



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

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Simhat Torah Celebration

Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel is the place to be for the evening and morning of *Simhat Torah*. Festival Evening services begin at 6:00p on Thursday 23 October. Festival Morning services begin at 9:15a on Friday 24 October, and also include dancing. Goodie Bags will be presented by the Sisterhood to all the children at services evening and morning.

Tashlikh Service Redeems Beaver Ponds Park

This year the BEKI community will be observing Tashlikh at two locations. As in the past, Tashlikh will be held below the Edgewood Bridge in Edgewood Park. New this year, the Friends of Beaver Ponds Park and BEKI are holding Tashlikh at Beaver Ponds, at the bank of the eastern pond, known as the "lagoon," located near the corner of Crescent and Fournier Streets. This is the opposite side of the park from Southern and Jackie Robinson, and is just south of the Animal Shelter. Both services are at 5:00p on Thursday 2 October, before the 6:15p afternoon service in the BEKI Sanctuary.

In the Tashlikh ("expelling") service we stand near a body of water with prayers that our sins be "washed away." The liturgy, including Biblical readings and song, is intended to create a spiritual setting in which we are able to clear ourselves of unwanted thoughts and needs, so that we can progress in the process of Teshuva ("repentance").

To find out more about the [Beaver Ponds Project](#) contact Robert Forbes at 782-9101 robert.forbes@yale.edu. See an area [map](#) including BEKI and Beaver Ponds Park.

BEKI 2000 New Member Survey

A BEKI 2000 workgroup has completed a survey of the members who have joined the synagogue within the past three years. The survey was designed to help us understand more about what attracted new members to the synagogue, and how they learned about the synagogue. By doing this, we hope to be able to develop insights as to how we could attract additional members in the future.

The survey was sent to 45 new members, and 22 returned the survey. We considered this to be a very good response rate, particularly given the difficulty of reaching people at this time of year.

The survey painted an interesting picture of our new members who participated in the survey.

- 95% are married
- 90% are between the ages of 30 and 49
- 86% were born Jewish (66% of the married members have a spouse born Jewish)
- 77% have children
- 60% of the members or their spouses are affiliated with Yale
- 60% have lived in the New Haven area 11 or more years
- 40% keep kosher at home
- 40% were unaffiliated before they joined BEKI (20% were affiliated with Hillel)

When we turn to looking at what drew our new members to BEKI, we also find some interesting information:

- 68% learned about BEKI from their friends
- 77% rated "Atmosphere" as being very important in their decision to join BEKI

- 54% rated "Location" as being very important in their decision to join BEKI
- 40% rated "Hebrew School" as being very important in their decision to join BEKI

When asked about the importance of various BEKI activities to them today:

- 68% rated "Shabbat morning service" as being very important
- 54% rated "High Holiday services" as being very important
- 45% rated "Hebrew School" as being very important

The BEKI 2000 committee wishes to extend its thanks to all the new members who participated in the survey. We will be using this information to help plan and focus our membership and marketing efforts in the future. More detailed information will be provided in future bulletins and other communications from the BEKI 2000 committee. As always, we warmly welcome your thoughts and comments, and even more, your volunteer time! Please feel free to contact John Weiser, Rob Leikind, or Sid Levine if you are interested in learning more, in giving us your thoughts, or in volunteering your time.

Calling all Ramahniks and Ramahnuks

Join fellow campers as Camps Ramah celebrates its fiftieth year on Shabbat Shuva, Saturday 4 October, beginning 9:15a. Campers will be honored during the service.

Yizkor Service on Shemini Atseret

There will be a Yizkor Memorial Service on the Festival of Shemini Atseret, the morning of Thursday 23 October. During that memorial service individual and communal prayers and remembrances will be offered for all of our departed loved ones. It is also appropriate to light a memorial candle before the onset of the Holy Day the previous evening.

A Message from Rabbi Tilsen

Relics for the Future

Behavioral ecologist Dr. Richard Cross compared the populations of ground squirrels living in California to those in Alaska. When exposed to a rattlesnake, the California squirrels exhibit defensive behaviors -- throwing dirt, fluffing up their tail, approaching with caution. In contrast, the Alaskan squirrels seemed "unable to recognize the threat of a rattlesnake...even after being bitten repeatedly."

It is easy to understand the lack of caution in the latter group, since Alaskan squirrels have not had to face rattlesnakes in the past three million years. What is remarkable is that the California squirrels instinctively exercise caution, even though they have not been exposed to rattlesnakes in the past 70,000 or more years. The behavior of the California snakes is termed "relict" behavior, in that it is an instinctive reaction that is maintained in the species long after the need for it has vanished. (New York Times, 24 December 1996, sec. C.)

It has often been commented that human civilization transmits behaviors that might have made sense at one time but are now destructive. The cultural reinforcement and biological urge to reproduce endlessly had a certain logic when child and adult mortality rates were much higher, but today most societies that promote rapid population growth are in serious trouble.

It has been argued that the continuing practice of legally identifying as Jews those born to a Jewish mother but not a Jewish father is such a "relict" behavior. The conventional explanation is that in the old days one could not definitively tell who the father was, so such an important status question could be decided only by the mother's identity which could be known for certain. When intermarriage was not an issue, this rule of matrilineal descent made perfect sense and was unquestioned. In our day, however, we can definitively identify the father (through DNA or other tests), and we believe as a matter of principle that a man's role in shaping his children's identity should be no less important than a woman's.

The conventional explanation for limiting Jewish legal status to matrilineal descent may have missed the mark. A recent news report provides a striking illustration of the power of the alternative principle of patrilineal descent. "Through a policy of genocidal rape, nationalist Serbs are using reproduction to lay claim to Bosnian and Croatian territory," according to press reports on the work of Beverly Allen, a scholar at Syracuse University. "The rapists claim the babies are Serbian, and therefore, the land they populate would become part of Serbia."

This same thinking may very well have been prevalent in the ancient and not-so-ancient Middle East, and our own rule of matrilineal descent -- probably implemented during the period of Roman military occupation of Israel -- may have been created for this very same defensive reason.

Like the defensive instinct of those California squirrels, our traditional culture contains elements that lay dormant until we need them. Many a Jew has abandoned synagogue community, worship and ritual when they are strong, healthy, young and busy, only to return to them later in time of need. Like the squirrel's instinct in reacting to the rattlesnake, our Jewish survival skills can help us when we face our own "rattlesnakes," no matter how unexpected. But for the synagogue and Jewish ritual resources to be there in time of need, steps must be taken even when we do not feel a pronounced need. As we enter this season of *teshuva* (repentance), let us examine our own behavior, to see which relics are worthy of maintaining

and which are worthy of ending. And as we meet the extraordinary challenges of a rapidly changing world, let us keep our eyes on our synagogue and our storehouse of traditions as a source of accumulated wisdom. When those snakes appear, you'll be ready.

Dear Rabbi: Answers, Advice and Helpful Household Hints

Dear Rabbi,

I learned giving gifts is not permitted on Shabbat. If this is so, how can people bring food to other people's house on shabbat, if they are giving it? Religious people do that all the time.

Signed, Don't Give a...gift

Dear Don't Give,

If food is brought, it is usually understood as sharing, as the food is served that day. For other items, one might legally accomplish the gift by having a third party accept the gift on behalf of the recipient before Shabbat (as one can usually accept something on behalf of someone, even without their knowledge, if it is something they would want). Don't worry about it too much.

Sukka Set Up

The BEKI sukka will be set up on Sunday morning 12 October beginning at 9:30a (immediately after the 9:00a morning service). Folks of all ages and genders are invited to join the Men's Club in this annual ritual. As UHS does not meet that morning, older children may enjoy this as an alternate activity. Help will also be needed to take the sukka down after the festival on Sunday 26 October at 9:30a.

Children's Sukka Crafts Hour

BEKI and neighborhood kids are all invited to the BEKI sukka for crafts and fun on Monday 13 October from 4:30p to 5:30p. The program will be held outside in the sukka unless it rains, in which case we'll be inside. Dress accordingly. Please feel free to invite friends and neighborhood children with their adults to join us and help decorate the BEKI sukka! Children are welcomed to take home their creations or leave them in the sukka. This year the Children's Sukka Crafts Hour is sponsored in Memory of Malka Levine by Rabbi Murray Levine and Family.

Build Your Own Sukka!

Building a sukka can be fun for the whole family, and it's a mitzva! If you've always wanted to build your own, now is the time. Sukkah Kits are available from Steve Henry Woodcraft at 919-489-7325. Members of the [Men's Club](#) can be available to help a little, too.

Hosannah! Hosannah!

The Hoshana Rabba ("Great Hosannah") morning service this year occurs on Wednesday 22 October. This is one of the most colorful, fun and tactile services of the year, featuring seven circuits around the shul with lulav and etrog and the hoshana service in which willow twigs are beaten on the chairs. Special holiday melodies make this an unforgettable spiritual experience. Be sure to come as this is a service for all ages. Hoshana Rabba service begins Wednesday 22 October at 7:00a and concludes by 8:30a.

Letters

Dear Fellow Members:

Thank you very much for having Stanley Saxe bring a Shabbos Dinner to my home. The thoughtfulness of sending me this dinner makes me very proud to be a member of BEKI.

Most sincerely, Hyla Greenberg.

I wish to express my thanks and appreciation shown to me when my brother Norman passed away. Your thoughtfulness was much appreciated.

Milton Smirnoff

Need a letter for Employer or School?

Shul members occasionally need letters to employers or principals explaining the nature of the Jewish holiday observance. Despite the high level of understanding in our community, there is still a need for

education and information. It is important that our children be in shul for all of Yontiff.

If you would like such a letter for Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, or Sukkot, contact Rabbi Tilsen at 389-2108 (jjtilsen@beki.org).

Can we talk?

Rabbi Tilsen will join [Anti-Defamation League](#) Director Robert Leikind and ADL staff Barbara Cushen and Helen Ross (all of whom are BEKI members) for an evening of Dialog between representatives of various movements in an effort to foster and model respectful communication. "Praying Before the Wall and About Ourselves: Conservative, Orthodox and Reform Rabbis Discuss their Differences During the Days of Awe" will be moderated by Rabbi Eric Polokoff and will feature the dialog between Rabbis Herbert Brockman, Michael Whitman and JJTilsen. The program of *intrafaith* dialog will be held on Sunday night 5 October at 7:30p at the JCC. For more information call the ADL office at (203) 772-1300.

Can we talk!

According to SNET, about 650 phone calls were made to BEKI in May 1997. That is over 30 phone calls per business day. The office is open 27 hours per non-holiday week. And that doesn't include the calls the office (including the Rabbi) made to others. Educated guesses put our phone traffic at more than double that figure in September.

Men's Miqva for Yom Kippur

A group of Jewish men of the BEKI [Men's Club](#) will meet at the New Haven Miqva (86 Hubinger Street) on Friday morning 10 October before Yom Kippur anytime from 7:40a to 9:15a to immerse individually in the miqva in preparation for Yom Kippur. The miqva experience is one way to help us enter a heightened state of purity and spiritual awareness as we work toward teshuva and transformation on Yom Kippur.

Those who would like to participate should bring a \$5 user fee (cash or check payable to "New Haven Mikvah"), a towel and comb. For more information call Rabbi Tilsen at 389-2108 (jjtilsen@beki.org) or find it on our [map](#).

BEKI Sisterhood News

A very Happy, Healthy and Rewarding New Year to all! May it be a year of Peace and Love.

Here are some dates to remember -- mark your calendars!

Sisterhood's [Annual Fall Rummage and Tag Sale](#) will take place on Sunday, 2 November, 9a to 3p, and on Monday 3 November, 9a to 1p. Set up will be on Thursday 30 October at 7:30p. Please offer your help to Mimi Kahn, 387-8105, or Mikki Ratner, 387-7882. They will appreciate it. Bring merchandise for the sale to the synagogue on Mondays through Thursdays, 9a to 3p. All clothing should be in good condition, clean, and suitable for fall and winter weather.

Sisterhood's Paid up Membership Supper will be held on Tuesday 4 November at 6p. The food is always great and the entertainment enjoyable. Pay your dues promptly! If you're not yet a member, JOIN!

Please remember Sisterhood's [Gift Shop](#) when you need a gift for any occasion. Sisterhood president, Adele Tyson, advises that the shop has been well stocked with many beautiful new items. Starting the latter part of October, the shop will be open Sunday mornings from 11a to 12:30p. The gift shop has many yarmulkes and talitot. If you need a large quantity of skull caps in a special color for a special event, tell Adele (389-9599) in ample time and she will order them for you. Patronize the Gift Shop!

LifeCycle

*HaMaqom Yinahem: We Mourn the Passing of **Norman Smirnoff**, brother of *Milton Smirnoff*, **Ralph Chorney**, father of *Betsy Rosenberb*.*

There will be a Hanuqat Matseva Gravemarker Dedication ceremony for Louis Goodwin of blessed memory at 11:30a on Sunday 26 October 1997 at Beth El Memorial Park cemetery in Hamden.

Mazal Tov to **April & Matthew Lieberman** on the birth of their daughter **Tennessee May Lieberman** on Wednesday 13 August (10 Av).

Mazal Tov to **Chyla Talesnick & Jeffrey Traubici** on the birth of their daughter **Yona Adina Traubici** on Wednesday night 27 August (25 Av).

Mazal Tov to **Arthur & Betty Levy** on the birth of their first grandchild **Jacob Abraham**.

Qohelet to be read

Selections from the Biblical Book of Qohelet ("Ecclesiastes") will be read on the festival morning of Shabbat 18 October during the 9:15a service. Qohelet, attributed by tradition to King Solomon in his old age, is a "wisdom" book that many see as being out of step with the rest of the Torah. While it includes such well-known passages as "To everything there is a season," it also contains statements that to some seem cynical or at times almost nihilistic. The Book will be chanted according to its beautiful and ancient melody.

Speakers in October

Stephen Wizner (pictured at right) teaches law at Yale University and is the BEKI Treasurer. Stephen lives with his wife Rachel in Westville. He will be the *darshan* (Torah discussion leader) on Shabbat morning 4 October during the 9:15a service.



Paul Bass is the associate editor of the [New Haven Advocate](#) and active member of BEKI's [Men's Club](#). Paul lives with his wife Carole Bass and children Annie and Sara in Westville. Paul will speak at the 8:00p service on Friday 31 October.

Library Acquisitions

The BEKI Library has acquired a set of fifty "B'kol Echad" songbooks, edited by Cantor Jeffrey Shiovitz and published by the [United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism](#). This 122 page compact songbook contains Shabbat Blessings, Shabbat Z'mirot, Grace After Meals, Shirim, and Songs of Israel. The set will be available for use at Friday night dinners, simchas, children's and other programs that take place on BEKI premises. The books are part of the Ari Nathan Levine Children's Library in the in the Claire Goodwin Youth Room. Please make sure to return all books to the labelled shelf after use.

What to Wear for the Holy Days

It is customary to wear a *tallit* (prayer shawl) during all morning and musaf services and during the Kol Nidre service on the eve of Yom Kippur. This is the only evening on which we normally wear a *tallit*. Those who wish to wear a tallit are encouraged to bring their own or to purchase one through the Sisterhood Gift Shop of another fine Judaica store.

Social Hall Renovation

Installation of wall, ceiling, and lighting improvements planned for the synagogue's lower Social Hall and lobby could be completed by the end of this coming January, in time to host many of the bar and bat mitzvah celebrations anticipated in the coming months. (There are sixteen benei mitzva celebrations this next year at BEKI!)

Interior designer and BEKI member **Lynn Brotman** has offered to contribute her professional expertise to the project. She is working with a small committee of individuals who will come up with the final

renovation plan for presentation to the Board. The committee will also be assisted by lighting designer **Ron Eichorn**.

The BEKI [Sisterhood](#) has decided to support the project. A pledge of \$5,000 for the project has been received from an individual donor.

A fundraising committee consisting of parents whose children are approaching benei mitzva had, by the end of August received additional commitments of over \$2,000 from BEKI parents. The committee will continue making appeals as needed.

Those interested in participating in or contributing to the Social Hall project should call **Helen Rosenberg at 389-9594**.

For more information call or write to:

**Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel
85 Harrison Street
New Haven, CT USA 06515-1724
203-389-2108**

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