



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

May 1998 VOL 4 Issue 5

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UHS Shabbat

Students, alumni, parents and faculty of our [United Hebrew School](#) will join together on Shabbat morning 2 May 1998 for the United Hebrew School Shabbat at BEKI. The service begins at 9:15a and ends around noon. Children of the School, alumni, parents and faculty will participate in services and receive a special blessing. Ms. Terri Stern, the UHS Principal, will present a Devar Torah - Torah Discussion. A Qiddush, sponsored by UHS Parents and Grandparents, will follow the service.

This year the Congregation will reap the "first fruits" of the [George G. & Leah E. Posener](#)



[Endowment for Youth Education](#) established in 1997 by George G. Posener (*pictured at left*). This Posener Endowment is managed by [The Jewish Foundation of Greater New Haven](#). Only the interest is used so the Endowment will help support BEKI's religious school in perpetuity. Posener, who received BEKI's [Distinguished Service Award](#) in 1995, has included UHS in his philanthropy for many years by sponsoring gifts for graduates and all advancing students of the School. In 1996, Posener also established the [Posener Family Memorial Fund](#) for Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel in blessed memory of his wife, parents, sisters, brother and two precious sons.

Support of the religious school is one way in which the Congregation fulfills its central mission of promoting Talmud Torah, the study of the Holy Teachings. In the past four years, the School has experienced a remarkable growth of 75% in enrollment. This infusion of new energy has enhanced the social and educational atmosphere of the School, while creating new demands on the Synagogue's resources.

The School enjoys the volunteer support of many concerned parents including Shoshana Zax, Barbara Stern, Natan Weinstein, Steven Fraade and Rabbi Tilsen, who serve on the School's Directorate. In addition, BEKI members Dr. Brian Karsif, Betsy Rosenberg, Rita Sela, Ina Silverman, Carole Ferency Takacs and Lori Weinstein serve on the faculty.

Shavuot Festival at BEKI

Men's Club Miqva Experience

Jewish men and boys are invited to join the BEKI [Men's Club](#) for individual private immersion in the miqva ("ritual bath") at 86 Hubinger Street on the Friday morning before Shavuot, 29 May, from 7:30a to 8:45a.

On the morning before each of the Festivals (High Holy Days, Sukkot, Pesah and Shavuot) Jewish men and boys of the BEKI Men's Club go to the New Haven Mikvah for private individual immersion. (Fathers may enter with their sons.) The miqva ("ritual bath") is a hygienic and warm setting for a "rebirth" experience. The miqva immersion is one way to help us enter a heightened state of purity and spiritual awareness as we prepare for the High Holy Days and the Festivals.

The New Haven Mikvah was designed by BEKI Men's Club member architect Arthur Ratner. The miqva has showers and dressing rooms. Those who would like to participate should bring a \$5 user fee (cash or check payable to "New Haven Mikvah"), a towel and comb.

Tiqun Leil Shavuot Sweeter than Honey: Night of Adult Study

On Saturday night 30 May following the 8:00p Shabbat Afternoon Service, there will be a late night of study featuring the teaching of leading scholars in our area.

Yizkor Memorial Service

A Yizkor Memorial Service will be held on Monday morning 1 June, the second day of the Festival of Shavuot. The morning service begins at 9:15a and the Yizkor Memorial Service follows the Torah service, usually after 10:20a. The Yizkor service is an appropriate time to remember loved ones who are no longer in the land of the living. The Festival service concludes at about noon.

Some households observe the custom of lighting a special memorial light the evening (this year, Sunday night 31 May) before Yizkor day. This light should be lighted from an existing flame, such as a pilot light or a 24-hour candle lighted before Shabbat. It is also appropriate to offer *tzedaqa* (charity) to a worthy cause such as Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel, and to make a commitment to perform an act of kindness and to study Torah. In these ways we insure that our loved ones' memories will be honored and their ideals continued.

Festival Morning Services Feature Hallel & Ruth

Shavuot Festival morning services on Sunday 31 May and Monday 1 June include the recitation of Hallel, a collection of celebratory Psalms (Biblical poems). The singing of Hallel can be a most joyful segment of our worship services. On Monday morning the Book of Ruth will be read according to its ancient and most beautiful melody. The Biblical Ruth, grandmother of King David, was a convert to Judaism and accepted the life of Torah upon herself enthusiastically and voluntarily. The reading of Ruth is thus appropriate to Shavuot which celebrates the giving of Torah on Sinai.

A Message from Rabbi Tilsen

Toward a Rational Bar- & Bat-Mitzva Observance

As a social institution, the Bar- & Bat-Mitzva observance as we know it is the product more of accident than of reason. It has been noted that there is more "bar" than "mitzva" in contemporary practice. Much ink has been spilled in vain condemning the ostentatious affairs costing tens of thousands of dollars and the theme parties that celebrate the most shallow aspects of American culture. Fortunately, the BEKI community has for the most part avoided those excesses. But the religious and educational component, the "mitzva," also needs reexamination.

Recitation of the *haftara* (a selection from the writings of the Prophets) is assumed to be the *sine qua non* of the bar- or bat-mitzva performance. But there is no good reason for it to be viewed as such.

The criteria for deciding what to teach first and best to our benei mitzva (plural of bar- or bat-mitzva) students should be religious importance and utility. Reciting the Shema ("Hear O Israel") twice daily is a *DeOraita* (Biblical) commandment for every adult Jew; reciting (or hearing) Friday Night Qiddush is a weekly religious responsibility. It makes no sense to expend great effort to learn to chant a haftara before one can recite the Shema and lead Friday Night Qiddush. This is especially so when many benei mitzva will never chant another haftara after their single "performance." It would be better for them to learn something that is more "fundamental" to the life of a Jew and something they can use again after that one day in the spotlight.

A second religious concern is that the sanctuary is only one of several arenas the bar- or bat-mitzva is entering. The performance of *gemilut hasadim* (acts of lovingkindness) and

tzedaka (charity) are religious obligations (mitzvot) that can also be assumed through public performance. We have seen a few inspiring examples from some of our recent benei mitzva. It would be nice if, in addition to throwing a big party, benei mitzva would contribute to a *tzedaka* such as the Louis Friedman Scholarship Fund, the George G. Posener Family Building Fund, or the Ari Nathan Levine Children's Library as an essential and public part of their observance at the Synagogue. (The fees currently paid to the synagogue for benei mitzva observances barely cover costs and do not represent a contribution.) And what lesson would parents teach their children if they dedicated 10% of the cost of the party to a worthy cause at BEKI?

A first step in rationalizing the benei mitzva program would be to reorder the curriculum. A second step would be to include a "mitzva project" in each observance, and for parents to show their children by example how to support the synagogue. Will this ever happen? Only when parents demand it.

Reader response is invited to Editor, BEKI Bulletin, 85 Harrison Street, New Haven CT 06515, by email to jjtilsen@aol.com or by fax to (203) 389-5899.

Dear Rabbi: Answers, Advice and Helpful Household Hints

Dear Rabbi,

If I had a son I would not want him circumcised. (I am not planning on having one soon.) We should oppose male circumcision just as we oppose female circumcision. Circumcision is a trauma that may create lasting psychological damage. According to men I have had sex with, the foreskin is a source of sexual pleasure and I would not want to deprive my son of that. Studies have shown that if proper hygiene is observed, the foreskin presents no medical disadvantage. What social disabilities would he face as an uncircumcised Jew? Why take away from a place where, if anything, we should be adding on?

Signed, for skin

Dear for skin,

Male circumcision should not be compared with female genital mutilation. The latter, only euphemistically called "circumcision," by all accounts entails severe health risks and loss of sexual sensation and has no medical benefit whatsoever. There is no evidence that circumcision creates any transient or lasting psychological effect. In fact, that loud cry you hear at a brit mila is often a reaction to the removal of the baby's diaper rather than the circumcision. Some babies don't even cry at their brit mila.

Removal of the foreskin does indeed change sexual sensation. However, the few men with whom I have personally spoken who have undergone circumcision as an adult, and therefore have a basis for comparison, say that sexual activity is no less pleasurable without the foreskin. While some women may have a preference, if anything the evidence shows that "on average" women find relations with a circumcised man more pleasurable than with the uncircumcised man.

"If proper hygiene is observed" is a big if. The foreskin, when proper hygiene is not maintained, can lead to negative health consequences such as frequent infections and cervical cancer. Even if you can train your son to floss daily, shower regularly, and raise the

seat and lower it again when he's through, it's not going to be easy training him for proper foreskin hygiene. It's one thing to help your seven-year-old son shampoo his hair; it's another to be retracting his foreskin for him; I'm not sure what the potential is for lasting psychological problems.

As an uncircumcised male, he would face some degree of ostracism within the male Jewish world, and indeed might very well be rejected as a potential mate by many fine Jewish women. "Uncircumcised one" is a most potent Biblical disparagement. Sometimes less is more.

Dear Rabbi,

How early can we make our house kosher for Pesah? Can we eat kosher for Pesah foods on our Pesah dishes before Pesah?

Signed, Early Bird

Dear Early Bird,

You can make your kitchen kosher for Pesah anytime you want. You can even keep it kosher for Pesah all year if you want. Just don't eat matza in the couple of weeks before Pesah.

Mishna Class

Study one complete section of the classic second-century Jewish law compendium in an open setting with Rabbi Tilsen. Some knowledge of Hebrew is helpful but not required. All are welcomed; no previous experience necessary.

Classes meet on Sunday mornings from 9:30a to 11:30a on 03 May, 17 May, 14 June and 21 June in BEKI's Rosenkrantz Library.

To participate: Obtain your own text, "Mishna Tractate Berakhot," Kehati Edition (available in softcover) or another edition from any Judaica store, and call BEKI at 389-2108 to register. The registration fee is \$10 for BEKI members, \$18 for non-members. Read chapters 1 & 2 before the first class.

This class is part of [Torah for the Hungry Mind: Adult Education at Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel](#).

Medical Ethics: Struggling to be Ethical While Delivering Managed Health Care

The current health care environment can put a great deal of pressure on professionals' ethical standards. Practitioners' livelihoods can become dependent on their delivering what they believe to be substandard levels of care. Seemingly irrational and even inhumane regulations and restrictions may tempt providers to bend, ignore, or even flaunt rules and regulations they had no voice in establishing. Health care practitioners are invited to a discussion at BEKI on Sunday 10 May from 9:30a to 10:30a about these and related ethical issues that they confront in their work. Participants will try to develop principles and strategies to guide their behavior. For more information, call Marc Schwartz at 387-1665 or Rabbi Jon-Jay

Tilsen at 389-2108 or jjtilsen@aol.com.

AA Open Meeting at BEKI marks first anniversary

A weekly [AA Meeting](#) has been held at BEKI since May 1997. Open to any person who can benefit from a recovery program, the meeting is held according to standard AA procedure. This is not a specifically Jewish recovery group, although a large proportion of participants are Jewish. For information on the weekly meeting call Jay at (203) 387-6019 or email Jay at jay@jacsweb.org.

See [JACS: Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons, and Significant Others](#) for more information.

Bulletin Boards

Members and visitors have commented on the informative and beautiful bulletin boards gracing the hallway outside of our classrooms and in the administrative wing. Credit for these bulletin boards goes to our Kadima & USY Youth Groups and the United Hebrew School under the principalship of Terri Stern. Take a look.

Chess anyone?

If you are interested in a chess club for adults or children that might meet at the JCC or at BEKI please contact Rabbi Tilsen at 389-2108 ext. 10 or email to jjtilsen@aol.com.

LaG BeOmer

Come to our annual Lag B'Omer campfire and sing-a-long on Thursday 14 May 6:30-8:00 P.M. (after dinner)! Bring your musical instruments, favorite songsheets, and a kosher dessert or drinks to share, to the backyard of Janet Felton and Marty Gilens, 162 Cleveland Road, New Haven. Call Marty or Janet at 387-6050 for information or directions.

Interest in Preschool or Nursery School

Are you interested in a BEKI Preschool or Nursery School? Come to an exploratory meeting for all interested parties on Thursday 7 May 1998 7:30p in BEKI's Claire Goodwin Children's Room. If you're interested but can't attend the meeting, or if you would like additional information, please call Rabbi Tilsen at (203) 389-2108 jjtilsen@aol.com or Linda Buckman at (203) 397-8344.

LifeCycle

*HaMaqom Yinahem Etkhem: We Mourn the Passing of **Beatrice Schrouder**, mother of Sybil Richards Massaquoi*

May the memory of our departed be for a blessing

BEKI Welcomes A New Member

Gila Reinstein

Calling Singles & Matchmakers

If you might like to help organize, set up, or otherwise support a Singles Event in early August at BEKI please contact Rabbi Tilsen at (203) 389-2108 ext. 10 or jjtilsen@aol.com.

Danya Cheskis-Gold Bat Mitzva

Danya Cheskis-Gold, daughter of Martin Gold & Rena Cheskis-Gold, and granddaughter of Barzilai Gold, will lead services and be called to the Torah as a bat mitzva on Shabbat 9 May. Danya is a student at Ezra Academy. Her family is among the few families boasting two concurrent generations of BEKI members.

Adult "Bat Mitzva" Observance

On Shabbat 30 May 1998 BEKI member Yael Wertheimer will lead services and be called to the Torah as a bat mitzva. Although she became a bat mitzva a few years ago by virtue of reaching the age of majority, like so many adults she did not have the opportunity to celebrate that milestone. Now, after completing a given level in her studies as an adult, the Congregation will wish her mazal tov as she publicly and formally renews her commitment to live according to Jewish tradition and to participate in our worship services.

For more information contact:

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