



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

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Capital Contribution Memorializes Goldsteins

A significant contribution has been made to honor the memory of **Herman and Edith Sokoloff Goldstein** by their son-in-law and daughter **Frank & Shirley Goldstein Frumento**. Herman & Edith Goldstein were members of the Congregation for more than a generation and are respected and well-remembered by our veteran members. Frank & Shirley operate Frumento Construction, and have directed their generous contribution to provide for vital improvements to the Synagogue structure that will benefit the entire Congregation for decades to come. In this way Frank & Shirley have honored the Goldstein's names and have taken their own place among the guardians of the Congregation's future.

A Message from Rabbi Tilsen

The Children of Neve Hanna

In Qiryat Gat, a developing town in southern Israel, there is a community -- a village -- for

children from severely dysfunctional families. These are children whose parents may be incarcerated for murder, drug dealing and prostitution. Many of these children had been subject to physical, sexual and psychological abuse. These are kids who could not make it with relatives, with foster parents or in other youth villages.

At Neve Hanna Children's Home these kids have a chance to grow up in "normal" families -- about a dozen kids per house, with one trained social worker staff "mom" and one "dad" per house. They learn to take care of themselves, to clean their room, do their homework, share their toys. They learn how to get along with others, how to resolve conflicts, how to accept and give love.

In so many cases, no matter how horribly the biological parents treated their kids, the kids dream of being reunited with their "real" parents. And no matter how difficult the kids are, with enough professional *and* loving care, most of them can grow up reasonably well "adjusted."

This year, while the Government transfers \$750 million unaccounted to the schools and Yeshivot operated by the "religious" parties, the kids of Neve Hanna don't get funds for toothbrushes. But no matter how underpaid and overworked the staff, no matter how they have to scrape by, the extraordinary staff and kids makes it work.

I first became aware of Neve Hanna about ten years ago when my classmate, a dedicated JTS Rabbinical student named Barry Dov Katz (now BEKI members Chyla Talesnick & Jeff Traubici's brother-in-law) volunteered to visit the kids each weekend and bring Shabbat, Torah, Traditions into their lives. He told them stories — the little engine that could, the bear who went over the mountain, along with more Jewishly traditional ones — that, although unfamiliar in Israeli culture, helped inspire them with a sense of self-worth, stories that gave them some of the tools to cope with the extraordinary challenges they face. Rabbi Katz, following in path worn by distinguished predecessors in the Conservative Movement, made sure that his classmates became aware of this important part of our Movement.

Since its inception Neve Hanna has maintained an ongoing relationship with the Conservative-Masorti Movement in Israel. These kids have Conservative Rabbis and teachers empowering them through the values and wisdom of our tradition. They are able to celebrate bar- and bat-mitzvas. Some even attend Camp Ramah in Israel.

Through the help of the Conservative-Masorti Movement these kids are getting more of a chance. A chance to experience a loving *Jewish* family, a chance to practice good dental hygiene, a chance to be raised as Jews with the beauty and joy of our Tradition. As a Conservative Jew you should be aware of what our Movement is doing in Israel. And as a Conservative Jew you can be proud of what our Movement is doing. You can feel even more proud if you yourself contribute to their success through your own tzedaka (philanthropy).

Contributions to help these kids can be earmarked through BEKI's Rabbi's Tzedaka Fund or by sending your check made to "American Friends of Neve Hanna" at 155 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010.

Dear Rabbi: Answers, Advice and Helpful Household Hints

Dear Rabbi,

I am a [non-Jewish] pre-operative Transsexual who is in my second year of what is referred to as the "real life test" (required two years of living as a women before surgery). There are references in the scriptures that my Jewish friends have trouble dealing with. Any help with these would be most appreciated.

Signed, B

Dear B,

One Biblical passage with direct bearing might be Deuteronomy 23:2: "No one whose testes are crushed or whose member is cut off shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord." That is usually understood to be a case of voluntary or accidental mutilation, and would not apply according to most authorities to cases due to birth defect or, according to some, due to disease. (See Rambam, Hilkhot Issurei Bi'a 16:9; Shulhan Arukh E.H. 5:10.) In halakha (Jewish jurisprudence) this law is understood to apply to Jews, but has no bearing on those not under the jurisdiction of Jewish law. As far as Jewish law is concerned, you are free to undergo that procedure if you wish, as long as the surgeon is not a Jew. Were you Jewish it would be difficult to find a basis for permitting the procedure. Other than a life-threatening situation such as cancer it would be difficult to claim medical necessity for this procedure under the usual definitions of Jewish law. On the other hand, psychological factors have been increasingly recognized in determining medical necessity in Jewish law, and this area of law continues to develop.

The punishment provided under Biblical law for a Jew who performs such surgery is lashing. Technically one could avoid this Biblical prohibition by using non-mechanical (i.e. chemical) methods, but this would still be viewed as "worthy of punishment by lashing" as a violation of the general rule against circumventing law. (See Rambam, Hilhot Issurei Bi'a 16:12.)

The Biblical consequence for a Jew of not being "admitted into the congregation of the Lord" means not being able to marry a Jewish woman. (See Mishna Yevamot 9:1-2.) Marriage to a woman who became Jewish by conversion or possibly a mamzeret (the progeny of certain forbidden unions) would be permitted. Presumably a Male-to-Female transsexual would not experience this limitation as a disability in any event. The subject may still be included in and can lead (yotsei others for) public performances such as birkat hamazon (grace after meals), hearing the shofar (ram's horn on Rosh HaShana), and reading the megilla (Book of Esther).

That is the legal "bottom line" with respect to that particular Biblical verse. On a philosophical level, one might wish that other less radical solutions to gender dysphoria might suffice. Many people are unhappy with their bodies -- too short, too fat, too tall, too ugly, the wrong complexion, and in this case, the wrong gender. At some point we have to be able to accept ourselves as God made us. On the other hand this does not mean that we can't try to overcome physical and psychological pain or disabilities. Some "elective" surgery is prohibited by Jewish law, particularly when it is life-threatening. Transsexual surgery has more implications than a "nose job," but many of the same considerations apply.

For an analysis of the verse Deuteronomy 22:5, "A man's item shall not be on a woman, and a man shall not wear a woman's garment; whoever does such a thing is an abhorrence unto Adonai," see my article ["Cross Dressing and Deuteronomy 22:5."](#) Again, though, it should be understood that this is meant to apply to a Jewish person.

Speakers in November

Marlo (*Mordekhai*) Palumbo, son of Ghislaine and Joseph Palumbo, brother of Darren, resides in Woodbridge. He attends Amity Junior High School in Bethany and enjoys soccer, skiing, baseball, computer games, riding All Terrain Vehicles and camping.

Marlo enjoys working on group projects, such as Scout activities when they collect for food baskets, helping his mother with Hadassah fund raisers and working with his father in his Lions Club local projects. He graduated from Religious School, belongs to USY and attends Makom.

Marlo loves to travel. Last year he drove with the family to Utah for an ATV Jamboree and saw spectacular canyons. This year the family flew to Australia for the Bar Mitzva observance of a cousin who he had not seen in 5 years, but keeps in touch via email. In Melbourne he went to his first Grand Prix as part of the Moomba festival (aboriginal for celebration) and the last week of that trip was spent at the Great Barrier Reef snorkeling and visiting the coastline rainforest and seeing the amazing native birds and animals. Marlo will be called to the Torah and lead services as a Bar Mitzva on Shabbat morning 8 November.

Aliza Kuperstock, daughter of David & Darryl Kuperstock, sister of Dina, resides in Woodbridge. Aliza will be called to the Torah and lead services as a Bat Mitzva on Shabbat morning 15 November.

Andrew "Drew" Alexander is a past-president of BEKI's [Men's Club](#) and currently a student in the Davidson School of Education at the [Jewish Theological Seminary of America](#). Drew will explicate the Torah portion of Hayei Sara on Shabbat morning 22 November during the 9:15a service.

Alef-Bet Workshop: Beginner's Hebrew with Rita

A Hebrew class for those who are just beginning will be taught by Rita Sela on six Thursday evenings beginning 6 November, 7:00p to 8:00p in Room 4. This class is for people who wish to learn to read the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, or who wish a refresher course in sounding ("decoding") written Hebrew. All are welcomed regardless of synagogue affiliation or religious identity. Pre-registration is requested (so that a textbook can be ordered for you), and the \$20 fee (\$30 for non-members) includes the textbook. For information or to register call 389-2108.

Hei-Vav: Advanced Beginner Hebrew with Ellen

A Hebrew class for Advanced Beginners will be taught by Ellen Jawitz on Wednesday evenings beginning 5 November at 8:00p. Pre-registration is requested, and there is a \$20 fee for BEKI members (\$30 for non-members). For information, or to register, or to learn the location of the class, call 389-2108.

Children's Library Acquisition

A three-volume set of books, *Torah Commentary for our Times*, by Harvey Fields (UAHC Press), has been acquired by the Ari Nathan Levine Library at BEKI, and is available for use

at BEKI in the Claire Goodwin Youth Room Resource Center. This set should provide an excellent resource for parents preparing for the [Children's Shabbat Havura](#) and [Junior Congregation](#).

What is the Rabbi's Tzedaka Fund?

The Rabbi's Tzedaka Fund is maintained to support families in need, provide educational materials for adults and children, and meet special needs of the shul and community. Contributions are tax-deductible and may be directed to the attention of Rabbi Tilsen. All gifts are appreciated and donations of \$25 or more are noted in the BEKI *Bulletin*.

Letters

Thank you for your kindness and thoughtful dinner for our family. Your sympathy in our recent loss will long be remembered and we deeply appreciate all that you have done.

Sincerely, Elsie & Lou Hodes & Family

Dear BEKI Community:

On behalf of our family, abundant thank yous for your outpouring of warmth, gifts, and help upon the birth of our third son, Jacob: A special thanks to all who helped David & Solomon continue to feel as special as they are!

Thank you sincerely, Jennifer Botwick, Michael Ries, David, Solomon, & Jacob

BEKI Sisterhood News

Reminder: Fall [Rummage Sale](#) on Sunday 2 November, 9a to 3p and Monday 3 November, 9a to - 1p. Setup is Thursday 30 October 7:30p. Mimi Kahn and Mikki Ratner need help for setup and during the sale. Offer your services.

Sisterhood's Paid-Up Supper is scheduled for Tuesday 4 November at 6p. This annual event is always enjoyable--good food, good program- details will be forthcoming. Pay your dues and come!

Mark your calendars for a Chanukah meeting on Monday 22 December.

Don't forget the Sisterhood [Gift Shop](#) for gifts. It is well stocked with many new items, including Judaic. And the wonderful Sisterhood cookbook is still available. There are gifts for all occasions. The Gift Shop is now open on Sunday mornings.

LifeCycle

Mazal Tov to

- Stewart Frankel & Joy Kaufman on their qiddushin, Jewish marriage under a huppa, on 31

August.

- Paul & Carole Bass on the qiddushin, Jewish marriage under a huppa, of Paul's father Milton Bass to Marlene Glantz, on 21 September - 19 Elul, and to Annie and Sarah Bass who served as *mesamhot hatan vekala*. Rabbi Tilsen officiated as *mesader qiddushin*.
- Grandparents Ivan & Rita Sachs, and to uncles and aunts Mark & Ilene Sachs and Kenneth & Linda Buckman, on the birth of their grandson and nephew, **Matthew Jordan Sachs**, to Howard & Linda Sachs on 31 August - 28 Av.
- Sara & Steven Stoll on the birth of their daughter **Batsheva Katriel Cece Labowe Stoll** on 18 September - 16 Elul, named at BEKI during Shabbat morning services.

BEKI Welcomes New Members & their Families who joined during September:

- Sheila Mondry
- Alan Rosner & Deren Manasevit
- Hanna & Sophie
- David Schwartz & Ellen Slopak-Schwartz
- Hanna Salowitz

Noah & Coby

- Phillip Simon & Deborah Libman
- Sam & Isabel

- Rachel Lovins

Daniel Kazer & Benjamin

- Howard & Willa Needler

Mark Needler

- Charlotte Noble
- Prof. Shulamith Scharfstein Chernoff
- Dr. Stephen & Sheryl Rothman

Danielle, Michael, Dayna & Mara

- Wendy Silver

Paul Angeloff, and Alexander & Rachel

- Herbert & Hanna Winer
- Rochelle "Shelli" Adoni

J. Adoni

- Ghislaine "Jessey" Palumbo

Joseph Palumbo, and Marlo & Darren

- Ronald Demakovsky & Teri Gallenstein

Leah and Josh

- David & Janet Golden

Rebecca

- Deborah Chernoff

- Yael Cohen

- Peter Lerner & Gwen Weltman

Netanya

- Dorothea Braginsky

- Barzillai Cheskis

- Robert Cohn

Matthew, Alex, Emma

- Lillian Silverman

- Jeremy Kasha

LeHitraot -- so long to members Jeff and Ellen Katz, and their children Alex & Jonathan, who have relocated to 61 Thurston Road, Newton, MA 02164, 617-244-1734. And to Stephen B. & Phyllis Selipsky selipsky@jdub.wustl.edu, Washington Univ. Dept. of Physics, (314) 935-4064, 1 Brookings Dr., Campus Box 1105, Saint Louis, MO 63130-4899. You are missed!

Study in Israel

If you or a family member are thinking of studying in Israel, or of financially supporting others to do so, consider the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem. The Yeshiva is open to men and women of all backgrounds. For information call (011-972) 2-625-6386, or (011-972) 2-625-6205 or fax (011-972) 2-623-4127. Tax-deductible contributions to this school can also be earmarked through the BEKI [Rabbi's Tzedaka Fund](#).

Computers needed

The United Hebrew School and BEKI offices are in need of several computers. 486-based units (or better), color monitors and laser printers can all be put to good use. If you or your company has used equipment to donate, please contact Rabbi Tilsen at 389-2108 or email jjtilsen@beki.org.

Purim Committee Forming

Purim will be observed Wednesday 11 March and Thursday 12 March 1998. If you would like to join the planning committee for the megilla readings or adult party, please contact Rabbi Tilsen at 389-2108 or email jjtilsen@beki.org.

For more information contact:

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203-389-2108

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