

# OR ZARUA

Congregation

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## NAHAMU, NAHAMU: A Summer of Heat and of Warmth

By Ron Meyers

Intimate relationships are complicated, and often produce as much heat as warmth. The relation between God and Israel is no exception.

The Bible is a long account of God and Israel passing through many cycles of anger and love, punishment and reconciliation. The biblical description of God's attributes (Exodus 34:6-7), which we recite as one of the major refrains in the High Holy Day liturgy, describes the poles of the relationship very clearly. It affirms God's boundless kindness—"the Lord, the Lord, merciful and gracious, slow to anger...Who preserves kindness to the thousandth generation...and cleanses." But it also reminds us that He "does not cleanse completely, recalling iniquity...to the third and the fourth generations."

During the summer, our holidays and readings map the entire landscape between God's mercy and God's strict reckoning. We begin the season with Shavuot, our celebration of the giving of the Torah. After the travesty of the golden calf and the God's punishment for it, the Revelation itself became a cycle of reckoning and forgiveness. After the second, successful, giving of the Law, the nation carried out a stunning program of building the tabernacle, in glorious unity with God. Later in the summer, we reach Tishe'ah B'Av, the endpoint of the long tabernacle narrative. On this date we lost both temples, which had provided a fixed and permanent home for the tablets of the Law, after they had been

carried in the tabernacle to the Promised Land. Tradition holds that the destruction was a result of God's judgment against our ancestors, for apostasy and civil strife.

So intense is the sorrow and shame of Tishe'ah B'Av that we spend three weeks building up to it with the three "haftarot of rebuke." These readings on the mid-summer Shabbatot contain some of the most scathing prophetic statements about Israel's shortcomings. But then, once the horrendous climax of Tishe'ah B'Av has passed, the rebuke is soothed with seven "haftarot of consolation." "Nahamu, nahamu," Isaiah tells us, "take comfort, comfort, for God will bring our punishment to an end, God will forgive."

The unforgiving heat of the summer trails off through the seven weeks of consolation, which deliver us directly to the High Holy Days. As in the statement of God's attributes, where sin is remembered for a few generations but goodness for a thousand, the three weeks of rebuke are calmed by a much longer period of consolation. By the time the Holy Days come around, we edit the attributes and recite only the positive ones in our services. The weeks of comfort focus our belief and hope in God's mercy. And the prior weeks of rebuke—and perhaps the trials of the waning year—have given us all the reminder we need of God's harsh judgment.

The waxing and waning of the summer heat carries us through a liturgical tour of the cosmic drama between man

and God. As the new year arrives in the fall, cooler heads look to the promise of comfort, redemption, and new beginnings.

### TISHE'AH B'AV SERVICES

*Erev Tishe'ah B'Av*

Reading of Eikha

*Saturday evening, August 9*

Service—9:00 p.m.

*Sunday morning, August 10*

Shaharit—8:45 a.m.

*Sunday evening, August 10*

Minhah/Ma'ariv—7:30 p.m.

### "WELCOME HOME TO OR ZARUA" SHABBAT

Saturday, September 6

We will greet prospective members and welcome existing members back to Or Zarua from their summer vacations at a "Welcome Home" Shabbat on September 6. Please invite friends who may be interested in joining our community! Services begin at 9:00 a.m., and a sumptuous kiddush will follow.

ק"ק אור זרוע  
CONGREGATION

**OR  
ZARUA**

A CONSERVATIVE SYNAGOGUE  
FOUNDED 1989

127 EAST 82ND STREET  
NEW YORK, NY 10028  
phone: 212-452-2310 fax: 212-452-2103  
www.orzarua.org

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# FROM THE LIBRARIAN

By Barry R. Feldman

Presented with an unwelcome challenge—I was asked to teach a three-session “mini-course” on American Jewish history—my initial reaction was to refuse. What events would I eliminate? Which periods would be discarded to Feldman’s dust bin of history? Which personalities would make the circle of discussion? Additional clarification posed a second challenge: to supply a bibliography with emphasis on New York City Jewry, not to exceed eight volumes which were easily available at libraries and bookstores and did not include periodicals or professional readings? The participants wanted a survey course that would help them negotiate a few months of leisurely, but scholarly, reading. I agreed. The challenge now became whittling down a vast cadre of readings to several volumes—a task that would occupy a few hours of consideration and indecision.

I would like to share my reading recommendations with you. (Note that I avoided the eight volume limitation by offering alternatives.) Together these texts offer insights and interpretations of American Jewry from colonial New Amsterdam to the present. While most of them were written several years ago, I do not believe this diminishes their accuracy and timeliness. Some of these books are available at the Oz Zarua library. Please share with me other books you would add to this list.

1. *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880-1950*, Jenna Weissman Joselit, Hill and Wang, 1994
2. *World of Our Fathers*, Irving Howe, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976
- 2a. *The Promised City: New York’s Jews, 1870-1914*, Moses Rischin, Harvard University Press, 1960
3. *Documentary History of the Jews in the United States, 1654-1875*, Morris U.

- Schappes, Citadel Press, 1950
4. *The Americanization of the Synagogue*, Leon D. Jick, Brandeis University Press, 1992
  5. *New York Jews and the Quest for Community: The Kehillah Experiment, 1908-1922*, Arthur A. Goren, Columbia University Press, 1979
  6. *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American Jewish Life*, Mordecai M. Kaplan, Schocken, 1967
  - 6a. *A Modern Heretic and a Traditional Community: Mordecai M. Kaplan, Orthodoxy, and American Judaism*, Jeffrey S. Gurock and Jacob J. Schacter, Columbia University Press, 1998
  7. *Americanization in the Making*, Jonathan Sarna, Yale University Press, 2004
  - 7a. *Zion in America*, Henry L Feingold, Dover Publications, 2002
  - 7b. *The Emergence of Conservative Judaism*, Moshe Davis, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1963
  - 7c. *Reminiscences*, Isaac Mayer Wise, second edition, Central Synagogue, 1945
  - 7d. *American Jewish Orthodoxy: A Historical Perspective*, Jeffrey S. Gurock, KTAV, 1996
  8. *The American Rabbinate: A Century of Continuity and Change, 1883-1983*, edited by Jacob Rader Marcus and Abraham J. Peck, KTAV, 1985

## OZY SHABBAT SERVICES

During the months of July and August, children’s Shabbat services will be divided into two groups: one for ages 2 through 6 and one for all other school-aged children.

## OZ YOUTH

If you are in the 11th or 12th grade and would like to help out during the High Holy Days, please email Ilana Burgess at [ilana@orzarua.org](mailto:ilana@orzarua.org).

## OZ Committee Chairs

ADMINISTRATION	Alan Ilberman
AESTHETICS	Aaron Shelden
BOOK DISCUSSION	Reed Schneider
BUILDING	Diane Okrent
CEMETERY	Andrew J. Frackman Mort Schwartz
DEVELOPMENT	Mimi Alperin
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HEVRA KADISHA	Vera Silver Gerry Solomon
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OROT	Ron Meyers
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PURIM SPIEL	Arthur Rosenbloom Bonnie Maslin Tibor Feldman Barbara Sassoon
SCHOOL	Betsy Dizengoff
TORAH/HAFARAH	Yaakov Shechter
WEBMASTER	Jay Palmer

If you would like to serve on a synagogue committee, please contact the office for the committee chair’s email address.

# Tradition and Modernity

By Diane Okrent

*The following essay won the Me'ah Essay Contest and was printed in the Me'ah Graduation Program, May 18, 2008.*

Every Friday night, I light Shabbat candles in tall brass candlesticks that my great-grandmother brought to America 100 years ago this spring. She was still using them 43 years later when I, her first great-grandchild, was born.

What would she think of me now, her candle-lighting, tallit-wearing, Torah-reading great-granddaughter? I like to think that she would be pleased to see me perpetuate the Jewish values she came here to preserve and, at the same time, integrate tradition and modernity.

To me, Me'ah has been about integrating tradition and modernity. We have studied biblical texts with reverence and, at the same time, learned about modern scholarship that suggests many authors. We have studied the earliest literature of our people and learned some of the underlying meanings and their applications to our modern lives. Now, when I read Torah or daven from the siddur, I have a better understanding of how the ancient traditions have been passed down to us and modernized along the way.

The semester on Rabbinics was the most amazing as we began to understand how the Rabbis, in the Mishnah, created a religion out of the ashes of the Second Temple, believing that it was possible to have a viable and robust form of Judaism without the Temple and sacrifices. The class on Pesah was especially engaging as we studied the passages of the Mishnah that appear virtually unchanged in our modern haggadot. The Rabbis sought to make Passover a meaningful experience without sacrifice while keeping the hope of liberation alive. As I prepare for Passover, I not only serve our traditional foods but I can bring to the table my new

understanding of the ceremony itself. My seder, as a result, combines both tradition and modernity.

The Medieval semester only heightened my respect and admiration for our people who survived wave after wave of gruesome anti-Semitism, and yet flourished. We learned about the Rambam who codified the law and presented an organization of the Talmud into conceptual themes. In essence, making the tradition more accessible to the modern Jew. And, we studied Rashi whose explanations of Torah are still relevant today.

The Modern period was the easiest to relate to as it led directly to our grandparents' histories. The trajectory from tradition to modernity accelerated with the Enlightenment in Germany and in Eastern Europe and led to the development of Reform, Modern Orthodox and Conservative Judaism. And, the history of anti-Semitism and grueling poverty led so many to Israel and to America—including my great-grandmother.

My great-grandmother was always an Orthodox Jew. She died before my first birthday but I have learned that this

exclusively Yiddish-speaking traditionalist had her own ways of adapting to modern American society. She would proclaim, "To visit a bubbe, you can travel on a holiday!" Her son, my great uncle, was our family's first Conservative Jew. His nieces and nephews (my father among them) followed his example and brought up their families in Conservative congregations. This same great uncle gave me his mother's candlesticks when I got married.

In my lifetime, Conservative congregations have evolved and continue to integrate tradition and modernity. A little more than 40 years ago, I was the first in my family to become a Bat Mitzvah, albeit on a Friday night. Now in our egalitarian, yet traditional congregation, I wear a tallit, read Torah, and chant Haftarah.

I think my great-grandmother would be pleased to see her candlesticks still in use 100 years after she brought them here. She would be especially pleased to know that I maintain Jewish traditions while embracing modernity.

Me'ah has enabled me to continue my Jewish education and enhance my personal integration of tradition and modernity.

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## Or Zarua Book Discussions

Our next book for discussion at Or Zarua will be *The Septembers of Shiraz*, Dahlia Sofer's recently published novel of a Jewish family's difficulties in Iran after the Islamist Revolutionary Guard overthrew the Shah. We will meet in the Or Zarua library Sunday, September 14 at 7:30 p.m. Mark your calendar with these other discussion dates in the fall: October 26 and December 14.

Our reading in 2007-08 included the following titles:



*The Yiddish Policemen's Union*  
by Michael Chabon

*Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life* by Sari Nusseibeh

*Jews and Power* by Ruth Wisse

*The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million* by Daniel Mendelsohn

*The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit*  
by Lucette Lagnado

If you have book recommendations or questions about our book discussions, please contact Reed Schneider at arlm1199@aol.com.

# Annual Meeting and Election of Board

The 2008 Or Zarua Annual Meeting and Election were held on Tuesday, May 20, preceded by a festive picnic in the social hall. The business meeting included reports from retiring President Michael W. Schwartz and Treasurer Morton Z. Schwartz and the election of officers and members of the Board of Trustees.

Congratulations to the following newly elected officers and members of the Board of Trustees:

Andrew J. Frackman, *President*

*Vice Presidents*

Alan D. Ilberman, *Administration*

Diane Okrent, *Facilities*

Marc D. Ashley, *Legal*

Brett Cohen, *Membership*

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Morton Z. Schwartz,

*Trustee Emeritus*

Andrew Frackman has rejoined the board this year.

The new trustee is Susan Lorin. The Congregation expresses its sincere thanks to Joseph Allerhand and Elizabeth Goldberg who retired from the board after many years of dedicated service.

Rabbi Wechsler spoke about Or Zarua's history and his hopes for its future. Both Rabbi Wechsler and Andrew Frackman, the president-elect, thanked Michael Schwartz for his wonderful leadership and dedication during the past three years. In appreciation, the Congregation presented him with what has become the traditional gift to the outgoing president—a clock—representing the gift of time.

Andrew Frackman outlined some of the challenges he sees facing the Congregation in the next few years, chief among them being the need to expand membership.



CONGREGATION OR ZARUA

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## REGISTRATION FOR HEBREW SCHOOL

Or Zarua's Hebrew School begins on Monday, September 8, 2008. Registration for both returning and new students is now open. Classes will meet as follows:

Kindergarten	Tuesday
1st Grade	Thursday
2nd Grade	Monday and Wednesday
3rd Grade	Monday and Wednesday
4th Grade	Monday and Wednesday
5th Grade	Monday and Wednesday
6th Grade	Tuesday and Thursday
Grades 7-12	Monday, 6-8 p.m.

For a registration form, please contact Ilana Burgess at 212-452-2310, extension 15 or [ilana@orzarua.org](mailto:ilana@orzarua.org).