



Congregation

OR ZARUA

NEWSLETTER / VOLUME 21:1

ELUL / TISHRI / HESHVAN 5769

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2008

Study Talmud with Rabbi Wechsler

By Jay Palmer

To say that Judaism is rooted in the Torah is unquestionably true, but studying the Torah alone can't possibly explain Judaism as we know it. At the time of the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., and in centuries thereafter, there were divergent streams within the Jewish community. The one which prevailed, and which we inherited, is commonly referred to as Rabbinic Judaism, so named because it reflects the Torah as understood by the rabbis—that is, by those sages whose discussions are preserved in the Talmud. To say that Judaism cannot be fully understood without exposure to the Talmud is an understatement of the highest order. Because

the Talmud has played, and continues to play, such a central role in the development of Judaism, it's tragic that familiarity with the Talmud is not the norm in much of the Jewish community.

Of course, it is not all that surprising that so many in our community haven't studied the Talmud. To be blunt, linguistic problems aside (the text of the Talmud is primarily Aramaic, a language with which few are familiar), the Talmud is enormously complex and is not the kind of work which one simply picks up and reads as one would a conventional book. In fact, the Talmud is about as far from being a conventional work as one could imagine. It is not, as many imagine, a code of law; it is, in essence, a record of discussions amongst rabbis covering all aspects of life, from the mundane to the sublime, including both spiritual matters and those which we would consider just the opposite, such as torts and civil law. To the rabbis, however, the range of subjects comprising the whole of human life and endeavor was just that—parts of a whole. For the rabbis there wasn't the kind of distinction which moderns make between the spiritual and the secular. The Torah is the source of those principles upon which all aspects of our lives are based; determining the way in which those principles are to be applied, however, was the massive undertaking to which the rabbis devoted their lives.

Studying Talmud puts to rest the oft-held image of the rabbis as a monolithic group of elderly, white-bearded sages gen-

tly discussing the law. In the Talmud one meets a fascinating array of individuals whose personalities come vividly to life—and whose lives cover the broad expanse of human experience. In it one discovers firebrands for whom the preservation of the Jewish people in exile is an all-encompassing passion; one encounters their humor and their foibles; one witnesses the rabbis' regard for one another as well as their egos; and, so central to an understanding of the Talmud, the student is exposed not only to the prevailing rulings, but also to the minority views, preserved with the same care as are those of the majority.

continued on page 9

IN THIS ISSUE

President's Message.....	2
High Holy Days	3
Congregational Services	3
OZ Youth Services.....	3
Sukkot.....	4
Eating in the Sukkah.....	4
Etrogim and Lulavim.....	4
Rabbi David Silber Lecture.....	4
Selihot	4
High Holy Days Alternate Services...	5
Or Zarua Crafts Club	8
Me'ah Graduate Studies	9
Matters of Life and Death.....	10

FEATURES

Youth Education Department	5
Monthly Calendars.....	6
Book Discussions	8
OZ Community	11

“WELCOME TO OZ” KIDDUSH LUNCH

Saturday, September 6

Welcome the month of Elul by feeding your body and your soul! On September 6, Or Zarua will sponsor a Kiddush lunch after Shabbat services. This event will provide a wonderful opportunity to greet new and prospective members as well as Congregants returning from their summer travels. Please invite friends who may be interested in joining Or Zarua. No reservations are required.

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

DR. HARLAN J. WECHSLER, *Rabbi*
ANDREW J. FRACKMAN, *President*
VICKY A. STEIN, *Executive Director*
ILANA BURGESS, *Youth Education Director*
CHARLES SPIELHOLZ, *Newsletter Editor*

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Andrew J. Frackman

I am privileged to have the opportunity to serve as president of this wonderful Congregation and to draft my first "President's Message" for our newsletter. As we approach the High Holy Days and a new year for the Congregation, I would like to share with you a few themes that I think all of us should consider. I have thought about these issues over the years as a Congregant and board member, and I hope to focus on them as president over the next year.

We are members of Congregation Or Zarua because each of us has made an affirmative decision to join a community that is uncommon, if not unique, in the spectrum of Jewish religious communal life. While there is no shortage of congregations in our area and city, there are few places where you can find the type of traditional, egalitarian and participatory religious experience that we are privileged to enjoy here at Or Zarua. (It is hard to think of any.) Indeed, there are few in the entire Conservative movement. I note this not to congratulate ourselves, but to caution ourselves. Preserving these attributes requires vigilance and effort. And, as wonderful as our community is, we must be prepared to work to enhance what we do, even when what we do is already excellent. We must enhance the quality of our prayer, including our music, so that our services remain fresh, stimulating, and, most importantly, spiritually uplifting. We must expand programming that challenges us, helps us achieve greater meaning in our spiritual lives, and permits new leaders to emerge from our midst. We must continue to improve on our excellent Hebrew School to ensure that it continues to offer compelling and exciting programming for our children. And we must improve the communal sense that is an essential element of any community of faith.

We are a small congregation and, by virtue of the size of our sanctuary, will always remain one. But we, like any institution, must retain our current members and attract new members to revitalize what we do, replenish our ranks, and remain vital. To do so, we must work on the challenges that I mentioned above—among other things.

Addressing these challenges requires focus, active participation of the community (including, but not limited to the board), and financial resources. The leadership of the Congregation is working with Rabbi Wechsler and our staff on several initiatives to address each of the challenges I mentioned above. We also need your active support and involvement to achieve our goals. Or Zarua offers many opportunities for Congregants to pray, learn, and engage in and support our programming and community activities. I encourage each of you in the upcoming year to consider specific ways in which you can participate more intensively in our communal activities. By doing so, you will help us develop even further as a community and help us all achieve greater kedushah in our lives.

I look forward to working with you over the coming year and wish you a *gmar hatimah tovah*.

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
EVENTS/ADULT ED	Helene Wolff
HESED	Robin Blumenthal Stephanie Failla
HEVRA KADISHA	Vera Silver Gerry Solomon
HOUSE	Janet Katz
ISRAEL	Aliza Kaplan
LIBRARY	Barry Feldman
MEMBERSHIP	Brett Cohen
MINYAN	Sheldon Adler
OROT	Ron Meyers
PLANNED GIVING	Jim Breznay
PUBLIC RELATIONS	Aaron Shelden
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.

JOEY WEISENBERG'S SPONTANEOUS JEWISH CHOIR

Everyone is invited to the reprise this fall of Joey Weisenberg's Spontaneous Jewish Choir. Sessions are scheduled for 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, October 30; Wednesday, November 5, 12 and 19; and Thursday, December 4, 11 and 18.

HIGH HOLY DAY SERVICES 5769/2008

Monday, September 29

Erev Rosh Hashanah

Evening (*Ramaz*) 6:15 p.m.–7:15 p.m.

Tuesday, September 30

First Day Rosh Hashanah (*Ramaz*)

Morning (*Ramaz*) 8:30 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Tashlikh 5:30 p.m.–6:15 p.m.
(in Central Park)

Evening (*Ramaz*) 6:40 p.m.–7:20 p.m.

Wednesday, October 1

Second Day Rosh Hashanah

Morning (*Ramaz*) 8:30 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Evening (*Ramaz*) 6:40 p.m.–7:20 p.m.

Saturday, October 4

Shabbat Shuvah 9:00 a.m.

Wednesday, October 8

Erev Yom Kippur

Minhah (*Or Zarua*) 1:00 p.m.–1:30 p.m.

Kol Nidre (*Ramaz*) 6:00 p.m.–8:45 p.m.

Thursday, October 9

Yom Kippur/Yizkor

Services (*Ramaz*) 9:00 a.m.–7:13 p.m.

Monday, October 13

Erev Sukkot 6:00 p.m.–7:00 p.m.

Tuesday, October 14

First Day Sukkot

Morning 9:00 a.m.–12:15 p.m.

Evening 6:20 p.m.–7:20 p.m.

Wednesday, October 15

Second Day Sukkot

Morning 9:00 a.m.–12:15 p.m.

Saturday, October 18

Shabbat Hol Hamoed 8:45 a.m.

Monday, October 20

Erev Shemini Atzeret

Evening 5:50 p.m.–6:50 p.m.

Tuesday, October 21

Shemini Atzeret/Yizkor

Morning 9:00 a.m.–12:15 p.m.

Erev Simhat Torah

Evening 6:15 p.m.–8:00 p.m.

Wednesday, October 22

Simhat Torah

Morning 9:00 a.m.–12:15 p.m.

High Holy Days, 5769/2008

The Jewish New Year for the year 5769 begins Monday evening, September 29, 2008.

As in previous years, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services will be held at the Ramaz School, 60 East 78th Street, between Park and Madison Avenues.

Service times are listed at left. If you need additional tickets, please contact Melissa Plush at mplush@orzarua.org or 212-452-2310, extension 10. Tickets are \$325. Each ticket includes all Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services.

For Tashlikh, we will meet at the Central Park Reservoir on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, Tuesday, September 30 at 5:30 p.m. Evening services at Ramaz will follow at 6:40 p.m.

Yizkor is part of Yom Kippur services, which begin at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday, October 9. The Yom Kippur fast concludes with the shofar blast after Neilah services at 7:13 p.m.

There are Alternate Services for the first day of Rosh Hashanah and for Kol Nidre. Both services will be held in the chapel on the second floor of Ramaz. For details, see the article on page 5.

OR ZARUA YOUTH HIGH HOLY DAY SERVICES 5769/2008

Rosh Hashanah

Tuesday, September 30 (First Day)
10:45 a.m.–12:45 p.m.

2-4 years old (*accompanied by an adult*)
Kindergarten-Grade 1, Grades 2-3,
Grades 4-6, Grades 7 and above

Wednesday, October 1 (Second Day)
10:45 a.m.–12:45 p.m.

2-4 years old (*accompanied by an adult*)
Kindergarten-Grade 1
Grades 2-3
Grades 4-teens, Special Service

Kol Nidre

Wednesday, October 8
6:00 p.m.–8:45 p.m.

Grades 1-3 and Grades 4-6

Yom Kippur

Thursday, October 9
11:15 a.m.–1:15 p.m.

2-4 years old (*accompanied by an adult*)
Kindergarten-Grade 1
Grades 2-3
Grades 4-teens, Special Service

A playroom will be open during all services for very young children who are accompanied and supervised by an adult. Children may not be left alone in this room.

Don't Miss Meals in the OZ Sukkah!

DINNER IN THE OZ SUKKAH

Erev Sukkot, Monday, October 13

Services begin at 6:00 p.m., Dinner at 7:15 p.m.

SHABBAT LUNCH IN THE OZ SUKKAH

Saturday, October 18

Immediately following services

**Reservations for either event are essential
and must be received before noon on Friday, October 3.**

\$30 adults; \$15 children aged 5-12; No charge for children under 5

RSVP: 212-452-2310, ext. 39 / mplush@orzarua.org / www.orzarua.org

Rabbi David Silber Lecture: *The Redemption of Sarah*



Rabbi David Silber, founder and dean of the Drisha Institute, will present a lecture in the Or Zarua library on Wednesday evening,

September 17 at 8:00 p.m. Rabbi Silber will speak on the redemption of Sarah, an analysis of the Torah reading for the first day of Rosh Hashanah.

Rabbi Silber, whose teaching brings together great sensitivity to the language of the biblical text and a wide knowledge of the Jewish tradition, has spoken at Or Zarua in previous years on the Akedah, the Book of Jonah, and the story of Hannah. His lecture this year is sure to offer an important opportunity to deepen our appreciation of the Rosh Hashanah service.

SLEEP IN THE SUKKAH *Saturday, October 18*

All Or Zarua children are invited to join our overnight sleepover starting after Shabbat at 7:00 p.m.

Have your parents RVSP to Ilana Burgess at iburgess@orzarua.org by Friday, October 10.

EATING IN THE SUKKAH

It is a mitzvah to eat in the sukkah during the Festival of Sukkot. Or Zarua is offering Congregants several opportunities to have lunch or dinner in the sukkah on the roof of our building.

Two Meals That Require Reservations

Dinner on Erev Sukkot,

Monday, October 13

Lunch on Shabbat Hol Hamoed,

Saturday, October 18

Both meals require reservations. Each is \$30 for adults, \$15 for children aged 5 to 12, and free for children under 5.

RSVP by noon on Friday, October 3.

Three Free Lunches

Immediately After Services

Sukkot Lunch,

Tuesday, October 14

Sukkot Lunch,

Wednesday, October 15

Simhat Torah Lunch,

Wednesday, October 22

No reservations are required for these three lunches.

Two Bring-Your-Own-Dinner Events

Tuesday, October 14

Friday, October 17

No reservations are required for the "Bring Your Own Dinner" events. Or Zarua will provide challah and dessert. You bring dinner and all service items, including beverages, plates, cups, napkins, and utensils. All food brought to the sukkah must be kosher.

If you wish to dine in the sukkah at times other than those listed above, please notify the synagogue office. We ask that you conclude your evening meal by 9:00 p.m.

To make reservations for any event, call the synagogue office (212-452-2310, extension 39), email Melissa Plush (mplush@orzarua.org), or sign up online at www.orzarua.org.

ETROGIM AND LULAVIM FOR SUKKOT

On Monday evening, October 13 the joyous holiday of Sukkot begins. Congregation Or Zarua will arrange for the purchase of etrogim and lulavim. All orders are delivered in complete sets: etrog in a box, lulav with hadassim and aravot in a bag. Three different sets, each certified for use on Sukkot, are available:

- Standard Sets, \$55.00 each
- Muvchar (Choice) Sets, \$65.00 each
- Mehudar (Gorgeous) Sets, \$80.00 each

If you wish to purchase a set, please be sure that your order is received at the Or Zarua office by noon on Monday, September 15.

You may order etrogim and lulavim sets online at www.orzarua.org or by phoning 212-452-2310, extension 10.

They may be picked up in the Or Zarua social hall on Sunday, October 12 between 8:30 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. or Monday, October 13 between 8:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.

SELIHOT *Saturday, September 20*

8:30 p.m.

SINFUL DESSERTS

Join us for an evening of community as we usher in the Yomim Noraim with a dessert reception.

9:15 p.m.

STUDY

Rabbi Wechsler will teach "Mystical Repentance in the Writings of Rav Kook." His source is Rav Kook's *Lights of Repentance*.

10:00 p.m.

SELIHOT SERVICES

High Holy Days Alternate Services

By Diane Okrent

One of the features that attract people to Congregation Or Zarua is the intimacy of our services. Both the size of the congregation and the design of our sanctuary enhance the davening experience. On the High Holy Days, we reproduce our signature intimacy, albeit with a large gathering in the Ramaz Upper School auditorium.

If you prefer to daven in a smaller setting, join our Alternate Services on the first day of Rosh Hashanah and on Kol Nidre. These services, in the Ramaz Chapel on the second floor, provide a more personal davening experience.

Guided by Terry Krulwich on Rosh Hashanah and Mark Somerstein on Kol

Nidre, these services encourage more participation through singing as well as explore the history and interpretation of various prayers and customs. Participants include novice and learned daveners who enjoy the friendly atmosphere. Knowledge of Hebrew or the liturgy is not required.

As the Ramaz Chapel only seats about 100 people, we need to know immediately if you wish to attend.

Please call the synagogue office as soon as possible to indicate your choice of service or return the reservation form that was mailed in August. Reservations for the Alternate Services will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.

MEET, GREET & SEAT Ushers are needed for Shabbat services throughout the year. Please email Janet Katz at jmkatz@nyc.rr.com to add your name to our list of volunteers. You will be contacted by email only. Your help is greatly appreciated.

Kadima and United Synagogue Youth

By Ilana Burgess

As many of you know, Or Zarua hosts amazingly active Kadima and United Synagogue Youth chapters. In 5768, we held wonderful activities both at and away from Or Zarua. We went bowling, played pool, gambled at our very own casino, and did mitzvah projects. We had incredible participation in both our Kadima and USY chapters. It was great to see so many smiling young Or Zarua faces socializing with each other as well as Jewish kids from other synagogues. Last year gave Jenny, Shay and me a great deal of nachas; we are looking forward to continuing and expanding our successes in 5769.

Our first Youth Party, a grand opening for Or Zarua's chapters of Kadima

and USY, will be held in our new Youth Lounge on Sunday, September 7 at 4:00 p.m. At that time, Or Zarua's young Congregants will make decisions regarding decor and plan future activities. We also want to start a music collection so that on Sundays and during vacations, especially when it is very cold outside, our kids will have a special place to "hang out" with old and new friends.

If you are in grades 6 through 8 (Kadima) or grades 9 through 12 (USY) and have not yet participated in our activities, please email me at iburgess@orzarua.org. We will put your name on our email list to keep you informed. We can't wait to hear from you!

Youth Education Calendar

SEPTEMBER 2008

- Sun 7** Youth Group Opening Activity, 4 p.m.
Mon 8 First day of school
Tue 9 First day of school
Wed 10 First day of school
Sat 20 Shabbat Class, 10 a.m.
Mon 22 B'nai Jeshrun, 6 p.m.
Mon 29 Erev Rosh Hashanah (no classes)
Tues 30 First Day Rosh Hashanah (no classes)

OCTOBER 2008

- Wed 1** Second Day Rosh Hashanah (no classes)
Mon 6 B'nai Jeshrun, 6 p.m.
Wed 8 Kol Nidre (no classes)
Thu 9 Yom Kippur (no classes)
Mon 13 Erev Sukkot (no classes)
Tue 14 Sukkot (no classes)
Wed 15 Sukkot (no classes)
Sat 18 Sleep in the Sukkah, 7 p.m. (all children are invited)
Sun 19 Lunch in the Sukkah (for families with young children up to Grade 3)
Mon 20 Sukkot (no classes)
Tue 21 Shemini Atzeret (no classes)
Wed 22 Simhat Torah (no classes)

NOVEMBER 2008

- Sat 8** Shabbat Class, 10 a.m.
Sun 16 Annual Talent Show (all children are invited)
Mon 17 B'nai Jeshrun, 6 p.m.
Wed 26 Thanksgiving (no classes)
Thu 27 Thanksgiving (no classes)

DECEMBER 2008

- Sat 13** Shabbat Class, 10 a.m.
Mon 22 Winter Break (no classes)

JANUARY 2009

- Mon 5** Classes resume

ADDITIONAL HIGH HOLY DAY TICKETS are \$325 per person. To order, contact Melissa Plush at mplush@orzarua.org or 212-452-2310, extension 10.

OR ZARUA CRAFTS CLUB

By Carrie Fox

Last September, a group of Or Zarua Congregants ushered in 5768 with the inaugural meeting of the Or Zarua Crafts Club. The club continued to meet one Sunday morning each month and accomplished much in its first year. We joined the many synagogues, churches, schools and non-profit organizations participating in Sanctuary Stitchers, a program sponsored by the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services. Volunteers knit or crochet squares for blankets that are presented to children and teens living at JBFCS residences. Recipients are often foster children who have suffered from abuse, neglect and other traumatic events. The handmade blankets help the children transition from one home to the next when they leave JBFCS facilities by reminding them of the security and care they received and providing comfort in their new life. In some cases, the blankets are their only possession.

The Crafts Club recently completed its first blanket, which will be presented

community adjacent to Gaza. Group members work on these projects during our monthly meetings and at home.



OZ Crafts Club members Lorraine Shapiro (left), Robin Blumenthal, Carrie Fox, Debbie Solymar, Diane Okrent and Claire Wolf Smith display the blanket they made for the JBFCS Sanctuary Stitchers program. Audrey Stadin (not pictured) also contributed to the project.

In addition to working on mitzvah projects, members also work on personal projects, share patterns and design ideas, and teach each other techniques. Participants range in age and skill level, from novices to experienced stitchers. The Crafts Club provides an opportunity for members to pursue a craft they enjoy while helping others and socializing with OZ members.

Please contact Carrie Fox (cfox@aya.yale.edu) if you are interested in joining the Crafts Club, contributing squares for a blanket or kippot for Sderot, or if you have ideas for future mitzvah projects. The Crafts Club meets on

to a child in October, and is working on its second. Other members have been crocheting colorful kippot to send to a school in Sderot, the embattled Israeli

the second Sunday of each month at 10:15 a.m. in the 4th floor library. We hope you will join us for our meetings on September 14 and October 12.

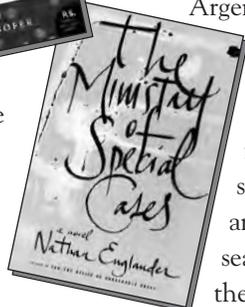
Or Zarua Book Discussions

Please join us in the Or Zarua library at 7:30 p.m. for our book discussions in September and October.

On Sunday, September 14, we will discuss a well-received new novel by Dalia Sofer, *The Septembers of Shiraz*. Sofer takes us into the life of one family among the prosperous Jewish community of Iran as it suffers the rough aftershocks of the overthrow of the Shah by the Islamist Revolutionary Guard.



On Sunday, October 26, we will take up *The Ministry of Special Cases*, the debut novel of Nathan Englander, author of the best-selling collection of stories *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges*. Englander's novel is set in Argentina during its rule by a military junta. Confronted by the government's kidnapping of their only son, a mother and father are individually driven to search unrelentingly for the truth.



SUKKOT FAMILY PROGRAM

Sunday, October 19

All families with young children up to Grade 3 are invited to LUNCH IN THE SUKKAH featuring pizza, Israeli dancing and art

Look for further announcements with more detailed information.

Me'ah Graduate Studies at OZ

By Phyllis Solomon

Following the High Holy Days in October, a group of Or Zarua Congregants, all graduates of the two-year Me'ah program, will continue their odyssey into the world of Jewish history. In the fall term we will begin with a course entitled "Unfolding the Text: Scripture/Bible/Tanakh Through the Vision of Classical Exegesis." We will examine how Jews have read the Torah since the Middle Ages and how interpretations have evolved. We will study the commentaries of Rashi, his grandson Rashbam, and the Spanish peripatetic Rav Avraham ibn Ezra, among others. We shall not only examine how they studied but also how they interacted with their Christian contemporaries.

This course will be taught by Robert ("Robbie") A. Harris, an associate professor of Bible at the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he teaches courses in biblical literature and commentary, particularly medieval Jewish biblical exegesis.

In the spring semester we will continue our studies with Benjamin Gampel in a course entitled "The Limits of Dissent in the Traditional Jewish Community." We will trace the limits of tolerable dissent over the course of Jewish history, exploring the fierce conflict that has taken place with the Jewish world over social and ideological issues such as the nature of Jewish identity and the boundaries of Jewish faith. We will examine how sectarian and messianic groups have

emerged from these protracted struggles within the Jewish communities and how—when Jews have been compelled, or sought willingly, to abandon their faith—this has redefined the Jewish sense of religion and the Jewish people.

Benjamin Gampel holds the Dina and Eli Field Family Chair in Jewish History at JTS, where he teaches courses in medieval and early modern Jewish history, with a special focus on the medieval Sephardim. He also lectures widely on the entire range of Jewish history.

For information about the entire Me'ah program or to join a specific Me'ah class held at Or Zarua, please call the New York office of Hebrew College at 646-472-5390.

Study Talmud at Or Zarua

continued from page 1

For many centuries the text of the Talmud was an entirely oral tradition; when the danger of its becoming lost became too great, however, it was finally recorded. To this day the Talmud is known, despite its being committed to writing, as the Oral Law, to distinguish it from the Torah, known as the Written Law. As a printed work, the Talmud traditionally consists of 20 volumes, covering more than 5,400 densely printed pages of text and commentary—the study of which would be a considerable undertaking in any language. Fortunately, there are now English translations which do a great deal toward making the Talmud accessible to those of us who aren't fluent in Aramaic. Even in translation, however, the Talmud is still sufficiently complex (partly due to the conciseness of a text originally preserved as a purely oral tradition) that to study it

requires the guidance of a person well steeped in the Talmudic tradition. We at Or Zarua are fortunate to have such a guide in Rabbi Wechsler, who each year leads many of us on exciting forays through the world of the Talmud. Class is taught in English; familiarity with Hebrew or Aramaic, or previous study of Talmud, is entirely unnecessary. For those who haven't yet taken advantage of the Talmud Class, make 5769 the year you finally take it upon yourselves to do so.

More information on the Talmud Class, including audio recordings of the past year's classes, is available on the Or Zarua website at www.orzarua.org. Click on "Talmud" under "Adult Education" in the menu on the left side of any page. The class meets on Wednesday evenings from 8:00 p.m.-9:30 p.m. This year's Talmud Class will begin on Wednesday, October 29, 2008. We look forward to seeing you there!

OZY SHABBAT CLASSES

Four grade-level classes meet from 10:30 a.m. to noon each Shabbat:

Seventh Floor

Class I: Kindergarten (ages 4-5)

Class II: Grades 1 to 3

Class III: Grades 4 to 6

Sixth Floor

Class IV: Ages 2-3

Each month during the school year, we have a special Hebrew School Shabbat Class, which all Hebrew School students in the third through sixth grades are expected to attend. Parents and students from other schools are welcome as well.

Hebrew School Shabbat Classes will be held on Saturday, September 20, November 8, and December 13.

This year we will be taking attendance to award a prize to every student who comes to class 10 times from September to May.

MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH

By Arthur H. Rosenbloom

Nothing concentrates the mind more wonderfully on matters of life and death than the imminent prospect of the High Holy Days. For as one approaches these days, thoughts turn to a consideration of what are, literally and figuratively, life and death issues. In that regard, I'm struck by how much I've learned from two very different sources—traditional Jewish ones to be sure, but also from Western literature in general and from modern British and American poetry in particular. More on each to come, but first a story:

Once upon a time when I was very young, about 10 as I recall, a chance visit to a remote closet in my parental home found me face to face with a yahrzeit calendar for my maternal grandmother. It bore what to me was a curious inscription: "The day of death is better than the day of birth," a shortened version of lines from Chapter 4 of Kohelet.

I further observed all the oppression that goes on under the sun: the tears of the oppressed, with none to comfort them; and the power of their oppressors—with none to comfort them. Then I accounted those who died long since more fortunate than those who are still living, and happier than either are those who have not yet come into being and have never witnessed the miseries that go on under the sun.

Puzzled by the inscription, I asked my mother to explain it to me. "Well, dear," she said, "you remember how old and sick Bubby was before she died...she was just happy to be out of her pain and at peace with God." But being a pestily curious kid, I went on—"But what does it mean for the rest of us when it says that the day of death is better than the day of birth?" "I don't know, sweetheart," she replied, "perhaps some day you'll find an answer to your question." Whether my mother's ingenuous response was an attempt to shield me from the painful insights resulting from a full explanation or whether, indeed, she really didn't understand the full implications of the quote, I'll never know. But this I do know—that encounter started me early on in this process of trying to fathom something about life and death. I walked away from that event with an unformed hunch that maybe life had a dark side.

Of course, kids start to grow up and even as youngsters experience the death of close family. But I really started to grapple with life and death issues in two college lit courses, a survey course in Western World Literature and one on Modern British and American Poetry. Both were taught by a smallish, gray-mustached, tweed-jacketed Faulkner look-alike named C. Willard Smith. Willard's lectures inspired two generations of Bucknellians, among them Phillip Roth, one year my senior. I recall Willard clearly, perched precariously on the edge of his desk, holding forth unaffectedly in a manner that turned literature and poetry into life and sent us reeling from the room, transported by the heady intoxication of new ideas. Small wonder that Bucknell named its literature library in his memory. Willard's influence on me and countless others confers upon him a very special form of immortality. His view, consistent with that of 19th-century British author and poet Matthew Arnold (he of "Dover Beach," "where ignorant armies clash by night"), was that literature might endeavor to answer some of the same questions as those addressed by religion.

What were some of the life and death issues I took away from those long Lewisburg afternoons with Willard? Appropriately enough for this time in the Jewish festival cycle, at least four I can think of: the omnipresence of evil in the world; the continuing cycle of birth, death, and rebirth; the immortality of biological and social DNA; and the hope we cherish that love will triumph over death.

We encounter evil almost daily, striking good people and bad with apparent indifference—a fact of life that precedes us in the world and succeeds us after we die until the coming of the Messianic era in which, in the words of Aleinu, all humanity will call upon God's name to turn the wicked toward him. And Willard taught us this message in the words of one of God's faithful, the Irish monk poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, a complex man who emerged from a long-held practice of silence to write among others, "Thou Art Indeed Just, Lord." Here is a short excerpt:

Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend with thee; but sir, so what I plead is just.

*Why do sinners' ways prosper?
And why must disappointment all
I endeavor end?
Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend.
How wouldst thou worse, I wonder than
thou dost.
Defeat thwart me?*

Doubts put aside, Hopkins concludes with this affirmation of God:

O thou lord of life, send my roots rain.

Second, we learned that life and death are part of a continuum, that the life force is one that ultimately produces death, and that out of death comes life, too. This is an excerpt from "The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives" by that brilliant and troubled Welshman Dylan Thomas (I can hear that stentorian voice on the Caedmon label as though it was yesterday):

*The force that through the
green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age;
That blasts the roots of trees
Is my destroyer
And I am dumb to tell
The crooked rose
My growth is bent by that
same wintry fever*

Or, in a similar vein, the delectations of oddly punctuated ee cummings—he of "Chanson Innocent," "Somewhere I Have Never Traveled," and "La Guerre"—in an excerpt from "When God Lets My Body Be":

*When God lets my body be
From each brave eye shall
Sprout a tree
Fruit that dangles therefrom
the purple world will dance upon
Between my lips which did sing
a rose shall beget the spring.*

A third life and death matter I took away from my encounters with Willard was immortality through the power of DNA which we pass down to our children, a power enhanced by what I call social DNA—the interactions we have with family, friends, and, for some of us, with students. Seeing these intimations of immortality in our children and grandchildren may, pardonably, I believe, cause us to lose all objectivity where they are concerned. Consider in that vein, Edward Arlington

Robinson—he of “Miniver Cheevey” who “scorned the commonplace and eyed a khaki suit with loathing” and of the elegant “Richard Corey” who though “he glittered when he walked” “put a bullet through his head”—with an excerpt from “The Gift of God” in which Robinson describes the joy of a pregnant woman.

*Blessed with joy that only she
Of all alive shall ever know
She wears a proud humility
For what it was that willed it so—
That her degree should be so great
Among the favored of the Lord
That she can scarcely bear the weight
Of her bewildering reward...
She crowns him with her gratefulness
And says again that life is good
And should the gift of God be less
In him than in her motherhood*

*His fame though vague
will not be small
As upward through her dream
he fares
Half clouded with a crimson fall
Of roses thrown on marble stairs*

A fourth life and death issue I confronted with Willard was the possibility of immortality through the memory of love—Dylan Thomas again—with an excerpt from “In Memory of Ann Jones”:

*...I know her scrubbed and
Sour humble hands
Lie with religion in their cramp,
her threadbare
Whisper in a damp world, her
Wits drilled hollow
Her fist of a face died
Clenched on round pain
And sculptured Ann is*

*Seventy years of stone.
These cloud-sopped, marble
Hands, this monumental
Argument of the hewn voice,
Gesture and psalm
Storm me forever over her
Grave until
The stuffed lung of the
Fox twitch and cry Love
And the strutting fern lay
Seeds on the sill*

It is, of course, through ties of love that last beyond the grave that one can conclude with Thomas that “death shall have no dominion” or in John Donne’s far earlier words “Death, thou shalt die.”

I end by returning to Jewish textual sources, secure in Kohelet’s understanding that:

continued on page 12

MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH

continued from page 11

*A season is set for everything,
a time for every experience
under heaven. A time for
being born and a time to die*

What I've learned from all of this is the great desirability of savoring life's moments and finding the means by which to deal with its adversities, doing good in the here and now before "the silver cord snaps and the golden bowl crashes, the jar is shattered at the spring and the jug is smashed at the cistern."

And so, when it's Ne'ilah time for me, I hope I'll have the strength to avoid the advice of Dylan Thomas, that brilliant Welsh denizen of the White Horse Saloon, and choose not to "rage, rage against the failing of the light." Rather, I hope I'll be able to heed the deathbed words of Professor Hillel Bavli in his poem "Tavalnu Et Beasranu" ("Clean and Pure").

*And when my time comes
Let me slip into the night
Demanding nothing, God, of man
Or of you.*

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER CHECKLIST

As there is so much happening at Or Zarua during September and October, the following checklist is provided to help you stay organized.

- Mark your calendar for Shabbat, September 6: "Welcome to Or Zarua" Kiddush Lunch.
- Order your lulav and etrog by Monday, September 15.
- Hear Rabbi David Silber lecture on the redemption of Sarah on Wednesday, September 17.
- Partake of Sinful Desserts, Study and Selihot on Saturday, September 20.
- RSVP by noon on Friday, October 3 for dinner on Erev Sukkot (October 13) and/or lunch on Shabbat Hol Hamoed (October 18).
- RSVP by Friday, October 10 to Ilana Burgess at iburgess@orzarua.org for Kids Sleep in the Sukkah (Saturday night, October 18).
- Mark your calendar for Sunday, October 19: Sukkot Family Program.
- Have you paid your membership dues?
- Have you paid your Hebrew school tuition?

If you have any questions, please contact Melissa Plush in the synagogue office at 212-452-2310, extension 10 or mplush@orzarua.org.



CONGREGATION OR ZARUA

127 East 82nd Street

New York, NY 10028

First Class
U.S. Postage
PAID
New York, NY
Permit No. 7998