

FAMILY & RELIGION

■ Movies/B4, 6
■ TV Schedule/B5
■ Comics/B7

Jewish afterlife explored

By **Bob Barrett**
News-Sentinel religion writer

Do Jews believe in life after death?

Perhaps the question should be phrased, "Does Judaism believe in life after death?" according to Dr. Simcha Paul Raphael, a Jewish psychologist and theologian who teaches religion at the Roman Catholic LaSalle University in Philadelphia.

The answer to the first question is, "Some yes and some no," but the answer to the second question is, "Yes."

Raphael will discuss the Jewish view of the afterlife in a talk at 7:15 p.m. Monday at the Arnstein Jewish Community Center, 6800 Deane Hill Drive. He will reveal the stages of death based on his research of Jewish tradition from earliest Biblical times to the present. He will discuss the possibility of reincarnation and conclude by answering questions.

The talk is free and open to the general public. It will follow a \$10-a-plate deli

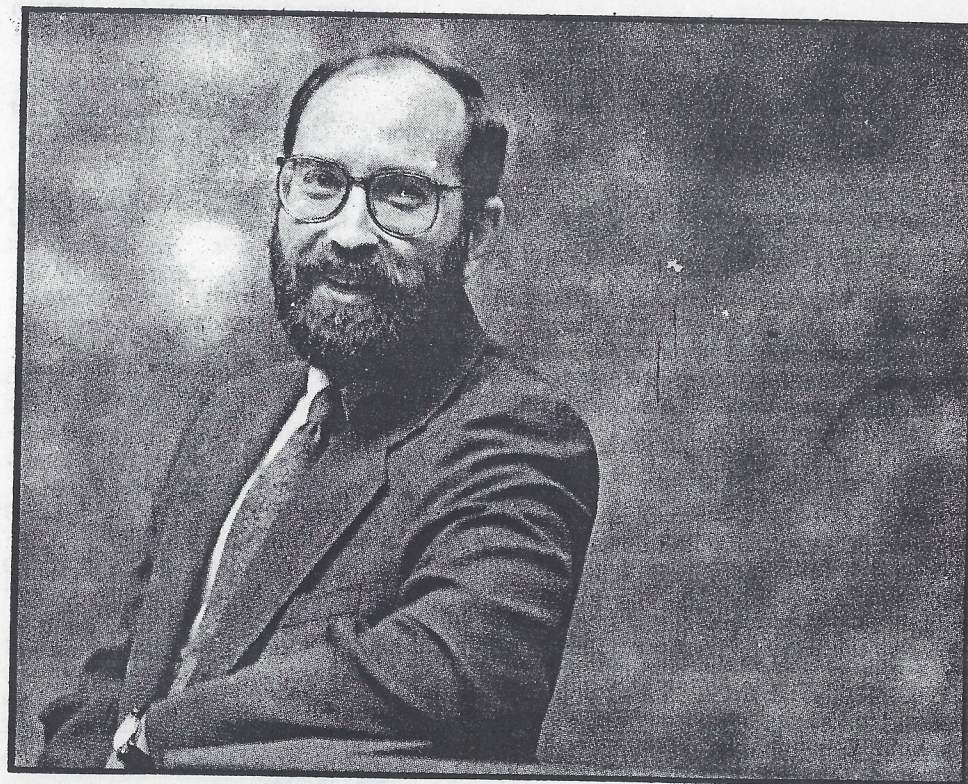
dinner at 6:30 p.m. Most seats for the dinner already have been filled, but a spokesman for the center said anyone wanting to check on a possible late reservation must call 690-6343 by Monday morning.

Raphael, who also teaches at Philadelphia's Gratz College, which specializes in Jewish studies, has made a lengthy study of the Jewish belief in a hereafter and is in the process of completing a book, whose working title is "Jewish Views of the Afterlife."

When not teaching, researching or writing on the book, he also has his own psychological counseling service. His business card offers "spiritually based psychotherapy."

"I got interested in the question of life after death when I was 21, following the death of my closest friend in an automobile accident," Raphael said.

Raphael, a native of Montreal, earned



J. Miles Cary/News-Sentinel staff

Please see **JEWS**, page **B2**

Dr. Simcha Paul Raphael: "There is no eternal damnation in Judaism. . . . There is an ancient tradition of seven heavens . . . I call 'R & R of the soul.'"

Jews

Continued from page B1

both his bachelor's and master's degrees in religious studies in Canada. He earned his doctorate in psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco, completing his dissertation on the implications of Jewish belief in an afterlife for the dying and the bereaved.

He spent two years as a bereavement counselor for a Jewish funeral home before joining La-Salle.

He is married to the former Rayzel "Randy" Robinson of Knoxville. They have one son, Yigdal.

The couple are visiting her parents, the Mitchell Robinsons of Sequoyah Hills. Her father is president of Modern Supply Co. and an uncle, Dr. Ruben Robinson, is a widely known area dentist.

She presently is studying to become a rabbi. Her grandfather A.J. Robinson was rabbi and sexton for Heska Amuna in Knoxville from the 1920s to the 1940s.

Raphael noted that he and his wife live in the Mount Airy section of Philadelphia, "touted as the center of the Jewish renewal movement in the United States."

He said many Jews, since the Holocaust, have been much more interested in how to live in this life, and interest in the hereafter has been nonexistent or, at best, secondary.

He also noted that for Judaism, as a religion, the emphasis always has been on how to live in this life.

"It's in this world that we

serve God," he said of the most popular view of Judaism. "In this world we can functionally do the Commandments, observe the Sabbath. We're more interested in the here and now than in the hereafter."

He paused.

"It's true," he said, "but it's only half true. There's a whole extensive teaching on life after death.

"What's happened (among Jews) in the past 10-15-20 years, there's more and more of a search for spirituality and meaning. The secular model is not sufficiently working for people — certainly among my contemporaries. I'm a baby boomer. I'm 40," he said.

Recalling the death of his best friend, he said, "Sometimes in the face of death, we finally face the questions of ultimate concern."

His search for an answer sent him not only to the ancient writings of the Bible, but to the mystic spiritualism of the Jewish Kabbalah, which grew up in the strong Jewish community in Spain from the 12th to the 16th centuries.

When Queen Isabella expelled the Jews from Spain, the tradition moved eastward to the area of Safed, Israel, then called Palestine.

He said the Jewish tradition recognizes several stages of death, each related to the physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of a person's being.

The first is the physical death, when a person separates from the physical body. That is called "the pangs of the grave," and can take from three to seven days.

Raphael says the tradition is that the more attuned to this physical world a person is, the more difficult this separation be-

comes.

After that comes Gehenna, what some call hell, or purgatory, which the Jews believe is a 12-month period of emotional purging or cleansing of the soul.

"Gehenna is not eternal damnation. There is no eternal damnation in Judaism," Raphael said.

He said the period is a time to resolve uncommunicated love or unresolved resentments that may have been present in the emotions of the deceased at the time of physical death.

The 12 months coincides with what for centuries has been a tradition of 12 months of mourning on the part of the departed's family.

Then, "that part of the soul dips in the River of Light (and) then enters into Gan Eden, or the Garden of Eden," Raphael said.

"There is an ancient tradition of seven heavens — higher and higher states of divine awareness," Raphael said. "I call this 'R & R of the soul.'"

At some later point, Raphael said, "mystical tradition says the soul's journey ends when it goes to 'Tzror Ha-Hayyim,' a storehouse of souls, where the soul receives the programming necessary for its next incarnation.

"From the 12th century on, reincarnation is as kosher as Mogen David wine," Raphael said, with a smile shining from beneath his beard.

"The implications are:

■ "Yes, Jews believe in life after death.

■ Also, "it teaches us something about life — what's important is the quality of the life we live now. If we live as we should in this life, the next will take care of itself."