'm sure our ancestors never dreamed that some descendant 70 or 80 years later would be looking at all this information, but here I am in 1997 looking for data in the 1920 U.S. Census.

My grandfather, David Tzipkin, was a distributor for the Manischewitz Matzoh Co. I'm sure he was not the one giving the answers to the census taker, possibly my mother or one of her brothers. Picture this dialogue:

- Q. What is your father's occupation?  
 A. He's a salesman.  
 Q. What product does he sell?  
 A. Matzoh.  
 Q. What's matzoh?

That answer appears in the U.S. census as "Jewish crackers." This may appear to you and me as funny, but who was there at the time to laugh? It took 77 years to come to light and when I saw it I really "cracked up."

*Alan Gelbert*

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### **Kashrut Alert**

BEKI *Bulletin* reader Dan Prober noted a recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* (15 May 1997) that points out that the ingredient "cochineal," a coloring agent in products such as Ocean Spray Ruby Red Grapefruit Juice Drink, is made from the dried bodies of female cochineal insects. Insects, with the exception of certain grasshoppers, are not kosher. Kosher consumers should be wary of seemingly innocuous products such as fruit drinks may have treif (non-kosher) ingredients, and that the "all natural" label is no guarantee of kashrut. Honey, which is exuded from an insect, is of course kosher. Major kashrut agencies (except the Lubavitch affiliated K-O) do not accept insect-derived ingredients such as cochineal.

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### **Minyanaires & Minyan Captains Needed**

Services are held at BEKI every morning and evening. If you are coming to say qaddish, please bring friends and family members with you, both to enhance the experience and to help assure the presence of a minyan (quorum) which is desirable (but not essential) for our services. In addition to the need for occasional participants, who are always very welcomed, we need more individuals who can make a commitment to attend a specific weekly service. We also need "minyan captains" who will be responsible for assuring a minyan on a given morning or evening. If you can volunteer for any of these crucial positions please call Steven Fraade at 397-9430 [steven.fraade@yale.edu](mailto:steven.fraade@yale.edu).

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"Dear Rabbi" and "A Message from Rabbi Tilsen" copyright Jon-Jay Tilsen 1997.

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