



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

May 1999 -- Sivan 5759

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### David & Lillian Levine Memorial Established

**David & Lillian Levine** (of blessed memory) have been memorialized through the generosity of their children, **J. Paul & Deanie Levine** and **Richard & Nancy Levine** and their families, by the establishment of a fund to support BEKI's programs for adults and children with special needs. [The David & Lillian Levine Endowment for People with Special Needs at Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel](#) is managed by the [Jewish Foundation of Greater New Haven](#).

David & Lillian Levine (*pictured at left*) were lifelong leaders and members of the Congregation. Lillian, whose first yahrzeit is observed this month, was remembered for her many years of dedicated work managing the BEKI [Sisterhood Giftshop](#). David & Lillian created a loving and nurturing Jewish home for their children. J. Paul and Richard (may they



Photo of David and Lillian  
Levine

live and be well) and Robert (of blessed memory), and instilled in them a love of tradition and an appreciation of the importance of Jewish life and community for every person, including those with special needs. By supporting our Congregation's efforts to welcome and serve people with special needs, the Levine families honor the values and work of their parents.

BEKI is at the forefront of addressing the special needs of Jewish children and adults. Since 1983, the BEKI Sisterhood has hosted a [Special Needs Model Seder](#) for Adults with Special Needs in conjunction with the Jewish Family Service. In 1995, the Congregation initiated the [Talmud Torah Meyuhad \(TTM\) Special Education Hebrew School](#) as part of its religious school; it was the first program of its kind in the region. Tailored to the needs and abilities of each student, the TTM provides for a "protected" learning environment as well as for individualized degrees of "mainstreaming" in the context of the larger religious school which meets concurrently. The TTM program at BEKI, now supported and directed by the Department of Jewish Education, has continued to serve the special needs of our students. In 1997, the Congregation initiated the [Kulanu Ke'Ehad Havura](#) for adults with special needs, with major funding from a grant from the Jewish Foundation of Greater New Haven. Kulanu is directed by BEKI member Anne Johnston.

The Jewish Foundation of Greater New Haven manages the fund for the benefit of BEKI. This means that the Foundation provides professional investment management and affords the Congregation returns normally available only to very large investors. Returns the past four years have been about 22.0%, 24.6%, 16.8% and 6.6%. The Jewish Foundation observes a "spending policy" in line with other major philanthropic foundations. This means that each year the Foundation distributes to the beneficiary (BEKI) a fixed percentage (5.5%) of the value of the fund. Because the annual distribution is known well in advance the Congregation can plan its budget accordingly. The return on investment of the fund will, on average, be higher than the 5.5% distributed, and the additional income is reinvested in the fund. This means the fund principal can continue to grow slowly, keeping pace with inflation. In this way, the real value of the fund will be protected and it will continue to honor David & Lillian Levine's memory and support the BEKI programs in perpetuity.

Looking to the future, there has been much discussion about the need to make our synagogue building physically accessible to all by redesigning the washrooms and installing an elevator. In addition, there are plans, subject to the availability of grant and designated donor funds, to build on the success of the Kulanu project by developing programs for adults with disabilities stemming from serious chronic mental illness. And, finally, much still needs to be done to assure full funding of the existing programs into the next decades.

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## **Grand Reopening of BEKI's Rosenkrantz Library**

On 1 May, following Shabbat services and qiddush, there will be an open house at BEKI's Rosenkrantz Library to celebrate its renovation and renewal. The Library was originally established in 1960 through a gift of the Louis Rosenkrantz Family. Funds to support the revitalization of the Library were generously donated by Louis & Mary Gurian Rosenkrantz. The continuing operation of the Library is supported by annual distributions from [The Louis](#)

[& Mary Rosenkrantz Family Library Endowment](#) for BEKI which is managed by the [Jewish Foundation of Greater New Haven](#).

The goal of the Library will be to provide BEKI members, children, and staff with an informative and interesting collection of books and media that will add richness and depth to their lives as Conservative Jews. A primary focus of the collection will be children's books. Included in the collection will be fiction about Jewish life issues for pre-teens and teens and material for helping children prepare for their bar- or bat-mitzva observance. Books that parents or older children can read to very young children will also be added to the collection. Plans are being made to establish a young members' advisory committee to help in planning the children's collection.

The adult book collection will focus on Jewish culture and reference works. Topics will include Jewish history, religion, philosophy, etc. There will be a collection of Jewish reference books, such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, atlases, biblical translations and commentaries on the bible, siddur, law codes, and collections of responsa. The Library's collection of books and media on Jewish music and Jewish cooking will be expanded as will its literature collection.

Books will circulate, for the most part, on a self-serve basis. Members will be able to take out most books and return them without having to make a record of their borrowing. However, certain books, including new books, reference books, books in great demand, and rare books, will be charged out using a simple card system.

It is anticipated that donations of books and funds will help enlarge the Library's collection. The Library has already received some wonderful new books as gifts. These include:

- *Jewish Women in America, An Historical Encyclopedia* by BEKI member Paula Hyman and Deborah Moore. A two volume edition, already viewed as a classic.
- *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara* by David I. Kertzer (The true story of how the kidnapping of an Italian Jewish boy by a Catholic Inquisitor in 1858 contributed to the collapse of the Church's temporal power in Italy.)
- Six new Jewish Cookbooks including *The Great Chefs of America Cook Kosher*, *Jewish Cooking in America*, and *The Complete International Jewish Cookbook*.
- *Shylock and the Jewish Question* by Martin Yaffe. (Yaffe challenges the conventional view that Shakespeare, in the Merchant of Venice, is unfriendly to Jews. A difficult challenge.)
- *The Political Consequences of Thinking* by Jennifer Ring. (Gender and Judaism in the work of Hannah Arendt.)

The Library welcomes the donation of additional books or funds. Donations in the following areas are welcome:

- Jewish holidays and customs
- Books providing guidance about Jewish family life events
- Important topics in contemporary Jewish life
- Israel's history, geography, politics, society
- Biographies of leading Jewish personalities
- Jewish arts, crafts
- New adult fiction on Jewish themes or books written by Jewish authors

Donors are urged to keep in mind that the Library is run by volunteers who have limited time to evaluate and process book donations. For this reason, the Library requests that donors observe certain procedures:

1. The Library will accept only hard cover and high quality paper backed books in very good or excellent condition. The strong preference will be for new books. Used books that have been underlined or annotated will not be accepted.
2. Potential donors should contact the Library Committee before sending books to the library (or leaving them in the library) as this will relieve the committee members of the task of dealing with books that do not fit the library's needs.
3. The committee does not wish to offend any donors by rejecting books they have donated. However, donors should realize that the acceptance of books will depend on the needs of the collection and will be at the discretion of the Committee. The Chair of the Committee will notify donors of the Committee's decision regarding their donations. It would be appreciated if donors would include a self addressed envelope with their donation to facilitate this communication.
4. Unless the donor makes prior arrangements, donated books not accepted into the collection will be placed on a "donations" shelf in the Library for a month. If the donor does not retrieve the book from the donations shelf by the end of that time, the Library will deal with the book at its discretion. It is hoped that these procedures will not be perceived as unwelcoming. Donations will be greatly appreciated.

Activities planned by the Library Committee include children's story hours and book discussions for adults. It is anticipated that members of the congregation will periodically lead discussions about a book or paper they have written or a topic in their area of expertise. The Library hopes to establish a special section for books and papers written by congregants.

In making plans for the Library, committee members carried out surveys of various Jewish libraries in the community, interviewed area librarians, spoke to Religious School principal Terri Stern, and were guided by Rabbi Tilsen.

Rhoda Lemkin will be the BEKI librarian. Members of the Children's collection subcommittee are Mimi Glenn (chair), Stephanie Shteirman, Stan Wiener, and Margot Roten. Members of the Adult Collection subcommittee are Morris Cohen, Nanette Stahl, Paula Hyman, and Bennett Lovett-Graff. Other members of the committee are Rabbi Murray Levine, Shiela Gardner, and Amitai Sela. Marc Schwartz is Chair of the Committee.

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## **Singers' Circle**

Anyone who would like to be placed on the Singers' Circle e-mailing list should e-mail their request to Marc Schwartz at [marc@healthcalls.com](mailto:marc@healthcalls.com). Mailings include reminders of upcoming meetings of the Singers' Circle as well as other Jewish musical events, plans for the Singers' Circle, and other issues of interest to BEKI singers and listeners. For those

without email, notice of these events will appear on the BEKI bulletin board opposite the Sisterhood Giftshop and will appear in the BEKI Bulletin and mid-month mailings.

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## A Message from Rabbi Tilsen

### *Labor Rights & Jewish Law*

*Note: As this issue went to press, the death of Jewish Home Director Richard Wallace, missing since mid-March, was confirmed. We mourn the loss of this kind and dedicated community leader and family man. May the Almighty comfort all who mourn.*

The labor strike which loomed against Connecticut nursing homes held the attention of the BEKI community this past winter, particularly as it threatened to involve the Jewish Home for the Aged of New Haven. Many of our members come from families that have been allied with the labor movement and hold support for workers as a fundamental Jewish value. Indeed, several of our members work professionally as union organizers and advisors. Moreover, many are sympathetic to the claim that many nursing home workers are genuinely underpaid. The Jewish Home has come closer than most facilities to upholding the highest standard for fairness and ethics in negotiating with the unions. Even so, it is still felt that even there many workers are underpaid.

At the same time, the nursing homes -- especially the Jewish Home -- holds a place of special reverence in our tradition. It is a place of "healing," where life-sustaining medical and personal care is provided. The Home is also an institution that stands as a measure of the community's respect for our parents and our elders. Indeed, several BEKI members are associated with the Jewish Home as residents and their families, administrators, care providers and volunteers.

The rights of workers is in fact well-founded in *halakha* (Jewish law). Based on laws stated explicitly in Torah, Talmud, and law codes, workers have the right to bargain collectively, set hours of work, receive sick and disability pay, receive fringe benefits, secure a safe workplace, and strike. The community at large through proper authority and lawful individual effort is obligated to ensure these rights. It is prohibited to work as a scab or to take the job of a worker fired for participating in a strike.

The union involved in the nursing home labor dispute is by no account subject to *halakha*; the position of the Jewish Home in this respect is more ambiguous. But inasmuch as *halakha* expresses our vision of a just society, as Jews we ought to work to insure that these rights, recognized by American society as well, are safeguarded. Even more, as Jews we are bound specifically by the prohibition against working as "scabs," and by the obligation to extend all of these labor rights to our employees, even in a non-Jewish or mixed American context. (Once again, we see that you don't have to be Jewish to be Jewish, but it helps.)

The specter of a strike threat at the Jewish Home is especially difficult because two value-areas come into sharp conflict. While ultimately the immediate health and safety of the residents overrides other concerns, the issue remains: How can we honor our duties to respect labor rights while crossing the picket line?

The key to our dilemma -- and indeed the true arena of apparent conflict between the union and the nursing homes -- is in Hartford. Much of the funding for nursing homes comes through the State government, and it is the legislature that indirectly sets the wage scales for

nursing home workers. If we are to stand ready to cross picket lines in order to insure the very lives of Jewish Home residents, we must also stand ready to add our voices and votes to those calling for better funding for nursing homes in Connecticut. This is not meant to endorse a specific proposal, but it is meant to support significantly improving the level of service and wages in nursing homes. If we can spend \$750 million on a new sports stadium, we can allocate funds to insure a basic level of dignity to nursing home residents and fair wages to those who serve them.

The Jewish Home, unlike some other employers, cannot move their facilities to Mexico or Indonesia. But many manufacturers can, and for that reason alone we need to recognize that insuring labor rights is a global movement. We need to talk about labor rights not just as a civil right but as a human right. And this means here at home, even at our Jewish Home.

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## Shavuot Festival at BEKI

### Lag BeOmer Campfire and Singalong

A Campfire and Singalong will mark the evening of **LaG BeOmer** (the thirty-third day after Passover) on Tuesday 4 May 1999 from 6:30p to 8p (after dinner). The LaG BeOmer Kumistz will be hosted by Janet Felton and Marty Gilens, 162 Cleveland Road in Westville (near Forest).

Bring kosher drinks or desserts, a blanket to sit on, musical instruments, and your favorite songsheets. Please RSVP to Marty or Janet at 387-6050.

This event is hosted by Marty Gilens & Janet Felton, and sponsored by the [Morris & Sara Oppenheim Endowment for Sacred Music](#) at Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel.

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### 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 Thursday morning before Shavuot, 20 May, from 7:45a to 9:00a.

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 Thursday night 20 May following the 8:00p Festival Evening Service, there will be a late night of study featuring the teaching of leading scholars in our



area. Sessions include **Robert Forbes** (*pictured at left*), Executive Coordinator of the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance and Abolition, "The Chosen People in the Promised Land: Early Americans' Image of Israel & Self-Conception"; **Pamela Tamarkin Reis** (*pictured at*



*right*), independent Bible Scholar, "Date Rape or

Seduction: A Closer Look at Amnon and Tamar"; **Bennett D. Kottler**, Assistant Professor of Science Education and Environmental Studies, Southern Connecticut State University, on an environmental topic; **Gila Reinstein**, spokesperson for Yale University, on "Life *is* Beautiful, and Other Wisdom of Holocaust Survivors"; and more.

### **Yizkor Memorial Service**

A Yizkor Memorial Service will be held on Shabbat morning 22 May, 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, Friday night 21 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 the festival began. Also, this light should be lit before the Shabbat candles. It is also appropriate to offer tzedaqa (charity) before or immediately after the festival 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 Friday 21 May and Shabbat 22 May 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 Shabbat 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.

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## **Shavuot Siyyum Celebration, New Siddur Dedication and Benefit Dance**

**Ellen Cohen, Ann Green, Judy Hoberman, Tanina Rostain, Barbara Stern, and Shoshana Zax** will lead services, read from the Torah and recite the Haftora on Shabbat Shavuot 22 May 1999, in celebrating the conclusion of their year-long program of Torah study with **Amy Pincus**. The celebrants will present a *qiddush* reception for the congregation after the service.

The service will also mark the debut of the new edition of **Siddur Sim Shalom**, a Shabbat and Festival edition of the Conservative Movement's prayerbook. Nicknamed "Slim Shalom" for its handier size and lighter weight, the new siddur features more gender-inclusive language, clearer layout, and more transliteration. The new siddurim are presented as a gift to the Congregation by the celebrants and their families.

The celebration will continue in the evening at a **Spring Fling Benefit Dance**, Saturday 22 May from 9:15p to 12:30a, featuring a d.j. and desserts. Advance tickets are available through the BEKI office (389-2108 ext. 14, [beki@snet.net](mailto:beki@snet.net)) at \$15.00. Tickets will also be available at the door at \$25.00.

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## **Memorial Day Special Times & Hours**

Please note that the shaharit morning service on Monday 31 May will be from 9:00a to 9:45a. The Rashi Study Group will meet from 9:46a to 10:30a. The BEKI office will be closed. Minha afternoon service will be at its usual time, 5:45p. All other services and programs will be at their usual times.

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## **BEKI Sisterhood News**

Mark your calendars for the annual "[Book of Life](#)" luncheon on Tuesday, 22 June, at 12 noon. There will be wonderful food, great entertainment and we will honor Sisterhood's Woman of Valor for this year. President Adele Tyson advises that invitations will be going



out in the near future, and she requests speedy responses.

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## LifeCycle

*HaMaqom Yinahem Etkhem*: We Mourn the Passing of **Morris "Moishe" Schnitman**; and **Marilyn Shure Savin**, sister of BEKI member James Shure.

May the memory of our departed be for a blessing.

Mazal Tov to **Lauri & Isaiah Cooper** and **Jonah Cooper** on the birth of their son and brother **Daniel Moses Cooper** on Thursday 8 Nisan 5759 - 25 March 1999. May this be sign of blessing for all.

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## Kashrut Supervision at Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel

Catered affairs (such as the feasts following weddings and *benei mitzva* observances) held at BEKI are under the strict *kashrut* (kosher) supervision of Rabbi Tilsen. In most instances the food is prepared in the caterer's own kitchens under the supervision of another kashrut supervising agency. The delivery, preparation, plating and serving at BEKI is done under Rabbi Tilsen's supervision (either personally or through his qualified agents). Supervision is provided to insure kashrut (kosher) and Shabbat compliance.

The quality of our supervision meets or exceeds that of most agency-provided on-site supervision. In part this is because our mashgihim (supervisors) and their agency (i.e. BEKI) are independent with respect to the caterer, thus avoiding any conflict of interest or the appearance of such. This service is provided to BEKI members at a fraction of the cost (typically less than half) of what other agencies charge. Rabbi Tilsen does not personally receive payment for kashrut supervision.

Experience has shown that this supervision is absolutely essential to guaranteeing the provision of kosher food in a context that respects the sanctity and joy of the Sabbath according to strict Conservative standards. Supervisors have prevented potential serious compromise of kashrut in numerous cases. Recent incidents include a kitchen worker who brought his deli sandwich to heat in our oven during a dairy affair, and a worker who brought a cup of Dunkin Donuts coffee with cream into our kitchen during a meat affair. Items intended for other affairs have been mistakenly delivered to BEKI as well. This is said not to impugn the reputation of any particular caterer or kosher caterers in general, but rather to admit that mistakes can happen, and to recognize that we need to exercise a reasonable degree of care.

Our shul (Congregation) permits the serving of hot food on Shabbat and festivals, in accordance with Jewish law. In general, Jewish law prohibits cooking food on Shabbat, even when done in a mechanism set up before Shabbat, and even when done by a non-Jewish person on behalf of a Jew. Reheating food that is already cooked is, generally, permitted, so long as no fire is kindled or adjusted. An understanding of and respect for the rules and careful attention is necessary, therefore, when reheating food on Shabbat in accordance with

## Jewish law.

A maximum fee schedule is available from the BEKI office. The fee for hot meals is higher than for cold meals because the presence of heat adds a level of complexity for kashrut supervision and Shabbat compliance, and thus usually requires more supervision time; if the only hot item is tea, for instance, the actual supervision expense will usually not be significantly greater. The maximum fee for a meat meal is higher than for a dairy meal because meat supervision requires a higher level of scrutiny and thus more supervision time. The fees stated on the schedule are maximum fees for typical affairs; the sponsor pays only for the actual expense, which may be lower.

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For more information contact:

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