

# The Synagogue Journal

## 1856-2006

October 13, 2006

historicaljournal@kanestreet.org

Shabbat Sh'mini Atzeret

### Issue 41 Adult Education

#### In this issue ...

As we usher in Simchat Torah, the most joyous day of the Jewish year, we look at our synagogue's long history as a house of Jewish studies. The holiday marks the thorough Jewish identification with learning that is associated in our tradition, not just with intellectual development, professional advance or scientific and technical progress, but with joy! *Brooklyn Eagle* articles note nineteenth century educational events at the synagogue, the speakers, topics and audience. In 1891 there were more than one hundred members of the Hebrew Progress Society, mostly of the "younger element." Baith Israel Literary League held Friday evening lectures for "literary and social purposes." Bible classes, debates, lectures and choral singing were offered on weekday evenings.

During the Goldfarb years, a number of men's and women's clubs at the synagogue provided cultural and educational activities. The Junior Members society was established to advance cultural, social and religious interests for men over eighteen. "Chief among their activities will be a monthly Forum for the presentation and discussion of timely topics." The Sisterhood, Men's Club and Young Folks Club (co-ed) each served distinct sectors of the community.

In the last fifty years Rabbis Henry Michelman, Eliot Rosen, Shael Siegel, Ray Scheindlin, Jonathan Ginsburg, Geoffrey Goldberg, Debra Cantor and Samuel Weintraub have organized and taught Jewish studies. A number of long-time devoted teachers from the congregation deserve special recognition: Bob Weinstein, Bob Rabin, Leonard Wasserman, Danny Magill, Fred Terna, Jennie Brooks and Bob Marx. The synagogue's first Scholar-In-Residence weekend was held February 1986 in celebration of the 850<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Maimonides. Rabbi Gordon Tucker was the first guest scholar. Subsequent weekends became known as the Sarah L. Leeman Scholar-in-Residence weekend in honor of our dedicated treasurer. Bernie and Sarah Leeman funded programs with guest scholars: Dr. Neil Gillman on "Modern Jewish Thought and Thinkers;" Professor Shaul Magid on "Jewish Mysticism;" Dr. Samuel Heilman on "The Shas Voters: Religious Fundamentalists or Separdhic Underclass?" and "Jewish Mesianism Today: What Is It?" Professor Eliezer Diamond on "Judaism and the Environment;" Deena Aranoff on Maimonides. Other recent programs of note are Rabbi Ray Scheindlin's mini-series of lectures on Islamic thought, a dialogue on Jewish Christian relations between Rabbi Irving Greenberg who spoke on his book, *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth*, and Reverend David Fisher, Senior Minister, Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims, and the historical symposium "Keeping the Faith in Brooklyn."

Book discussion groups have been well attended. In 1996 The Scroll noted, "Zach Baker, Julia Hirsch and Beth Bosworth led Book Salons about the books *Bintel's Brief*, *Humoldt's Gift*, *The Assistant* and a biography of Isaac Baashevis Singer." During the past three years, David Samuels has organized the Y. L. Peretz Distinguished Writers' Series held on Shabbat afternoons. Authors have included: Ron Rosenbaum on Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, Andre Aciman on *Out of Egypt*, Virginia Heffernan on *Daniel Deronda* by George Eliot and Katie Roiphe on Farideh Goldin's *Wedding Song*.

For a flavor of two comprehensive courses offered at Kane Street's Educational Center, read Tim Rucinski's article about Me'ah and the Q & A with Iris Katzner, in which she shares reminiscences about Perek Yomi. The journal includes a current listing of Adult Educational offerings in "Learning – 2006".

Special thanks to: Tim Rucinski, Iris Katzner; Rabbi Weintraub, Vivien Shelanski; Jack Levin; the Brooklyn Daily Eagle Online™, Brooklyn Public Library; [www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/eagle](http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/eagle)

Carol Levin, Editor  
[historicaljournal@kanestreet.org](mailto:historicaljournal@kanestreet.org)

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**“Hebrew Progress”** February 1891

Rev. Dr. Pereira Mendez addressed the congregation’s Hebrew Progress society. “He claimed that intelligence was the precursor of happiness.”

**“The Hebrew Family – a Migratory People on the Road to Progress”** April 1891

Reverend Marcus Friedlander delivered a lecture in the synagogue Baith Israel on this significant topic.

**“New Literary League”** October 25, 1901

This brief notice about “Beth Israel Literary League” notes that the society will “have lectures delivered every Friday evening and for the furtherance of other literary and social purposes.”

### **Sleepless Wednesdays**

Kane Street Me’ah coordinator Tim Rucinski writes about the class with one hundred hours.

### **Perek Yomi: One Student’s Perspective**

Iris Katzner reminisces about Kane Street’s Adult Education program.

### **Learning –Fall 2006**

Curriculum, fees and instructors for Kane Street Synagogue’s current season

## HEBREW PROGRESS.

### An Interesting Lecture at the Synagogue Baith Israel.

A large audience filled the auditorium of the Synagogue Baith Israel, State street and Boeruin place, last night, to listen to a lecture on "Hebrew Progress" by the Rev. Dr. H. Pereira Mendez, of the Portuguese Jewish synagogue in New York. Dr. Mendez is well known to the congregation Baith Israel, as some three years ago he had charge for a short time of the synagogue. His address was very pleasant and was thoroughly entertaining. His discourse was directed especially to the members of the Hebrew Progress Society, under whose auspices the lecture was given.

Dr. Mendez's theme was practically on how societies should be conducted. He claimed that much good resulted from the banding together of persons for social and intellectual purposes. He added, however, that willing heartedness, charity and a disposition to give way in favor of a little opposition when occasion required would help things immensely. He claimed that intelligence was the precursor of happiness. He gave the members the following as a motto for their organization: "Willing heartedness, kindly and charitable feelings for each other, a firm love for the synagogue and a pride in your congregation."

The Hebrew progress society is composed of the younger element of the congregation Baith Israel and, although organized only four months, has done much good work in promoting the social intercourse of its people. There are over one hundred members. The officers are: Joel Krone, president; Louis Levison and Miss Hattie Jacobs, vice presidents; Benjamin Bach, secretary; Miss R. Taylor, financial secretary; Miss Annie Weruberg, treasurer; George Obst, A. H. Levy, William J. Coleman, B. Bach, Nathan Sonnenstrahl, Miss M. Levison, Miss T. Marks, Miss S. Krone and Miss Fannie Jacobs, trustees.

Brooklyn Eagle; Apr 27, 1891; Page 4

"The Hebrew Family—a Migratory People on the Road to Progress" was the significant title of a lecture delivered by the Rev. Mr. Friedlander in the synagogue Baith Israel, last night. Other rabbis, Harrison and Taubenhau, delivered addresses. While the conservatives of the old faith are strong the liberals are growing in force in Brooklyn.

Dr. Meredith finished his series of able and interesting discourses on "The Beginnings of Christianity." The subject of the twenty-fifth sermon was the second coming of Christ. During the six months of their delivery these discourses have filled the Tompkins avenue church with attentive listeners. Final services were held in the Reformed church on New Jersey avenue. The edifice will be remodeled and improved and during the time required for this necessary work the pastor, Dr. Brooks, will preach in private houses.

## **NEW LITERARY LEAGUE**

Brooklyn Eagle; Oct 25, 1901: Page 16

The Beth Israel Literary League was organized last Tuesday and will hold its first meeting Tuesday evening next, at 8 o'clock, at the Temple Beth Israel, Boerum place and State street, for the purpose of electing permanent officers and the enrolling of members. The objects of this society will be to have lectures delivered under its auspices every Friday evening and for the furtherance of other literary and social purposes.

## Sleepless Wednesdays

by Timothy J. Rucinski

*Timothy J. Rucinski is Kane Street's Me'ah coordinator. He has been a member of the synagogue since 2002 and now serves on the board. He is employed by LaGuardia Community College as the Director of the Center for Corporate Education.*

All through this past year, Wednesdays brought sleepless nights.

They weren't unusual Wednesdays. There were no cataclysms to keep the sleepers awake or heightened urgencies beyond the norm. It did seem as if it had rained every Wednesday evening during the year, but inclement weather had nothing to do with late hour restlessness. It was just that Wednesdays were evenings of "Me'ah," two and a half hours dedicated to the serious study of Judaism. With this study came excitement and ideas and challenging concepts that were new and stimulating to a gathering of students in the Kane Street community room.

"I couldn't sleep at all Wednesday night," you would hear on Shabbat, week after week. "The whole idea of biblical redaction just kept my brain on fire," or, "I drove my husband crazy when I got home because I was so excited and couldn't stop talking about the Mishnah!"

Through the Me'ah Program, something fascinating took hold at Kane Street. A group of twenty-eight adult learners, some male, some female, some younger or older than others, some married, some single, some married to each other, some not even Jewish, all met for the sole purpose of studying Judaism at the college level. All brought their own agendas and curiosities, whether a need to better understand the history behind the prayer book and the Bible, or to find some locus by which to establish cultural and religious identity, or simply to satisfy a thirst for history of the Jewish people in general. These twenty-eight people, some of whom were close friends and some who were strangers, chose to spend their Wednesday evenings with one another on an adventure of discovery.

The first of the Me'ah instructors, Deena Aranoff, a young PhD candidate at Columbia University, began by engaging the class with the Hebrew Bible, something with which we were all familiar, but something with which we all soon realized we didn't know at all. Each week the class prepared by reading generous selections of Tanakh as well as selected articles and numerous books, arriving at seven o'clock on Wednesday evening, often bleary-eyed from finishing up the readings late into the night before.

Within a few weeks, a sense of camaraderie gelled within the confines of the community room. Not only was there a growing identification with Deena and the knowledge and humor that she brought to the class, there was a sense of belonging, there was a feeling of safety. You could say anything in the group and not worry that you would sound like an idiot. You could share conflicting ideas and notions, all of which were neither right nor wrong. The study group, in a very few short weeks, had blossomed into a community of learning.

Me'ah isn't easy. Some personal ideals that had been formed at an early age, at times, seemed to be on the brink of shattering. Some aspects of faith were challenged and, ultimately, reinforced through discussion and through an evening of questions and answers with Rabbi Weintraub. At all times, however, there was a genuine need to go on, to learn more, to accept and tackle the challenges. Yet, no matter how much the community fed upon knowledge, it still hungered for more. Even before mid-term, the question on many minds was, "What are we going to do when the program is over?!" "Me'ah withdrawal," someone remarked, "will be an ugly thing."

Me'ah, which in Hebrew means "100," is indeed a one hundred hour program that developed out of Hebrew College in Boston and is now replicated throughout the Northeast. Kane Street Synagogue was the first community to host the program in Brooklyn. The first year of study is divided into two semesters of ten weeks each, beginning with the Hebrew Bible, and continuing with the Rabbinical Period.

Deena Aranoff successfully guided us through the majesty of the Hebrew Bible. Dr. David Kramer, the rare books librarian at the Jewish Theological Seminary, was our guide into the Rabbinic period, the critical years following the destruction of the Temple. Members of the class had no idea about what waited for them in this highly "heady" subject area, but with David's masterful guidance, the journey progressed into a realm that opened our minds to the rich insightfulness, perplexities, and brilliance of the writers of the Mishnah and the Talmud.

As we enter the New Year, the Me'ah Program winds down with its final two semesters. The first features Judaism in the Medieval Period with an emphasis on the relationships between Judaism and Islam, and the writings and teachings of the great sages of the time. The year will conclude with Modern Judaism, not including the holocaust, which would be an entire class in itself.

It is impossible to cover more than a sampling of knowledge in these hundred hours. It's not meant to be so. But if one looks at the program as the hub of a wheel, the outreaching spokes of study topics are rich with possibilities. Some of us

find that we need to study more Talmud, as this simple taste was not enough. Others want to delve deeper into the settlement of Canaan by the Israelites and the indigenous cultures that came together to form the northern and southern kingdoms. Still others, moving forward, will want to pour over the works of Maimonides to discover how this brilliant man was able to define Judaism for his time.

This year's guides include Dr. Arnold Franklin, Assistant Professor of Classical and Oriental Studies at Hunter College, and Dr. Annie Polland, the Director of Education and History at the Eldridge Street Project, a not-for-profit that is stewarding the architectural restoration of the 1887 Eldridge Street Synagogue. Even now, as Me'ah prepares to begin in earnest for the year, students meet on Shabbat or on the street and ask, "Did you complete the summer readings yet? Fantastic stuff!" There is an eagerness to get back into the classroom.

If you walk past Kane Street on your way home one evening, peek into the glass window and see if you can catch a glimpse of the community room. In there you will find a community of adult learners, a very tight community of adult learners, opening their hearts and minds to the richness of Jewish history and heritage. It is only the beginning. There will undoubtedly be many more sleepless Wednesdays. A community of learning, after all, is meant to grow.



### **Perek Yomi: One Student's Perspective**

*Kane Street Synagogue offered a Bible study program in which students with all levels of learning read and studied the complete TaNaKh (Torah, Nev'im and Kethuvim) over the course of two-and-one-half years. The first cycle of this United Synagogue program began on Simchat Torah 5760 with the book of Joshua. Journal editor Carol Levin recently spoke with Iris Katzner about her experiences with Kane Street's Adult Education program. Their conversation included the following:*

#### **Who taught the Perek Yomi class?**

"Danny Magill and Ellen Shaw co-led the class. It was run very casually. Danny and Ellen served more as facilitators than teachers. Everyone had something interesting to say. I loved it when Danny would illustrate the meaning of particular passages with a medieval tale from a rebbe."

#### **What were the assignments?**

"Perek Yomi literally means "a chapter a day." Our weekly assignment was to read the next seven chapters of the Tanakh. Every week we'd read portions aloud in English and then discuss them. The primary text was "The Jewish Study Bible" published by the Jewish Publication Society in 1985, but people also brought additional Bibles to class. The only time Hebrew was used was for a confusing chapter. Then the Hebrew speakers would go to their texts and check the translations to get at the meaning."

#### **Who was in the class?**

"It was a terrific group of enthusiastic people. Some completed the entire cycle, which went from Joshua to Deuteronomy. Others joined us midway."

(Editor's note: The class included Roz Arons, Ernie Fried and Laura Barbanel, Ellen Farrar, Ellen and Mordechai Friedman, Danny Magill, Ellen Shaw, Vivien and Mike Shelanski, Ira Skop, Adina Solomon and her dad Eliot Solomon, Ron Stein, Ed Telzak and Maureen Weicher.)

#### **Where did the class meet?**

"We met on Tuesdays from 8 to 9:30 PM in the old community room before the redo of the Goldman Educational Center. During the winter months, it was freezing in the shul. One week someone brought in scotch so we could warm ourselves during the break. Drinking scotch at the break became a tradition – it was always single malt, no blended scotch."

#### **What's your religious educational background?**

"I grew up in Bedford Stuyvesant and Canarsie in a non-shul going Orthodox family. As a child I didn't attend Hebrew school but was certainly aware of my heritage and familiar with Bible stories. Stephen and I lived in the Village we belonged to the " Conservative Synagogue of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and when we moved from the village to Brooklyn twenty years ago, we joined Kane Street Synagogue. My first class here was beginning Hebrew and I learned enough to be able to follow along at shul. You know that I'm currently in the Me'ah class."

#### **Can you compare Perek Yomi with Me'ah?**

"Perek Yomi was taught on a *haimisha* level. It was more of a book club, a book club of the greatest book ever written. It was the most fun class that I ever took. Me'ah is more of a critical study of the Tanakh. It's an analysis of the writings from

a historical and literary perspective. At Perek Yomi there was no analysis of the historical proof. We took all the stories at face value.”

### **Did your study of the Tanakh affect you?**

“It did. It made the Bible more alive for me. I found that I could have learned conversations with people and it brought Biblical thought to everyday circumstance. The daily endeavors of man became part of my consciousness. In all this time, nothing has changed in personal relationships. The story of two brothers fighting is constant. I’m a food broker, and there would be situations in my business that related to the stories we discussed in class. Perek Yomi was the study of human relationships.”



## **LEARNING – 2006**

Kane Street Synagogue is committed to teaching people from all walks of life who want to explore Judaism. Our approach is pluralistic and informal. We learn from the many voices of Jewish tradition, and create a passionate, caring community of learners. We are pleased to offer these courses in the upcoming months: Except for Beginner’s and Intermediate Hebrew, courses require no prior background in Jewish studies or Hebrew.

### **Courses**

#### **Introduction to Judaism**

An exploration of Jewish thought, prayer, and practice, students look at inherited texts and contemporary issues as they learn about Jewish history, holidays, beliefs and ethics. Teachers: Rabbi Rona Shapiro and Rabbi Sue Oren. Class times: A 20-session course, beginning the week of October 8, taught in two separate sessions: Mondays, 7:30-9:30 at Kane Street Synagogue. Sundays, 7:30-9:30 at Congregation Beth Elohim

**Introduction to Hebrew** -- Learn to Read. An introduction to Hebrew letters, vowels, phonetics and basic vocabulary. This course prepares students to take “Beginner’s Hebrew” (see below). Teacher: Cila Allon. Class times: Three Tuesdays, 7:30-9:00 PM, beginning September 12, 2006.

#### **Beginner’s Hebrew – Learn to speak**

This course focuses on basic Modern Hebrew conversations and beginning grammar, while also increasing the students’ fluency in reading the Sabbath Synagogue prayers. Knowledge of Hebrew letters and vowels is required. This may be achieved by taking Introduction to Hebrew (see above) or by completing beforehand the primer, Teach Yourself to Learn Hebrew, available through the Rabbi’s office. Teacher: Cila Allon. Class times: Eight Tuesdays, 7:30-9:00 PM, beginning October 3, 2006.

#### **Intermediate Hebrew - Learn to write**

In this course students compose and write simple sentences, expand their vocabulary, and master conversations around day to day issues in Modern Hebrew. Teacher: Ofer Caspi. Class times: Eight Tuesdays, 7:30 – 9:00 PM, beginning October 3, 2006.

#### **Advanced Hebrew**

Students will read and analyze modern Israeli prose, study writing style and articulation, and discuss current social issues. Teacher: Cila Allon. Class times: Eight Tuesdays, 6:00-7:30 PM, beginning October 3, 2006.

#### **Hebrew for Teenagers**

Essentially the same curriculum as “Intermediate Hebrew” (see above), but geared for teens, ages thirteen to seventeen. Teacher: Ofer Caspi. Class times: Eight Tuesdays, 6:00-7:30 PM, beginning October 3, 2006.

#### **Tzurus, and its Antidotes: Jewish ways to keep yourself up when life gets you down**

Over 3200 years of tears and triumph, persecutions and prayers, setbacks and *simches*, Jews have perfected a nonviolent arsenal of outlooks and techniques to withstand the trials of life and even come out smiling. In this course, we will explore successful Jewish responses to *Tzurus* (trouble) in one’s relationship to family, work, and one’s own *Yetzer Hara* (destructive impulses). Our sources will include Torah stories and their interpretations, Jewish ethical texts, Talmudic lore, modern Jewish literature, Jewish humor and memoirs of notable Jews. Open to all, regardless of religious knowledge, background or beliefs. Teacher: Rabbi Sam Weintraub. Class times: Eight Tuesdays, 7:30-9:00 PM, beginnings October 24, 2006.



## Learn to Chant Torah

Would you like to experience the great honor and privilege of chanting Torah before the congregation? We offer private and small group instruction. Contact Rabbi Weintraub if you are interested.

## ME'AH

Me'ah is a comprehensive, two-year course in which students learn Jewish studies with professional University educators. The curriculum includes texts, personalities, history, beliefs, law and lore from the Bible to the modern period. There are four semesters, each with eleven weekly sessions. Teachers this year are Dr. Arnold Franklin for Medieval Jewish Civilization (Fall 2006) and Dr. Annie Polland for Modern Jewish Civilization (Spring 2007). Classes are full for 2006-7 but we are hoping to begin the next two year, Me'ah cycle at Kane Street in September 2007. For information or to indicate your interest, please contact Tim Rucinski at [tim\\_rucinski@yahoo.com](mailto:tim_rucinski@yahoo.com)

## Course Fees

	Members / non-members
Tzuras and its Antidotes	\$25 / \$50
Introduction to Hebrew	\$75 / \$90
Beginner's Hebrew	\$200 / \$240
Intermediate Hebrew	\$200 / \$240
Hebrew for Teens	\$200 / \$240
Advanced Hebrew	\$299 / \$240

The Learner's Service, and Torah and Mishna Study Groups are all free

## Faculty

**Cila Allon**, an Israeli painter and photographer, teaches Hebrew at Jeewish Theological Seminary and Yeshiva University.

**Jenny Brooks** is Principal of the East Midwood Jewish Center High School and a veteran adult education teacher at Kane Street.

**Ofer Caspi**, an Israeli writer and director, has published two books, written for major newspapers, and directed TV shows, feature films, and theatre.

**Dr. Arnold Franklin** is Assistant Professor of Classical and Oriental Studies at Hunter College, specializing in cultural Jewish-Islamic relations.

**David Grupper** has for the past twenty-five years led prayer services, Junior Congregation and the Learner's Service at Kane Street.

**Rabbi Josh Gutoff** has taught and written about Jewish prayer for over twenty years. He is currently a doctoral student at the William Davidson School of Jewish Education at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

**Dr. Annie Polland** is Director of Education and History at the Eldridge Street Project, and Visiting Professor of History at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

**Bob Marx** has for the past twenty-five years led a monthly Shabbat visiting program at he Cobble Hill Nursing Home, as well as prayers, Torah reading, special workshops and alternative High Holiday services at Kane Street,

**Rabbi Sue Oren** has developed adult courses in Jewish and interfaith settings in New York, Canada, Costa Rica, Holland and Italy.

**Rabbi Rona Shapiro**, ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary, currently works at Ma'yan: the Jewish Women's Project in New York.

**Rabbi Sam Weintraub** is Spiritual Leader of Kane Street Synagogue and has taught Judaism to people of all ages, in formal and informal ways for twenty-five years.



## About the Journal ...

The Synagogue Journal is a one-year online publication designed to highlight prominent individuals and events during the Kane Street Synagogue congregation's past 150 years.

We welcome submissions of reminiscences, letters and photographs to help shape the BIAE story for Congregation Baith Israel Anshei Emes. For a list of upcoming Journal themes or to read past issues, see "Archives" located under the Journal banner.

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