

A Traditional, Egalitarian and Participatory  
Conservative Synagogue



OR HADASH

HIGH HOLY DAYS 2023/5784



*New Light on Haifa, photo by Rabbi Scott Bolton*

## Welcome to Or Hadash Or Zarua's Quarterly Magazine

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A CONSERVATIVE SYNAGOGUE  
FOUNDED 1989

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# President's Message

by Isaac Nagiel



**W**hy is This Holiday Different from All Other Holidays?

As we enter these Yamim Noraim (Days of Awe), which

encompass the Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and the days in between, it is a time of deep reflection and spirituality.

For many, the period of reflection starts in Elul in preparation for this concentrated period of awesome gravity. Feelings of joy and celebration are often inter-mixed with anxiety and trepidation. Sitting with these contradictory emotions causes us to push against our innate mental wiring which tends to reject ambiguity and uncertainty. The author F. Scott Fitzgerald noted this difficulty when he wrote that the "test of first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function."

During the Yamim Noraim, we have to dig deep and push past these physical constraints to achieve spiritual fulfillment. These holidays are unique in that they force us to wrestle with ourselves on the fundamental questions of human nature and destiny, and there are no outs we can turn to for distraction. The holidays are not like any other Jewish holiday in that there is no agricultural or historical significance attached to them. Instead, we must harvest from within ourselves a better person, a more forgiving person, and a more merciful person.

Our Rosh Hashanah, Kol Nidre, and Yom Kippur services will once again be held in Wallace Hall at Park Avenue between 83rd and 84th Streets. Evening services for Rosh Hashanah will be held in our building on East 82nd Street.

For those who prefer to join our High Holy Days services remotely, we will be providing a link to participate via livestream.

I wish everyone a meaningful holiday full of introspection and personal growth.

L'Shanah Tovah,

## Or Hadash means New Light

For the next few issues  
OZ's new magazine, Or Hadash, will  
publish photographs featuring  
Light that inspires.

Please send your Light inspired  
photographs to Charlie at:  
[CharlesSpielholz@gmail.com](mailto:CharlesSpielholz@gmail.com)



## A Reason To Pray by Rabbi Scott N. Bolton

The students asked the Master, “Rebbe, what do you pray for when you do not feel any inspiration to pray at all?”

*Can you believe they would imagine the Rebbe had no inspiration to pray?! So honest were they with one another that the spiritual leader explained that sometimes his morning tefillah did not start with great kavannah—intentionality—for davening. He went to minyan out of habit, to stir himself into prayer-mode and to be there for others.*

“When I do not have the inspiration to pray, I pray for the ability to pray. And sometimes I run through the list of people I love, and I pray for each of them. God protect my beloved. God bless my children and friends. God heal whoever needs a *refuah shlaymah*, a complete recovery.”

And after that more and more Jews came to pray together at the synagogue.

Weekdays, each Friday night and every Shabbat morning we come together as a community to pray. For thousands of years Jews have “made the minyan.” Our community, in 5784, must rise to the occasion and strengthen our *minyanim* (plural for services).

Reciting ancient rites and performing our rituals allows us to discover newness in our souls. We help each other grow. We help each other mourn and say kaddish. We sing out “mazel tov!” when babies are named and couples come for their aufrufs. Without witnesses to simchas and minyan-goers to say “amen” to kaddish we lose sight of who we are.

Abraham Joshua Heschel frames the prayer opportunity as a deep commitment to Jewish culture. Religion, or ritual life, is just one aspect of Jewish culture yet it is central to a synagogue’s existence.

Heschel also describes Jewish prayer as having two aspects in his book, “Quest for God.” There is a prayer of expression and a prayer of empathy.

Even if one is not able to express every word of the prayers in the siddur, a person may rely on the leader to say the requisite rite and express the prayer of his or her heart. The Talmud teaches that prayer is *HaAvodah She’B’Lev* - the offering of the heart. When we allow the words to be like waves in the ocean of prayer we experience the grandeur of the enterprise. As we study more of the Hebrew roots over time and gain more insights into the words they act as kindling to remind us of the wonder of nature, the power of love, and the lessons of history.

And then begins the walk through the gate of the prayer of empathy. With minyan-goers sharing the space around us we find ourselves wondering and hoping and feeling along with others. While each of us experiences life uniquely, the minyan experience reminds us that we are fellow travelers.

And, being more than just our thoughts and body, we begin to empathize with our souls who want to reveal divine mysteries and insights to us. Prayer is the place of sensing the divine spark, sudden impulses that we have repressed that lead to deeper self-knowledge and senses of purpose. We remind ourselves of the deeper questions we live with that have no immediate answers and sense for a moment we can live gloriously despite the mysteries, or because of them. New horizons come into focus when we experience prayer like this, but it will not happen every day. We live with that reality.

We gather in the sanctuary at Or Zarua to make the minyan and to make services more of a communal experience. We come together as fellow human beings, as congregants, members of the shul and as friends. Our individual purposes may be different on any given day, and yet those who make the minyan share a most sacred joy and responsibility.

What do we do when there is no urge to pray? Come pray for the ability to pray! Express wonder for the miracles that abound and request help to navigate decisions and life’s challenges. Listen for soul whispers. Learn one more Hebrew root and how to place the feet by watching others; locate yourself near another praying soul to acquire knowledge through experience.

Often people will find our synagogue when they have a loss or they are new to the neighborhood, and when there is a minyan they find inspiration. Come be that ambassador and that fellow traveler. Enjoy the breakfast afterward; stay and talk about journeys and share about New York experiences.

For many Jews, the idea of a rich prayer life is left to the Orthodox or Hasidic and the more religious among us. In their minds, Jewish religion and worship is not the same as Jewish culture. Participating in prayer, though, makes for a unique Jewish cultural expression and productivity. The experience of minyan provides comfort, a space to express gratitude, to make requests of the self and of God - even while we may have doubts in our faith or what or who God is.

On a more practical note, there are needs we help each other fulfill by attending minyan. Someone saying kaddish needs 9 others to say amen.

A soul longing for more social connection comes to minyan to find others in the sea of humanity in our City. We lift our voices in song and unify our spirits to express hope for holiness in a world that can disappoint, disturb or discomfort. We ask for blessings - for ourselves, each other, our children and parents. We seek to hear the voices of souls who reside in the next world. We feel their love more saliently as we sit in the pews in our beloved sanctuary.

Towards the end of the daily service we recite Psalm 20 - a beautiful passage that allows us to put our troubles on the table, that promises victory of a holy nature despite the turmoil. It gains us perspective about our material world and reminds us that we must be part of a community who asks for each others’ deepest hopes and desires for life to be fulfilled.

When reciting this Psalm it is good for the minyan-goer to look at his or her neighbor when saying the line “יְיָ יִתֵּן לְךָ חַיִּים” “May God grant you your desires...” And by making such a request in the community we are also saying, “I will be here to celebrate with you. I will be here to support you should you suffer. I will be here to sing together, in order to fill our lives and world with more holiness and peace.”

To develop a spiritual and prayer life, as a Jew, is an endeavor worth connecting about, so please be in touch to discuss and learn, grow and gain new perspectives on the prayer book, prayer language, and the practice of Jewish prayer. Let now be the time to grow and find good reasons to make the minyan.

-Rabbi Bolton, [rabbibolton@orzarua.org](mailto:rabbibolton@orzarua.org).

**Daily Morning Minyan in the OZ Sanctuary**  
Monday & Wednesday - Friday at 7:15 am  
Sunday & Select Secular Holidays at 8:45 am  
For more information:  
Sheldon Adler: [sadler568@gmail.com](mailto:sadler568@gmail.com)  
Gerry Solomon: [gsolomon2@aol.com](mailto:gsolomon2@aol.com)

# *Elul Inspiration with Barry Coller*

## A Letter to My Grandchildren Upon Entering College Barry S. Coller, MD

### Prologue

My motivation in writing this letter is to provide my grandchildren with information on the contributions Judaism has made to Western Civilization so that they may take pride in these contributions and be better able to explain their religion to classmates. I've long felt that Conservative Judaism has the potential for special resonance with college students who are beginning their journey into the world of big ideas and the role humans have in the world. And I have been frustrated by a lack of recognition of Judaism's contributions to the fundamental rockbed pillars of Western Civilization. Ironically, I have come to the paradoxical conclusion that it is precisely because Judaism's impact is so profound that it is invisible.

Let me briefly try to explain what I mean. When I was in college, one of the more challenging books I read was *Ideology and Utopia* by the sociologist Karl Mannheim. I make no claim to understanding the subtlety of his arguments, but I did come away with an insight that has been borne out repeatedly in my life experience. And that is: if you really want to understand someone, don't ask what they think, find out what they take for granted. That is, what fundamental assumptions do they make about the world that color the way in which they see the world and make decisions. These assumptions operate at a level below conscious thought but dramatically affect thought and action. So, my principal premise is that Judaism's teachings dominate these assumptions and thus define how Westerners think at such a deep level that they are not even recognized as deriving from Judaism, nor therefore, ascribed to Judaism. My goal is to bring those principles to the surface of consciousness for my grandchildren so as to identify their rightful source as a way of preparing them to go off to college and begin a great intellectual awakening.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that Jews invented ethics. One can read powerful ethical treatises from Ancient Egypt long before Moses gave the Jews the Ten Commandments. What Jews did was to place ethics in a historical, religious context, and record it in writing in order to transmit it from generation to generation in an unbroken chain to the modern world. I hope that this letter will provide that context for my grandchildren as they transition to college and adulthood.

Dear Rachel, Lucas, and Hudson,

Congratulations on your college acceptances! I know how hard you have worked to attain your knowledge and so I am delighted that it has been recognized by your selection by a great college. Bravo!

As you embark on your college student adventure, and move out into the world, I want to make sure you carry with you some information about your Jewish heritage that I wished was shared with me when I started college. I suspect that this information will not be covered in your classes and that is why I want to share it with you. First and foremost, you should take pride in knowing much of modern civilization derives from the fundamental ideas of our ancestors. You should take pride in knowing that Judaism has been continuously practiced longer than any other organized religion in the world despite many attempts to prevent its continuity. As the foundational religion for both Christianity and Islam, Judaism's precepts have shaped Western and much of Asian civilization, with billions of people around the world practicing one of these three religions. While each one has unique features, they share core religious beliefs that originated in Judaism. You are part of this unbroken lineage.

### ETHICS OF TORAH

The most well-known, iconic ethical contribution of the Torah is, of course, The Ten Commandments. But there are other foundational ideas in the Torah that are less well known and appreciated. It is these that I would like to share with you.

Take for example, the soaring proclamation of the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal." This derives from the Torah's teaching that man and woman were made in God's image (Genesis 1:27) and that all humans descend from the same parents, Adam and Eve. From this central Jewish belief also flows the concept that each of us has a spark of divinity and thus, we must treat all people with respect and seek to protect their dignity. I know that you take these ideas for granted, but painful experience teaches us that many societies do not consider all people to be equal and some have subjected individuals to slavery or used them in other ways for their own purposes, with no regard for their rights as human beings. In fact, even to this day, we in the U.S. still suffer from the legacy of slavery, bigotry, and systemic racism.

The Torah requires that one treat individuals with disabilities respectfully and with kindness and consideration. It specifically states that one should not curse the deaf (who cannot hear the curse) or put a stumbling block before the blind (who cannot see it and will therefore stumble over it) (Leviticus 19:4). This, too, follows from recognizing that all people are created

## ***Elul Inspiration with Barry Coller continued***

in God's image.

The Torah also forbids cruelty to animals, making it not only an injunction for the Jewish people, but a fundamental principle for all nations (Genesis 9:4 and 24:19; Deuteronomy 22:4 and 6).

### **THE SEVENTH DAY AND THE SABBATICAL YEAR**

The Torah tells us that because God rested on the seventh day and declared it holy (Genesis 2:3), humans who are created in God's image should also rest each week on the Sabbath, the seventh day. This goes not just for humans but also for animals. By defining a work week and proclaiming a weekly day of rest, not only for themselves, but also for non-Jews among them, Judaism gave the world a great gift that has benefitted workers the world over for millennia.

According to the Torah, every seventh year is a Sabbatical year, in which Jews who loaned money to other Jews must forgive the debt (Deuteronomy 15:1) and Jews who acquired land from other Jews had to give the seller the chance to buy it back for a fair price (Leviticus 25:23). Thus, Judaism established foundational principles to prevent wealth inequality.

Today, Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and non-religious, faculty members at virtually every university in the U.S. seek Sabbatical year leaves, traditionally every seven years, from their ordinary teaching responsibilities to refresh their scholarship and research, and to reflect on their careers. It is one of the most treasured academic benefits, but I suspect that many of your professors may not appreciate from whence the concept arose.

In addition, the Torah declares every 50th year a Jubilee year, in which debts are forgiven, land that was sold to others is returned even without payment, and Jewish slaves are set free. In fact, the Torah's text of the Jubilee year proclamation is inscribed on the Liberty Bell: 'Proclaim LIBERTY Throughout all the Land unto all the Inhabitants Thereof' (Leviticus 25:10). This is compelling evidence that not only were the founders of the U.S. very knowledgeable about the Torah, but they held Torah values in high esteem.

Taxation in the Torah had six key principles. 1. A half-shekel, a modest amount, was required from every male regardless of his income or wealth to ensure that everyone participated in supporting the communal religious activities (Exodus 30:13). 2. About 2% of one's produce was given to the priests. 3. In addition, a 10% tax (tithe) on one's produce was given to support the Levites who were responsible for maintaining the temple. Since in both of these cases, the tax was based

on a percentage, this ensured that those who were more prosperous in that year paid a larger amount of money than those who were not as prosperous (Leviticus 27:30). 4. An additional 10% tax was paid during years one, two, four and five of the Sabbatical cycle by bringing the produce to the temple or by converting it into money to support the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for festivals; in years three and six this tithe supported the poor. 5. During the Sabbatical year the land also rested from cultivation, but the produce that grew without cultivation belonged to all in need, and to the animals, not the owner (Leviticus 25:6). 6. Finally, the Torah requires that the owners of fields producing food have to leave the produce at the corners of their field untouched so that those who did not have enough food can come and glean the food (Leviticus 19:9). Widows and orphans, as well as non-Jewish strangers are repeatedly singled out in the Torah as worthy of special protections, defining the moral imperative of assisting the most vulnerable members of the community, including those who would be the equivalent of immigrants in our country, regardless of their social station or even their religious beliefs.

The Torah requires proper stewardship for the land and respect for trees as part of its ecological imperatives. The land belongs to God and so people are stewards rather than owners of the land, able to produce food in their time and then pass it along to someone else. As a result, the land also takes part in the Sabbatical and Jubilee years, being unworked so as to replenish the soil. Amazingly, even war does not justify cutting down fruit trees as part of the siege of a city. 'When you besiege a city for many days to wage war against it to capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an ax against them, for you may eat from them, but you shall not cut them down' (Deuteronomy 20:19).

### **LAW, GOVERNANCE AND BUSINESS**

The Torah demands that justice be done and that no one is above the law (Leviticus chapter 19.): 'You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor.' The concept of equality before the law and the impartiality of judges and juries are the prerequisites of a just society. As Jewish law developed, even the High Priest was subject to being found guilty of a crime and punished.

The Torah requires ethical business dealings with specific injunctions to use fair measures of weight, length, and capacity in trading (Leviticus 19:35).

The Torah recognized the importance of separation of

## *Elul Inspiration with Barry Coller continued*

powers in governance. While Moses was able to single-handedly forge the twelve tribes into a nation with a lot of help from God, upon his death, ritual leadership was entrusted to his brother Aaron as the High Priest, civil leadership was entrusted to Joshua as the head of the army, judicial responsibility was entrusted to the courts composed of learned and impartial judges, and spiritual leadership was entrusted to the Prophets, who were inspired by God and had the power to anoint and remove the king. The Torah doesn't envision a need for a king but allows the Jews to have one if they decide that they want one because other surrounding nations have kings. It actually does not give the king any specific powers but demands that the king follow the law by making his own copy of the Torah and keeping it with him at all times. It also warns against the king amassing too much wealth or too many instruments of war (Deuteronomy 17:14). Thus, there is a moral force above the king and the government, and if a government makes immoral laws, they are null and void.

### THE SUMMING UP

These tenets of Judaism set the expectations and standards for communal human behavior: to be kind, to be just, to be honest, to have integrity, to be charitable, to be humble. to recognize the spark of divinity in every person, to uphold the dignity of all people, to do good whenever you can, to confront those who use power for their own benefit, and to protect the vulnerable, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger.

The central feature of Judaism throughout the more than 3,000 years during which it has been continuously practiced is the encouragement of different learned interpretations of the Torah, buttressed by evidence. While we may not view the type of evidence put forward in the Talmud to support positions as compelling, the brilliance of the internal consistency and the tolerance for multiple conflicting interpretations is astounding. This commitment to never-ending questioning and precision in language and thought have prepared Jews to use the same scholarship, intellectual rigor, and

creativity in advancing the arts, literature, business, medicine, and the sciences. In college you will bring exactly these same skills to your studies. Even though you may not recognize it, you will find that your education in Judaism has prepared you well to bring analytical thinking and creativity to the subjects you choose to study.

When you next travel to Washington, D.C., I suggest that you visit the many places where Moses is reverentially referred to in his role as law giver, including one of the 23 marble relief portraits over the gallery doors of the House Chamber in the U.S. Capitol, on the south wall frieze of the Supreme Court courtroom, and in the main reading room of The Library of Congress. Our Founding Fathers recognized that our country's moral status and commitment to justice rests on the law given at Mount Sinai. Regardless of whether one believes that the Torah was dictated to Moses by God or written by humans, it still stands as one of the defining events in world civilization, and you, as a linear descendent of that event, should take great pride in this singular contribution.

I hope this information will stand you in good stead in respectfully explaining your religion to your classmates who may not know much about it and may even have misconceptions. I also hope that this extremely brief description of just a few of the elements of Judaism will encourage you to ask your own questions and search out the answers through your own reading, discussions, and ultimately, scholarship. As a result, I am accompanying this letter with a copy of the Torah for you to take with you to college. It will be a valuable reference for you as you delve into many important new ideas.

With my deepest love and best wishes for an exciting and stimulating college experience.

Grandpa



# Elul Inspiration with Marc Ashley

## T'Shuvah: Lessons From a Heretic Marc Ashley

Is genuine repentance – the thematic core of the High Holy Days – easy or difficult? Is it well within our reach, or just beyond our grasp?

The very purpose and utility of Yom Kippur hinge on the elusive answers to those vexing questions. An ancient rabbinic story about a notorious heretic may provide guidance for us.

In some respects, the repentance equation seems simple: We presume that God welcomes our repentance, and we need only accept the divine invitation. Indeed, three times a day, Jews proclaim that God yearns for our *t'shuvah*. In each *amidah* prayer, we state with confidence: "Lead us back to You with perfect repentance . . . God who desires repentance." Of all the blessings of the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer, only repentance is described as God's desire.

A rabbinic midrash on the Song of Songs, interpreted to reflect the intimacy of the loving relationship between God and the Jewish people, makes the goal of genuine repentance seem even more readily accessible and attainable: "God says: My children, create for me a small opening of *t'shuvah*, as tiny as the head of a pin, and I will open for you openings that even wagons and chariots can pass through" (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 5:2). This passage suggests that even if we make a partial or half-hearted stab at repentance, God will grant us divine favor and do the rest of the hard work for us, enabling us to reach results that extend beyond our efforts.

As we anxiously ponder our tenuous mortality during the High Holy Day season, the Rosh Hashanah liturgy comfortingly asserts that God awaits our repentance even until the day of our death and will immediately accept it whenever it may occur. From this hopeful perspective, human penitence and divine acceptance are readily available and never too late. The gates of repentance are perpetually open, and will expand if we make even modest efforts.

These depictions of the easy achievability of repentance, however, stand in stark contrast to other authoritative characterizations that make it seem nearly impossible. For Maimonides, the multistage *t'shuvah* process – comprised of regret, confession, resolute commitment to alter one's conduct, and resistance of temptation to repeat a sin – is laborious and demanding, seemingly an all-or-nothing affair involving a virtual revolution of personal identity. For the Rambam, fragmentary efforts just won't do. Successful repentance must encompass daunting internal struggles and external changes, a refashioning of character from the

inside and outside.

So which is it – is *t'shuvah* close at hand or a remote aspiration? Is God, as we recite repeatedly on the High Holy Days, actually "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in kindness, . . . forgiver of iniquity, willful sin, and error"? Or is God more like the punitive power that administers intergenerational punishment (*Exodus* 20:5), perhaps rendering futile our efforts at repentance? The answer may be found less in God's nature than in our own human perspective of ourselves, as we consider initiating the process of genuine repentance.

How we each conceive of our individual capacity to achieve change may dictate whether the gates of repentance are indeed open to us personally. Elevating our aspirations for true refinement of action and character can shape our prospects for achieving genuine repentance. As we seek to return to God – the literal root of *t'shuvah* – we must engage in honest introspection. Thorough self-appraisal may yield the capacity to rethink what we can expect from ourselves. How we thought of our potential last year may need to change to reshape our year to come.

The Rabbis of the Talmud expressed this seminal High Holy Day lesson through a moving story about Elisha ben Abuyah, a second-century rabbinic scholar who turned into his era's most infamous apostate (and, later, the nuanced protagonist of *As A Driven Leaf*, Milton Steinberg's great historical novel). Elisha's poignant fate may illuminate our own journeys.

As background to this story, the Talmud suggests that Elisha's faith in divine providence was shattered when observing a young boy fall to his death from a tree while in the process of performing two commandments that the Torah states will prolong one's life (i.e., honoring one's parents and separating a baby bird from its mother before capturing it). The harsh disconnect between expectation and reality irrevocably punctured Elisha's trust in God. Thereafter, in light of his heretical behavior, Elisha was known to his rabbinic colleagues as "*Acher*" – "the other."

Elisha ben Abuyah's greatest student was Rabbi Meir (husband of Beruriah, the Talmud's most learned woman), whose opinions pervade the Mishnah, the first rabbinic legal code. Rabbi Meir, who after Elisha's apostasy continued his studies under Rabbi Akiva, never despaired of persuading his heretic teacher to perform repentance and return to his rabbinic roots. Thus, even in the wake of Elisha's apostasy, Rabbi Meir treasured

## Elul Inspiration with Marc Ashley continued

his teacher's Torah insights.

Among a series of tales about the extraordinary relationship between Elisha ben Abuyah, the notorious apostate, and Rabbi Meir, the venerable traditionalist scholar yet also Elisha's faithful student, the Babylonian Talmud recounts the following story (*Hagigah 15a*):

Our Rabbis taught: Once Acher was riding on a horse on the Sabbath [which was prohibited by Jewish law], and Rabbi Meir was walking behind him, hanging on his teacher's every word. Acher said to Rabbi Meir: "Meir, turn back, for I have measured by the paces of my horse that the Sabbath travel limit has already been reached [and thus Rabbi Meir would violate Shabbat laws by walking any further]." Rabbi Meir said to Acher: "You, too, should go back" [so as also not to violate Shabbat laws]. Acher answered: "Have I not already told you that I have previously heard from behind the partition [i.e., through a divine voice]: 'Repent, you backsliding children [and I will cure you from backsliding]' [Jeremiah 3:22; referring to all sinning Jews and God's acceptance of their repentance] – except Acher!"

We see through this story that his colleagues' appellation for him had stuck to his core. As Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik insightfully noted about this tale, Elisha had transitioned to view *himself*, through God's eyes, as Acher – the "other" – and therefore, unlike other Jews, as undeserving and incapable of performing repentance and achieving divine acceptance. Perhaps if he could have, alternatively, conceived of himself at least in part as Elisha, his former identity, he would have exempted himself from the terrible divine decree – which specifically targeted Acher – that now governed his alienated existence.

Viewing himself wholly as Acher, Elisha caused the gates of repentance to close, thereby sealing his own cruel destiny. Yet even if Acher could not have sought repentance, it was still available to Elisha. If only he could have reimagined himself as Elisha, *t'shuvah* may have seemed possible in his own mind.

Perhaps Elisha's greatest act of heresy, as the Talmudic scholar Saul Lieberman once remarked, was in denying the very possibility of repentance. Elisha could have responded to the divine voice that Acher was not his name, and thus the decree precluding repentance did not apply to him. But in embracing the derogatory label of Acher and acceding to the divine decree that was directed only to that part of himself, Elisha further betrayed the tradition he knew so well, which never abandons hope of repentance and renewal.

So, too, with us. We can achieve transformative repentance if we but aspire and commit to facilitate change. We are all sinners, but how we conceive of ourselves and our prospects for genuine improvement can define whether true repentance remains available to us. Despite our flaws, none of us should feel entrapped by self-conceptions of "Acher-hood" – fully alienated from the possibility of rapprochement with God – because none of us is irredeemable.

This year, then, pursue the mantle of "Elisha" and avoid "Acher" at all costs. Strive to create even a small opening for repentance, and watch how vast change can flow through it. Our holy tradition makes clear for us that *t'shuvah* is always within our grasp, just around the bend.

-Marc Ashley





## Atonement, Redemption, and Justice: The Days of Awe All Semester Long

with Professor Randy Friedman

Department of Judaic Studies, Binghamton University

Wednesday, September 20, 7:00 pm beginning with Sinful Desserts

**W**ith guidance and encouragement from Or Zarua Congregant Owen Pell, Professor Randy Friedman offered a Binghamton University Scholar's Program course titled "Atonement, Redemption, and Justice." Beginning with Hammurabi's Code, and working through Biblical, Rabbinic, and medieval Jewish texts and commentaries, students explored these categories of religious and philosophical thought in the broader context of the study of genocide and mass atrocity prevention – a focus of the institute at Binghamton that was facilitated by Owen. Students applied what they learned from these foundational texts to the study of guilt, forgiveness, and restorative justice after genocide and mass atrocity, focusing on the Holocaust, in particular. At the end of the term, they worked through some of the myriad difficulties in the process of restorative justice, connecting our three main categories of atonement, redemption, and justice with questions of memory, guilt, responsibility, and community.



As we work on ourselves during the Yamim Noraim between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we will move the conversation from the secular classroom to our synagogue. What do we mean, as Jews, when we reflect on atonement in the wider context of our concerns with justice? Is atonement an individual or social task? Does it require others' forgiveness? Is redemption something to be pursued in our lives? With or for others? How? As we work through these questions, we will engage Biblical and Rabbinic texts, as well as excerpts from Primo Levi.

Randy Friedman has taught at Binghamton University for 18 years. He and Brenda Schlaen, a family medicine doctor, are the parents of Ellie, Mika, and Zohar, all Ramah in the Rockies kids. Randy teaches philosophy of religion at Binghamton University in the Department of Judaic Studies and serves on the Federation and Temple Israel boards.

*Sponsored by Owen Pell  
in memory of  
Pearl Pell, Beatrice and Leonard Pell  
of blessed memory*





## Talmud Class - A New Direction

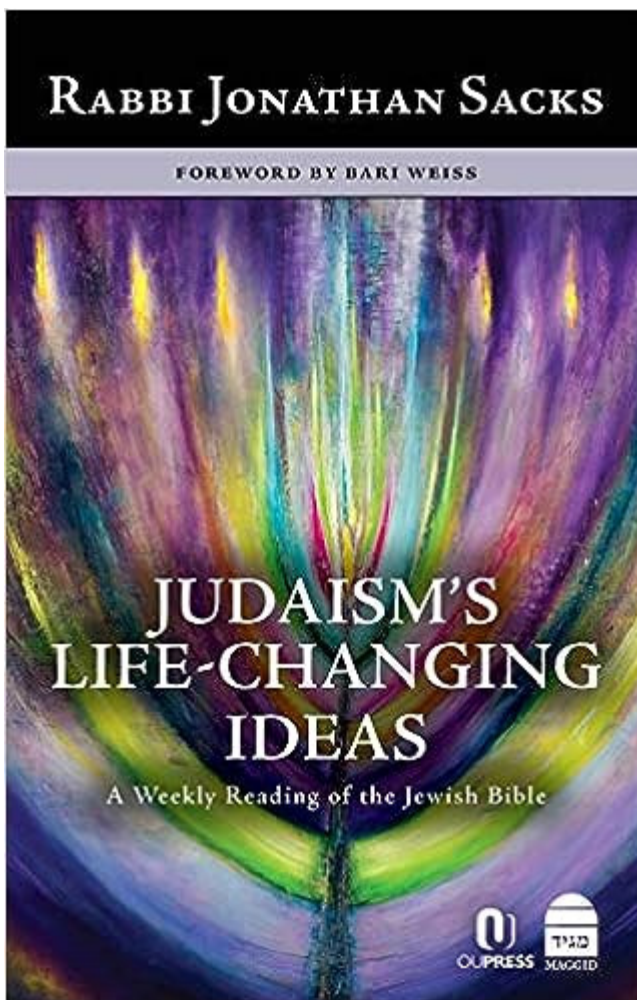
### Talmudic Route 66:

### The Top Sixty-Six Sugiyot (Passages) Every Educated Jew Must Know

Join me starting in 5784 for an exciting journey into learning the sixty-six Talmudic passages that educated Jews must know according to the Mandel Center at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Whether you own the volume needed for a given class or you look on using the digital Talmudic resources we now have available in the Or Zarua library that Rabbi Bolton shares on screen, you can join the study.

Class meets both in-person and on-line (ZOOM) on Wednesday nights,  
beginning October 11 at 7:30pm-9:00pm.





## JUDAISM'S LIFE CHANGING IDEAS

Community Torah Study with Rabbi Bolton on Mondays NOON on ZOOM honoring the work of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. This year we will be focusing on essays in Rabbi Sacks "Judaism's Life Changing Ideas" volume that follows the weekly Torah portion. Join the study and discussion!

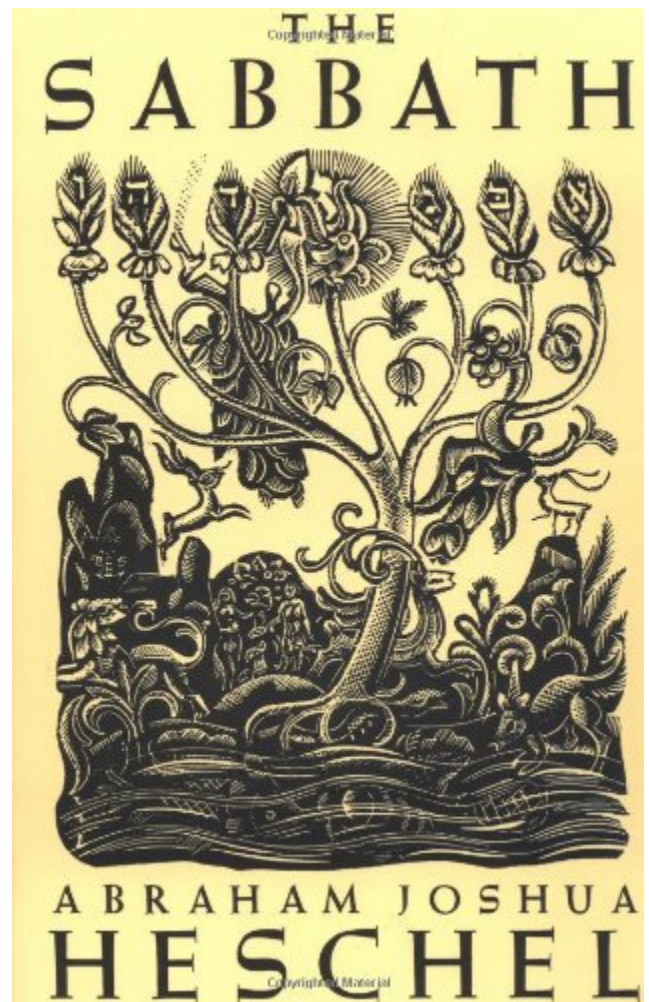
Class begins Monday, October 16th, on Zoom

## Siddur Class: An Exploration of Heschel's "The Sabbath"

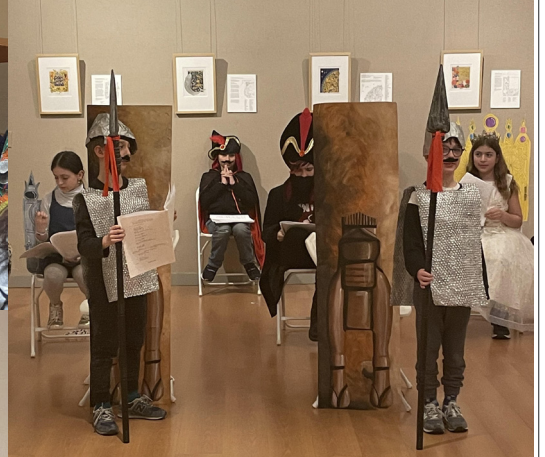
Title: "Oh, Lord, Hear Our Sabbath Prayers"

We will venture into our Sabbath prayers and focus on the themes and liturgy of the three main services of Shabbat. We will start with an overall survey of the importance of Shabbat in Jewish life. Then we get granular about the prayer book and go slowly through vocabulary, to gain access to the Hebrew of our prayers. We will discuss why we repeat some paragraphs in each Shabbat Amidah and say others only once. Come explore our Sabbath liturgy, our relationships to Shabbat and Heschel's "The Sabbath." A little Shabbat on Thursday will inspire!

Class begins Thursday, October 12th, 8:40 am, in-person









# Why OZ?

By Meredith Fages

**W**hy OZ? It boils down to one word. One name, really. Sigal. It might translate as “violet” but it ought to be synonymous with “mitzvah.”

My husband Michael and I first met Sigal Cohen when our son Graham was in preschool. We were shul shopping, like many New York couples with young children who hadn't yet made the leap from visiting their parents' synagogues to the commitment of membership in a congregation closer to home.

Sigal opened the doors for us to come in. Literally. I don't mean metaphorically, although that did soon become true, too. The shul was closed, and she came in on her day off to meet us in the rooftop sukkah. She explained the significance of the lulav and etrog to our then-tiny boy and guided the three of us through the associated prayers. I was charmed by her warmth, openness, and ability to connect with each of us.

While I am Jewish, I was not raised in a particularly observant fashion. My husband grew up in a family with stronger Jewish traditions than mine. I also had experiences along the way during my peripatetic military-family childhood that made me feel excluded and unwelcome in Jewish cultural groups, in spite of my efforts to connect and learn. Even though I had made my Bat Mitzvah in a Conservative congregation, I felt insecure for not having as much formal religious knowledge as my peers, and I didn't go to Jewish sleepaway camp. This uncomfortable sense of marginalization that set in long ago has been hard for me to shake, even as an adult.

When my husband and I visited other congregations around town, my internal warning bells rang incessantly...until I met Sigal, and Rabbi Bolton (and Rabbi Amy) shortly thereafter. For the first time, I felt like I could just be myself in a religious setting. OZ has a reputation for strong intellectual grounding that was attractive to me, and I also appreciated the absence of pretense amongst fellow congregants. The rabbis invited us to their home for a new members' dinner last year, and I was blown away by the profound conversations that stretched late into the night – many of which addressed others' unconventional spiritual journeys.

We chose to delay our son's enrollment in Hebrew school because of the pandemic (but also baked delicious hamantaschen with Sigal via Zoom because of the pandemic). But when we were finally ready to join two years ago, there was no question that Or L'Atid was the place for Graham. We were drawn to the personalized and vibrant approach to Jewish education as shaped by Sigal's creativity and vision. He particularly loves learning about the weekly Parashah and T'filah. This year he acted in his first Purim Spiel – written and composed by Or L'Atid alumnus Ziggy Bornas – and took such ownership of his role as one of the palace guards that he made papier mache helmets and “chain mail” at home for himself and the other guard, Jared, who has become a good friend in and out the classroom. And learning a new language with an unfamiliar alphabet is tough stuff, but Graham is rising to the challenge, shepherded by the caring, engaging teachers.

“Welcoming” is the word that comes to mind on a recurring loop when I think of Or Zarua.

Thank you for welcoming us.

We look forward to reciprocating!



# What's the Point of Hebrew School?

By Sigal Cohen

**C**hess, dance, piano, coding, sports, art... after a long day at school, it's rare for a kid to head straight home after school, do homework, relax a bit, enjoy a family dinner and get ready for bed. Colleges (and let's face it, even Middle School and High School applications in NYC) are becoming increasingly competitive, and kids have no choice but to show diverse interests and commitments to have a chance at their top-choice schools. Luckily, most kids enjoy their after-school activities, with opportunities to develop and strengthen varied skillsets.

And then, we come along, throwing another option into the mix: Hebrew School.

Why bother? Does Hebrew School really matter, beyond the oft-prioritized preparation for Bar and Bat Mitzvah? For so many, Hebrew School is an unavoidable burden with B'nei Mitzvah as the goalpost. Get the kids there, make sure the grandparents are happy, and we've done our jobs.

I feel fortunate to have found Or Zarua, where that's just not enough. Here, we see Bar and Bat Mitzvah as a milestone in a lifelong Jewish journey – an exciting and meaningful transition that welcomes kids into Jewish adulthood, with all its privileges and obligations. The significance of that time in a young person's life is not that it functions as their graduation from Jewish education. Rather, it marks the moment from which they must have sufficient knowledge and understanding of Jewish law, custom and ritual to be able to participate meaningfully in Jewish life.

We don't "teach to the test." Our aim is not to enable students to fake their way through a public recitation of our sacred ancient texts with no real understanding of why they're there, what they've said, and what comes next. We want kids to develop deep knowledge of Jewish history, text, and practice. Along with that, we teach them the skills they need to engage further in Jewish learning and Jewish life as they enter high school, college, and beyond. We, of course, endeavor to impart the myriad joys of Jewish life and learning. But, more than that, we seek to cultivate interest, curiosity, and excitement. We want our graduates to pursue opportunities for ongoing Jewish education and to choose to actively engage and participate in Jewish life. If we – the parents and the community in partnership – do not give them the skills to do so, they will need to "discover" the rich tapestry of Jewish life and learning later in life, perhaps in college, as if new to them (and that's if they decide to seek it out!). Instead, we work to enrich their lives with all our tradition has to offer at a young age, so that it can be a part of who they are as they develop their own Jewish identities.

Start your kids young. Our Hebrew School begins with Pre-K classes. Make it a part of their routine from the very beginning, so that your kids never have the sense that Hebrew School is taking the place of another activity they love. Show them that Jewish learning is a priority in your family, and that going to Hebrew School is an expected part of life, just like "regular" school. Don't allow Judaism to be a question of if or when – teach your kids that it's a given. If it holds that place in your family's life, together, you can explore what is meaningful to you and when you want to engage more deeply.

Build a foundation for your family now, because without one, the Jewish lives that your kids will want to build as adults will have much less to hold them up. Commit to Jewish communal life in our wonderful community so that you can ensure your family's vibrant Jewish future.

Or L'Atid  
אור לעתיד

Youth  
Education  
& Programming

Congregation Or Zarua

## Hebrew School begins Monday, September 11!

Contact Sigal, [scohen@orzarua.org](mailto:scohen@orzarua.org) or visit our website, [orzarua.org/or-latid/hebrew-school/](http://orzarua.org/or-latid/hebrew-school/) to learn more about OZ's Hebrew School program. It's never too late to start learning!





## Or L'Atid is so much more than Hebrew School.

Or L'Atid is all about community.

OZ members can find their unique place at OZ through participation in Shabbat and holiday services and programs, classes, social or hesed events, Israel engagement, singing with Bir'nana... the list goes on and on.

All are welcome - come with your kids or without them!

In addition to all the opportunities for connection that can be found at OZ, we have created a community within our community - Or L'Atid.

Families come together to learn, pray, celebrate and socialize with programming designed with intergenerational participation in mind. Judaism is a family thing - it's not limited to either the parents or the children. We want kids and parents alike to be empowered to live Jewishly.

We are constantly expanding our offerings so that everyone can find the right moment to connect.

Contact Sigal, [scohen@orzarua.org](mailto:scohen@orzarua.org) or visit our website, [orzarua.org/or-latid/](http://orzarua.org/or-latid/) to find your moment.





# Israel Opportunities & News

**Israeli Biblical Fortress and Forest of Your Dreams**  
Read at: <https://tinyurl.com/BiblicalFortress082023>



**Cleaning Up Space  
Make Flying Cars a Reality**

**How Israeli Tech is Tackling  
Space Debris and Advancing  
Satellite Propulsion**

Read at:  
<https://tinyurl.com/SpaceTrash082023>

# Celebrating Israel Throughout the Year

Israeli Water Experts Aid South Africa's Water Challenges

Read at: <https://tinyurl.com/IsraelWater082023>



Unearthing  
Echoes  
of the  
Second  
Temple's  
Fall in  
Jerusalem



Read at: <https://tinyurl.com/2ndTemple082023>



## READING PARTNERS

We have a new partnership for fulfilling the mitzvah of "teaching them diligently to your children."

The OZ Hesed committee invites and encourages you to tutor students in NYC public schools in-person or online.

We are delighted to announce that Or Zarua has formed a partnership with an outstanding national program designed to promote literacy in public schools. READING PARTNERS supports students who are significantly behind grade level in reading.

Tutors work one-on-one with students twice a week, either onsite at the school or remotely using a school online set-up. Volunteer tutors will be trained to utilize an individualized literacy program.

We are seeking congregants to join us in this vital and rewarding opportunity. Please contact Sara Adler at [seadler216@gmail.com](mailto:seadler216@gmail.com) if you are interested in participating and/or would like to learn more about the program.

## The Re-Creation of the Or Zarua Newsletter

Our synagogue's Newsletter is undergoing changes. Some of these changes have already been instituted. **Spotlight**, a new Or Zarua publication, which has been appearing monthly since May, contains the calendars as well as "flyers" providing brief descriptions of upcoming programs. The monthly publication of **Spotlight** will provide up-to-date information about all Or Zarua events.

The former newsletter, which will now appear quarterly, is becoming a magazine called **Or Hadash** (meaning *New Light*). **Or Hadash** will contain feature articles about classes, programs, and events as well as other articles of interest to our Congregation. Each issue will be theme-based. For example, this issue, which is both *New Light* and *Elul* themed, contains articles written by parents of the Or Zarua Hebrew School, an article by Rabbi Bolton about the significance of prayer in a minyan, two *Elul* themed essays from past editions of *Orot*, and a photo of Haifa at night. **Or Hadash** will continue to publish the President's Message and the Community News. Future issues will present articles prepared by Congregant's Bobbi Collier and Gerry Solomon on exhibits in the Art Gallery, photo montages of Or Zarua get-togethers and outings, coverage of hesed events, services for Shabbat, Yom Tov, and the daily minyan, Or Zarua Committee News, as well as original theme-based photos.

If you would like to participate in any aspect of the preparation of **Or Hadash**—original writing, layout, photography, implement new ideas—or submit a theme-based article or photograph please contact me, via email at [CharlesSpielholz@gmail.com](mailto:CharlesSpielholz@gmail.com). Involvement of Congregants is key to producing a publication that serves the Or Zarua Community.

-Charlie Spielholz

# New Board Members

**Natalie Friedman** is a native New Yorker who grew up in Queens in a multi-lingual family of immigrants from the former Soviet Union. She attended the Bronx High School of Science, and then went on to receive a B.A. in English and French at Vassar College. After earning a Ph.D. in American Literature from New York University, Natalie taught first-year writing, Holocaust literature, and Jewish American literature at Boston University, Marymount College, and Vassar College. She eventually moved into academic administration and worked as a dean at both NYU and Barnard College. In 2020, she left Barnard to direct the New York office of The Posse Foundation, which grants college scholarships to underrepresented students who show leadership potential. In 2021, she made a career shift and now works at Spencer Stuart International in their Leadership Advisory Services. She and her family have been members of Or Zarua since 2012. She is mother to Noah (17), and Margot (13), and wife to Chris, who is a dedicated member of Birnana. One fun Jewish fact about Natalie is that she speaks Yiddish, having learned it from her maternal bubbe. *Zei gezunt und shtark! Mazal und brucha* to all.

**Alan Ilberman** served two previous terms on the Board of Trustees and has served in numerous positions at OZ over the years. He currently is on the Fund for the Future Committee and serves as chair of the Security Committee. In 1993, after many years in property management, Alan founded Business Solutions Inc, a

boutique property management and real estate investment firm specializing in properties tenanted by the United States Government. In 1999, he founded REDirect Consulting, which over the years, became a global technology advisory firm, serving the real estate industry. In 2022, after years of arduous toil, Alan sold both businesses and retired. He is looking forward to additional learning, travel and volunteer opportunities in the years to come. Alan and his wife Caroline, a fine artist specializing in collage, have been members of Or Zarua for 27 years and live in Yorkville.

**Jonathan Mishkin** has been a member of Or Zarua for almost ten years. He has lived in New York for most of his life, with time away in Chicago, Toronto and Tel Aviv. He was a resident of the Upper East Side until he renovated an empty brownstone in Harlem on Strivers Row. And stayed at OZ—mostly because he enjoys the close community he has found here!

Jonathan is a former co-chair of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research and member of the board of the Center for Jewish History in New York. He is the proud father of two daughters (one recently married) and one son. Jonathan has completed twelve marathons and is thankful his knees and hips have not given up on him. He is also a fan of the New Jersey Devils and the New York Mets. Jonathan received a BA from Columbia University and an MBA from the University of Chicago.

Jonathan travels frequently to Israel where he has many family members. He recently closed on

a duplex apartment just south of Tel Aviv, in Bat Yam, close to the beach, that he intends to rent out on AirBNB. Discounts available for OZ members.

For his day job, Jonathan is a Managing Director of TM Capital Corp. and co-leads TM Capital's industrial practice where he focuses on the Print, Paper and Packaging sectors. Prior to joining the firm Jonathan was the founder and managing partner of Sanabe & Associates, LLC. Prior to founding Sanabe & Associates in 2002, Jonathan was North American Group Head for Paper, Packaging and Forest Products for Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenrette (DLJ) from 1994–2000 and retained this position after DLJ was acquired by Credit Suisse First Boston (CSFB) in 2000.

From 1989 – 1994, Jonathan built a leading franchise in Canadian paper and forest products at Burns Fry Limited. He served on the board of Ainsworth Lumber, a large Canadian manufacturer of oriented strand board.

# OZ Gallery News

## New Year, New Exhibit

### She Did It!

## Extraordinary Jewish-American Women

Come to another fascinating exhibition at "The Synagogue with an Art Gallery" and meet 16 extraordinary women on October 29th.



They fought for the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, the formation of unions for underpaid workers, civil rights, women's rights, and the education and wellbeing of children. With hard work, determination, and perseverance, they succeeded beyond all expectations. A surprising number of Jewish women broke barriers to become "the first" in their field, rising to the top of diverse careers including business and entrepreneurship, science, medicine, visual art, the performing arts, law, politics, education, philanthropy, and religion.



127 East 82nd Street, New York, NY 10028