



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

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### Four Leaders Show the Way

#### Four Leaders Show the Way

Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel is a vibrant Jewish home to hundreds of families from Greater New Haven. It is a symbol of Jewish life to people throughout our region. Yet, sustaining the Congregation has been a challenge. A few years ago many of us worried whether BEKI could continue well into the next century. Today no one doubts that it will. But getting there will not be easy. Despite the wonderful successes of the past few years, we face considerable challenges.

#### Our Challenge

No doubt about it: BEKI is booming. The hard work of scores of dedicated congregants did more than energize the synagogue. It transformed it into an extraordinarily vital spiritual home for people of all ages.

Nothing portrays BEKI's extraordinary change in fortune more dramatically than the fact that only a few years ago a Bar- or Bat-Mitzva observance was an event that happened once every year or two. In contrast, this year we have celebrated 13 Benei Mitzva. BEKI has truly turned a corner and has, in the space of a few short years, become a beacon of Jewish life in New Haven.

All, however, is not well yet. While for the first time in years BEKI balanced its operating budget, the synagogue still carries the burden of years of deficit spending (\$74,000 to be exact). To make matters worse, the financial crisis of the past years forced us to defer critical capital improvements. Finally, even if neither of these factors were present, the skeletal budget of the past years is simply not enough to meet the requirements of a growing synagogue with a rapidly expanding youth program, expanding ritual and programmatic requirements, increased maintenance and custodial costs attendant to the increased use of the building, accelerating demands upon the staff and all the other costs attendant to a rapidly expanding congregation.

### The Strategy for Meeting this Challenge

The only way for us to meet this challenge is for each congregant to participate in safeguarding the financial health of BEKI according to their means. To enable this to happen more easily we are moving to a system of annual giving. Each member of the synagogue is going to be asked to make an annual gift to BEKI (including dues). To this end, we have recently begun asking members of our Congregation to make their 1998 annual pledge to BEKI. We are proud to announce that four congregants have already joined together to pledge \$25,000 to BEKI for 1998. These people are George Posener (\$10,000), Lester & Bernice Margolis, Tina Rose and Paul Goodwin.

### BEKI: A Part of Our Lives, A Part of Our Future

BEKI has a bright and promising future, provided that we all realize that it is a future in which we each will have to invest according to our abilities. A great deal of thanks is owed to George Posener, Lester & Bernice Margolis, Tina Rose and Paul Goodwin for leading the way. Now it is up to each of us to join them in assuring that our children and grandchildren will know the kind of vibrant Jewish life at BEKI that we treasure.

*RL*

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### **BEKI Welcomes New Members**

During the past five years, the Congregation has experienced a period of remarkable growth and transition in its membership. Of the approximately 250 families who currently bear the honor of formal membership in the Congregation, 100 have joined in the past five years. (This figure does not count families who joined during that period but have since moved away or otherwise not maintained their membership.) We are pleased to welcome **Stanton & Marjorie Wiener**, and their children **Matthew & Jason**, as new members and our "100th" family.

The number of minor children in the Congregation has expanded from about 70 to almost 200 in this same time period, and the mean age of our adult members is now over two years younger.

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### **The President's Column by Dr. Brian Karsif**

Dear Friends: I hope that you are all having a good summer. My first year as President of BEKI is over and what an incredible year it has been. We had more *simchat* (celebrations) this past year than in the previous 10 years combined. We went from a shul with 210 member units to one with over 240, adding over 110 new individuals to the BEKI community. We not only balanced our budget but we were able to pay off some of the debt which we inherited from the prior year. The Lower Social Hall underwent renovations so that it is now a terrific place for upcoming *simchat*.

My first Presidential letter in April generated an enormous response with many new people taking on projects such as the raffle, testimonial dinner, Fall rummage, High Holiday planning, food coupons, committees, board positions and the like. None of this could have been accomplished, however, without generous donations of time and money. Which brings me to my next topic: we need more of both.

### **Some Things You Need to Know**

On average, the synagogue spends over \$25,000 per month. This includes everything needed to run the shul: salaries for the staff; insurances for the building and its contents such as Torah scrolls; utilities; building maintenance including fixing all of the things that break and trying to prevent other things from breaking; expenses for the United Hebrew School; program expenses for adult and youth education, youth programs, United Synagogue dues, *Bulletin* printing, High Holidays, office equipment, computers, alarm systems, and on and on! Dues income covers only about 40% of that \$25,000 monthly bill. So how do we make ends meet? By asking people to give to the shul more than their dues, sometimes much more.

### **How We Can Make BEKI Thrive**

In many synagogues there are mandatory contributions to a building fund or a maintenance fee or some other gimmicky way to get money for the shul from the members. At BEKI, we prefer the straightforward approach: We ask people to give because this is their shul, their community, and they care about it. And so, people do give. We received a generous gift from Rob and Susan Goodwin Lerman towards the Lower Level Social Hall renovations. Louis and Mary Rosenkrantz provided us with a significant gift toward BEKI's Rosenkrantz Family Library which will be upgraded this year. Frank and Shirley Goldstein Frumento gave a significant gift in memory of their parents Herman & Edith Goldstein, and Sara Oppenheim, of blessed memory, gave a significant gift as well. Together these generous gifts supported over \$60,000 in capital improvements. One time gifts like these have proven critical to the life of our synagogue.

### **The Campaign to Promote Annual Giving**

Large gifts like those already mentioned, however, by themselves will not sustain our shul. For this reason, we have initiated a campaign to promote annual giving (including dues) to BEKI. Already a number of people have generously stepped forward to insure the present and future of the synagogue by committing to provide significant annual donations. [George Posener](#) has given \$10,000. Tina Rose, Pat Goodwin and Lester & Bernice Margolis have given significant figures as well. It is now time for us to follow their example. Each of us must be prepared to give financially to the shul as much as we can. Dues are simply not enough. We must each do more not only this year, but every year.

### **What Does BEKI Mean to You?**

Thus has begun the task of asking the members of the BEKI community to place a value on BEKI. What is it worth to you financially? How important is it to each of you that our shul not only survive but thrive and grow? If you give only your dues but could give more, please do so now and every year. If you cannot give any more financially, then give of your time as there are many things which need doing at BEKI.

## Tzedaka

As Jews, we are commanded to give *tzedaka*, usually translated incorrectly as charity. But in fact, the word "*tzedaka*" comes from the root "tzedek" meaning righteous. Giving *tzedaka* is the **right thing** to do and it must start at home, in our immediate community, in our BEKI community.

## A Message from Rabbi Tilsen

### *Wild Indians & Wicked Witches*

A Jewish parent might holler at her kids, "stop running around like wild Indians!" and think nothing of it. He might not be concerned if his child dressed as a wicked witch on Halloween. But I can't imagine an Indian parent hollering, "stop whining like a Jew!" or a Wiccan child dressed as a "hateful hasid."

We have come a long way in learning to speak and act respectfully toward others of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. A public official or school teacher who utters a racial or ethnic slur is sure to be out of a job. At the very least, racist and sexist speech is not considered acceptable in polite company.

But there are a few relics of those vile defamations that persist even in family settings. "Wild Indians" ("wild" as opposed to "civilized former savages") are portrayed in old Westerns and live on in the popular imagination in ways so utterly divorced from reality that one might try to excuse the use of the term by saying they didn't mean real people. And when we make sport of "witches" we surely do not have in mind our neighbors who, in our day, actually practice the ancient Wiccan religion (currently undergoing somewhat of a renaissance). We don't mean real Indians or real Witches. But isn't that our neighbors' excuse when they use an anti-Semitic epithet? "To Jew down" the price is "just a figure of speech." "Hymie Town" was meant merely in jest. And those ashtray jokes are just meant as jokes.

Gay & Lesbian people, too, are still the object of jest and derision. Whether one views homosexuality as merely an alternate lifestyle, as a manifestation of mental illness or as a grave and willful sin, it is wrong to joke about it or vilify Gays and Lesbians. To do so violates numerous commandments, including the prohibitions against lashon hara (group slander), hatred, incitement to hatred, incitement to violence, and causing economic harm.

The recent atrocity in Texas, where (allegedly) three white Christians chained an African-American man to the back of their pickup truck and dragged him to his death, shocks us with the realization that we live in a society polluted with racism and intolerance. It is a great mitzva to keep as far from the sin of racism and hatred as possible, even (or especially) to the point of being careful how we implicitly show disrespect for other people.

"Did you hear the one about the gay *shvartzer*?" No, I didn't, and I don't want to hear it.

*Who loves life and desires good long years? Keep your tongue from evil, your lips from speaking falsehood, turn from wickedness and do good, seek peace and pursue it.*

*Psalm 34*

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

Dear Rabbi,

The siddur (prayer book) instructions say that the *Shema* [p. 100-103 in *Sim Shalom*] should be recited silently except for the first line. But sometimes we sing it out loud. Why is that?

Signed,

Can Hear O Israel

Dear Can Hear,

The *Shema* is, ideally, recited out loud, at least loud enough for the reciter to hear him- or herself. The instruction "silently" refers only to the one line "*barukh shem...*, praised be...," which is not part of the *Shema* but is, rather, an inserted meditation. The choice of reciting the *Shema* aloud together (usually according to the *trope*) is usually made by the reader (i.e. the person leading services) based on their aesthetic preference.

## BEKI Marches Against Hunger



A BEKI team took part in the 3 May "March Against Hunger" through Westville. We raised several hundred dollars for the cause, and had a great time together. Join us next year! Thanks to Kathy Rosenbluh for supervising the banner-making project, and to Sheila Mondry and Helen Rosenberg for helping to make the banner. The banner is now available through the BEKI office for future marches, walks, parades, and the like. The participation in the Walk is an expression of the Congregation's commitment to [Tiqun HaOlam](#),

commitment to social action and advancement. BEKI Team walkers were Paul, Carole, Annie & Sarah Bass; Saul Bell; Helen Rosenberg and Eva Landau; Rabbi Tilsen, Miriam Benson, Gilah, Tsvi and Tova Benson-Tilsen, and Rhoda Zahler.

## Speakers & Darshanim in July & August

**Anne Johnston** will serve as the darshanit on Shabbat morning 4 July. Anne, a BEKI member, directs the [Kulanu Ke'Ehad Havura](#) for adults with special needs at BEKI.

**Paul Bass** will serve as the darshan on Shabbat morning 10 July. Paul is a BEKI member and serves as an aliya usher on Shabbat mornings.

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## **Tisha Be'Av Observance**

The fast of Tisha BeAv, ("ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av"), will be observed on the tenth of Av this year. (This is somewhat like the Fourth of July being observed on Monday 6 July.) The observance begins after Shabbat on Saturday 1 August. Shabbat *Mincha* afternoon service will be held at its regular time, 5:45p. The traditional *Maariv* (evening) service begins at 9:00p. The Shaharit (morning) service on Sunday 2 August is from 9:00a to 10:30a. The evening and morning services include the reading of the Biblical Book of *Eikha* (Lamentations). The fast is observed from Saturday night until about 8:40p Sunday night. Tisha BeAv commemorates the destruction of the first two Temples and other tragedies that have taken place in our long and glorious history. The fast is the only full-day fast besides Yom Kippur.

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## **LifeCycle**

*HaMaqom Yinahem Etkhem: We Mourn the Passing of*

**Florence M. Scheinfeld**, aunt of Robert Lettick

**Lillian Levine**, mother of J. Paul Levine, and mother of Richard Levine

**Anna Benson**, grandmother of Joanne Rudof, and grandmother of Cissi Ledewitz

May God Comfort All Who Mourn

*Mazal Tov to*

Jill Medvedow, daughter of Leon & Phyllis Medvedow, on her appointment as Director of the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in Boston.

Beth Weinstein, daughter of Natan & Lori Weinstein, who has graduated from High School and plans to attend Becker College.

Dina Kuperstock, daughter of David & Darryl Kuperstock, on being elected USY Regional President.

Aaron Brotman, son of Jay & Lynn Brotman, on his graduation from Ezra Academy.

Alan Lehrer, son of Arnold & Naomi Lehrer, on his graduation from Ezra Academy.

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