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Rabbi’s Message
The Reel Rabbi

*The first of occasional columns on faith and films.*

“The Tree of Life,” directed by Terrence Malick, is a story about the tragedy of a middle-class Catholic couple in Waco, Texas, some time in the 1950s. Mr. O’Brien (Brad Pitt), a hard-driving plant manager, and Mrs. O’Bien (Jessica Chastain), a housewife, lose one of their three young sons in a tragic accident. From the opening shot, however, which shares two verses from the book of Job, to its conclusion, with an eerie depiction of the afterlife, the film views the family’s tragedy from the perspective of eternity.

When the Talmudic Rabbis wondered what Moses was doing up on Mount Sinai for 40 days, some concluded that he was exploring with G-d the question of why the righteous suffer. Similarly, this movie is propelled by the belief that the suffering of this family cannot be addressed by a story, however poignant, constrained by the personalities and conventions of Eisenhower’s Middle America. Indeed, the characters frequently do not even speak to each other but rather individually, in poignant voiceovers, accompanying cosmic scenes. During a long, phantasmagoric, and aurally and visually overwhelming depiction of creation at the film’s beginning, Mrs. O’Brien laments, “Life of my life; my search for you!”

*Rabbi’s message continued on p. 4*

Service Schedule for July 2011

*NOTE: Sunday Morning Minyan is always at 9:00 unless otherwise stated.*

**July 1-2 Shabbat Chukkat – Rosh Chodesh Tammuz**
Candle Lighting 8:11 P.M. Shabbat ends 9:14 P.M.
Friday Night 6:00 P.M.
Shabbat Morning 9:30 A.M. **(Note earlier time because of Rosh Chodesh)**

**July 8-9 Shabbat Balak**
Candle Lighting 8:09 P.M. Shabbat ends 9:12 P.M.
Friday Night 6:00 P.M.
Shabbat Morning 9:30 A.M.
Torah Study Group 11:00 A.M.

**July 15-16 Shabbat Pinchas**
Candle Lighting 8:06 P.M. Shabbat ends 9:09 P.M.
Friday Night 6:00 P.M.
Shabbat Morning 9:30 A.M.

**July 22-23 Shabbat Mattot**
Candle Lighting 8:01 Shabbat ends 9:04 P.M.
Friday Night 6:00 P.M.
Shabbat Morning 9:30A.M.

**July 29-30 Shabbat Massei**
Candle Lighting 7:55 Shabbat ends 8:58 P.M.
Friday Night 6:00 P.M.
Shabbat Morning 9:30A.M.
It’s Time to Pay, Pal: Kane Street’s End of Fiscal Year
The end of Kane Street’s fiscal year is fast approaching! Before we close our books on July 31, we would appreciate it if members who owe money for this year can make their payments by this date. And of course, additional donations are always welcome!!

Avoid Class Struggle; Sign Up Soon for Hebrew School
Hebrew School begins September 12. It is not too late to register but some of the classes are almost at capacity. Please get your registrations in as soon as possible, and encourage your friends and neighbors with kids to check out our fantastic program. Contact Rabbi Valerie Lieber for more information vlieber@kanestreet.org. You can download the registration at: http://kanestreet.org/home/2011-12_hebrew-school-registration/.

Ohmmmmmm Tov: Jewish Meditation and Yoga Class July 21
Enroll in a July 21 Kane Street workshop from 6:30 to 8 p.m. to learn how to use gentle chair yoga, Jewish meditation and contemplative techniques to find relaxation, healing and a sense of peace. Refresh your spirit this summer. All levels of yoga and meditation practitioners welcome, including beginners. Wear comfortable clothing. Workshop conducted by Jessica Klaitman, certified yoga teacher, and Maxine Skurka. Both are Connect to Care Resource Specialists. RSVP by phone (212) 632-4602 or email connect-to-care@jbfcs.org.

Give Us the Dish on Our Green Cutlery and Plates
Join the Greening Initiative and make Kane Street and our community a greener and more sustainable place. Let us know what you thought of our test run using environmentally sustainable cutlery and plates at Kiddush the last few weeks. Contact: Marion Stein marions@panix.com.

Grad All Over
Congratulations to the following Kane Street families, all contributors to the June 25 Graduation Kiddush, for their high school, college, and law school graduates. (And congratulations to all Kane Street families whose children matriculated this year.)

❖ The Vigrass/Abrams Family ❖ The Vossen/Bloomfield Family ❖ The Makow/Brickner Family ❖ The Bodenheim/Byaela Family ❖ The Wilsher/Freed Family ❖ The Kleinman Family ❖ The Kolber Family ❖ The Levinson Family ❖ The Rifkin Family ❖ The Romano Family ❖ The Green/Stulberg Family ❖ The Lieberman/Telzak Family ❖ The Scarvalone/Weisman Family

Jewish Bike Ride: Pedal to Eco-Mettle
Biking, sustainable food, the environment and Jews go together like…challah and wine! Join the “YES WE KANE” team for the Hazon New York Jewish Bike Ride and Retreat over Labor Day weekend. It starts with a beautiful Shabbat of learning, playing and eating great food in Dutchess County (you can sign up for the Shabbat-only plan). Then Sunday morning we bike through the countryside over the Hudson and back to Putnam County. Monday we ride into NYC ending at JTS. You can ride a bike or serve on the crew. For more information, ask Rabbi Valerie or check out www.Hazon.org. If you can’t attend, you can sponsor our team!
Have You Seen the Tucky Drucker Garden Lately? (Hint: It’s At Kane Street)
KSS’s garden, located on Tompkins Place and dedicated to the memory of longtime member Tucky Drucker, has been replanted by volunteers. The Synagogue contributed funds to replace plantings that were destroyed during the Sanctuary roof replacement project. Now the garden looks beautiful! Thanks to Vivien Shelanski for helping to coordinate and to all the other volunteers, especially our neighbors the Blyers for doing the actual planting.

Next Cobble Hill Health Center Visit July 23
Join the Social Justice Committee at the Cobble Hill Health Center (380 Henry St.) 10 to 11 a.m. July 23 to schmooze and sing songs with the residents.

Give Honey for Rosh Hashanah and Give Sweetness and Love
Every year our honey sale is extremely popular because it brings so much happiness to those who get a jar in time for the Jewish New Year. It is so sweet we call it a Love Raiser rather than a fundraiser – although it does raise important funds for the Synagogue, which especially support our children’s learning and Shabbat experiences. Jars are $12 each and will be mailed directly to your recipients. Please send your payment and list of recipients to Rabbi Valerie no later than July 15. The order form can be found on the home page of the Kane Street web site: www.kanestreet.org.

JBFCS Social Worker Now Available at Kane Street
The JBFCS Partners in Caring program provides social service support to its partner synagogues. Thanks to a grant from UJA-Federation of New York, a JBFCS social worker is now available to Kane Street Synagogue to provide consultation, training and direct social work services to the synagogue community, including crisis intervention, time-limited counseling, case management, information and referral, mutual support groups (such as bereavement, caregivers, and single parent), and community education programs. To access Partners in Caring, please contact Gloria Blumenthal: (212) 632 7646 or gblumenthal@jbfcs.org. Look for information in an upcoming Kane Yirbu about a meeting to introduce Partners in Caring to Kane Street congregants!

Sing Along Project July 14 Is Music To the Eyes as Well
Shirim v’Chasadim -- the Sing Along Project – is expanding to encompass the visual arts! Kane Streeter and artist Fred Terna will present a slide show 6 p.m. July 14 on "The Binding of Isaac" at Cobble Hill Health Center. Come hear Fred, see his work, and spend time with our friends and neighbors at the center. For more information or to volunteer your talents, contact Nigel FeBland at feblandgrp@aol.com.

Kane Street Kiddush FAQs
The word “Kehillah” means community, and one of the aims of our Synagogue is to foster a strong sense of community by providing an ample, pleasing Kiddush after Shabbat services. Eating together, schmoozing, and relaxing helps to strengthen our community and elevate Shabbat. Funds for these light luncheons are provided by members celebrating a special occasion, such as an anniversary, baby naming or Bar/Bat Mitzvah — or any occasion. We are reaching out to all members, particularly those who might not have sponsored a Kiddush in the recent past, or perhaps ever before, and are asking you to help make our community stronger by sponsoring a Kiddush. Below are questions and answers about how it’s done:
How do I sponsor a kiddush?
Call the office to check your proposed date. Linda or her staff can discuss your options and help you make arrangements.

How much does it cost to sponsor a kiddush?
The office can provide you with a list of approved Kosher caterers for large simchas. In addition, fellow congregant Olga Shraer of Olga on Smith can provide $244 and $302 options here, which will feed about 125 for a light lunch. You may order through the KSS office, which will bill your account.

Can I do it myself?
Self-catering can be an affordable option. For example: 16 pounds of salad, 10 dozen rolls, 10 pounds of fruit, and a tray of cookies can be bought at Costco for about $100. But you must abide by the Synagogue’s Kashrut policy: *All packaged foods must have a hecksher, a seal from a known kosher inspection agency. *No home-cooked foods may be brought into the building. *Any food prepared in the KSS kitchen requires permission of the office and supervision of the Rabbi. *All items must come in disposable platters and containers, ready to set out without plating, and be delivered to KSS on Friday afternoon by 1 p.m. during winter months and 3 p.m. for spring/summer.

Tisha B’Av Services and Fast Aug 8-9
Tisha B’Av, the fast day of the Ninth of Av, is the saddest day of the Jewish Year. We remember on this day some of the greatest tragedies of our history, including the destruction of the First and Second Temples, and the exiles that followed.

The fast begins Monday night, Aug. 8, at 8:04 P.M. and ends on Tuesday evening at 8:32 P.M. As on Yom Kippur, eating, drinking, bathing, anointing one’s body with cosmetics, wearing leather shoes and sexual intercourse are forbidden. Even the study of Torah, except for sorrowful texts like the Book of Job, are prohibited, since the study of Torah is a joyous activity.

Tisha B’Av begins with a sad but beautiful service that will begin Monday night at 8:30 P.M. in the Goldman Center Social Hall. We pray the brief Ma’ariv evening services in a hushed tone, and then (if it is physically possible) the worshippers sit on the floor for the chanting of Lamentations and the singing of Kinot (hymns) in an exquisite cantillation that is special to Tisha B’Av. We dim the lights, which reflects our darkened mood, so PLEASE BRING A FLASHLIGHT to follow the texts.

The next morning, we join together for Shacharit services, again with Kinot beginning at 7:30 A.M. and ending about 9:00 A.M. Tallit and Teffillin are not worn but we add a Torah reading and Haftarah, again with the special Tisha B’Av Cantillation.

After Tisha B’Av is Shabbat Nachamu, the Shabbat of Comfort, Aug. 12 and 13, which begins a seven-week period of consolation, self-examination, and re-commitment to the community and spiritual optimism, culminating on Sept. 28 with Rosh Hashanah.

Rabbi’s Message, cont.
Cinematically, the individual family members are seen adrift. They are often shot partially or alone. The camera takes us away from the world of social industry and community that energized postwar America, and offers instead, for example, numerous ground shots of the trees on the O’Brien’s property seen against a grey, indifferent sky, accompanied at times by a haunting requiem.
The setting of “The Tree of Life” may be rural, but nature is often seen as indifferent or inimical. At its opening, set against a black screen, we find the text of Job 38:4: “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth; declare if you have the understanding!” In this powerful chapter, G-d appears to Job out of a storm, and teaches him that just as man cannot create or understand the grandeur of nature, so we cannot fathom G-d’s judgments.

As most of the Book of Job shares his companion’s speeches to him, so this film, shortly after these opening texts, in a voiceover, shares the words of one of Mrs. O’Brien’s comforters: “There is the way of nature and the way of grace. We must choose which one we will follow. Grace accepts in full love the world as it is. Nature places itself at the center and seeks to lord over others. It has its own way, and finds reasons to be unhappy even when love is shining through all things. No one who loves in the way of grace ever comes to a bad end.”

This juxtaposition of nature and grace recalled for me two ways in which the Torah knows G-d. G-d in the Torah is called Elohim (G-d) but also Adonai (Lord). The Talmudic Rabbis felt that Elohim refers to the Divine attribute of justice, while Adonai characterizes the Divine attribute of mercy.

Elohim refers to the G-d of nature, the reality of the way things are, not the way they ought to be. Elohim refers to the G-d who created the world and grounds it in dependable natural laws. Our physical world obeys these laws, not moral dictates.

Adonai is the complementary aspect of Divinity. Adonai, identified with mercy, is that part of the Divine which inspires us to engage, transform and improve upon nature in ways that are moral. Elohim is the reality principle. Adonai is the human capacity to respond to reality. Adonai is in the work of people who rescue the victims of natural disaster, who find life-saving cures for disease, and who are able to accept the love of others and find dignity and hope even after devastating personal tragedies.

As Job, Mr. and Mrs. O’Brien first respond to their tragedy with shock and bewilderment. It will be years before the family can accept their loss. We hear no conversation between the father and mother about the loss of their child (only compensatory fighting about the proper rearing of their surviving sons!). The couple is strikingly handsome and fit, but there is not a hint of sexual intimacy between them. Mrs. O’Brien dances once in the film, while hanging laundry, but the camera soon pans, predictably, up through bare trees to a silent sky.

Mr. O’Brien throws himself full throttle into his work. His life with the boys is joyless. Interactions that might have become playful—teaching them to garden or box—become dutiful and taciturn. We see him marching into the dining room, ordering his sullen sons to “give their father a kiss.” He lectures Jack: “Your mother’s naïve. It takes fierce will to get ahead in this world. Otherwise people will take advantage of you. Don’t do like I did. I once dreamed of being a great musician. I was sidetracked.”

The Book of Job ends on a note of healing and restoration. Job’s 10 children are returned to him, along with a huge estate, and he lives 140 more years, long enough to see great-great-grandchildren. So, “The Tree of Life” ends on a note of fulfillment, occasioned, meaningfully, by yet another setback. Mr. O’Brien, the Company Man whose life was propelled by the boyish optimism of postwar America, loses his job. We
see the family then leaving their Waco home for a destination that is not disclosed. A voiceover (G-d?), however, preaches, “The only way to be happy is to love. Unless you love, your life will just flash by.”

Mr. O’Brien, who almost looks relieved after his loss of employment, tells Jack, “You are all I have, all I ever wanted to have. I wanted you to be strong, to be your own boss. I was too tough, but I was proud.” Jack responds, “I am like you.” Finally, Mr. O’Brien accepts the reality of nature in the only way that it can be accepted, fully. He is now open to the power of grace. His son was lost, but his future is open before him. The members of this family cannot change the past, but they can open their hearts to their future.

**Todah Rabah**

**Special Contributions to Kane Street Synagogue (from Jan. 1, 2011; updated June 21, 2011)**

- Paul and Nancy Fink for the General Fund
- Elana Santo for the General Fund
- Sheldon Zorfas and Mei-Ying Tsai for the General Fund
- **In honor of Bob and Gloria Blumenthal’s anniversary**
- Evelyn Rubenstein
- **In memory of Milton Mandel**
- Marion Stein
- **In honor of Paul Fink’s birthday**
- Dr. Stanley Friedman and Shira Scheindlin
- **In honor of Sam Rubenstein’s engagement**
- Dr. Stanley Friedman and Shira Scheindlin
- **In honor of Eva Lytal Phillips**
- Andre and Rena Schklowsky
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- In honor of Benjamin Zalman’s birthday
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- In memory of Bob and Gloria Blumenthal
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- Martin Gringer and Barbara Zahler-Gringer
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In memory of David Trager, cont.
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Seth and Judith Greenwald
In memory of Pearl and Herman Greenwald
June Posner
In honor of Ami Blumenthal’s engagement
Evelyn Rubenstein
Frederick Terna and Rebecca Shiffman
In honor of Dean and Ronnie Ringel’s new granddaughter
William and Susan Rifkin (for the Building Fund)
Michael and Vivien Shelanski (for the Building Fund)
In honor of Josh Gutoff
William and Susan Rifkin (for the Building Fund)
In memory of Harriet Chad
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Robert and Gloria Blumenthal
Evelyn Rubenstein
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In memory of Bertha Brown
Ceil Dresher
In honor of the Youth Klezmer Band
Kenneth Hudes & Hiroko Otani
In memory of Herbert Klein
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In memory of Trude Mayer
Seth and Judith Greenwald
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In honor of Ellen Shaw
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Rita Zweifach
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Alan Salzberg and Lisa Smith
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In honor of Rachel Fink’s engagement
Evelyn Rubenstein
Philip and Ellen Phillips
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In honor of Matt Friedman’s engagement
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In honor of Daniel Weintraub’s Bar Mitzvah
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Seth and Judith Greenwald
Joy Fallek
William and Susan Rifkin
Hai and Betsey Knafo
In honor of Marah Birnbaum’s Bat Mitzvah
Jason Gitlin and Laureve Blackstone

In honor of Vicky Vossen and David Bloomfield for successfully completing the college application process
Philip and Ellen Phillips

In honor of Josiah Trager’s engagement
Frederick Terna and Rebecca Shiffman

In honor of Bayle Smith-Salzberg’s Bat Mitzvah
Jay Silverstein and Tamar Laks
William Bregman and Sheila Rabin (for the Bob Rabin Fund)
Seth and Judith Greenwald
William and Susan Rifkin
Marion and Ronald Stein
Hai and Betsey Knafo
Michael and Vivien Shelanski

In recognition of Rabbi Barat Ellman receiving her Ph.D.
Marion and Ronald Stein
William Bregman and Sheila Rabin (for the Bob Rabin Fund)

In honor of Miriam Samson’s 100th birthday
Seth and Judith Greenwald
Harold and Arlene Schneider (for the Sanctuary Preservation Fund)
William and Susan Rifkin

In honor of Raphael Schklowsky’s engagement
William and Susan Rifkin

In memory of Myra Segal
Jay Silverstein and Tamar Laks
Seth Lieberman and Andrea Glick
William and Susan Rifkin
Claudia Warburg
Evelyn Rubenstein
Marion and Ronald Stein
Alan Salzberg and Lisa Smith
Michael and Vivien Shelanski
Avram Nemetz and Linda Kane

In memory of David Cobin
Evelyn Rubenstein
Michael and Vivien Shelanski