

The Valley

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Jewish scholar to address life after death

By Laure Cioffi
Tribune-Review Media Service

A friend's death left Jewish student Simcha Raphael searching for answers about his faith's view of the afterlife.

"Generally, most people, Jews and non-Jews, assume as a given that Judaism does not believe in life after death," he said.

But when Raphael dug deeper into the subject, he found Judaism has a long history of afterlife beliefs that often are not taught today.

He plans to share some of his findings at a three-day scholar-in-residence program at Adat Shalom in Indiana Township this weekend.

Raphael was invited to speak by Rabbi David Greenspoon, who had heard him speak before another congregation.

"My sense is most people growing up Jewish are basically told Judaism believes something about heaven, but we are told to do good here," Greenspoon said. "But there is a 3,000-year history with different takes about what the afterlife experience is supposed to be all about."

Raphael's quest for answers about the afterlife started with his friend's fatal car accident.

"It was the early 1970s, and there was almost nothing available. I found few references, and there was almost a sense of 'We don't

If you go

Schedule for "Judaism and the Mysteries of Life, Death and the World Beyond:"

■ 7 p.m. Friday — Shabbat service followed by speaker Simcha Raphael at 8 p.m. Raphael will speak on "Jewish Views of the Afterlife."

■ Saturday — Raphael will speak on "Conscious Living and Dying: Guidelines from the Book of Genesis" during the 9:15 a.m. Shabbat service. The service will be followed by a luncheon and question-and-answer period.

The luncheon is \$7 per person for Adat Shalom members and \$10 for nonmembers, and reservations are required.

■ Sunday — 9 a.m. Sunday morning service, followed by a talk by Raphael on "From Mourning to Meaning, From Longing to Legacy: Jewish Wisdom and the Psychology of Grief" at 9:30 a.m. Lectures are free.

Location: Adat Shalom, 368 Guys Run Road, Indiana Township, near HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital.

Details: (412) 820-7000.

want to talk about it," he said.

A few years later, a teacher pointed him in the direction of mystical traditions dating to the 15th century.

"When I began to look at this old stuff with new eyes, I began to see there was a lot," Raphael said.

He found entire descriptions of the phases and states of the soul after death that correlate with modern Jewish ritual practices.

A doctoral dissertation on the subject eventually led to a published book that is considered the definitive reference work on the subject, Greenspoon said.

Interest in the subject has grown tremendously since Raphael started lecturing on the subject in the early 1980s, when his lectures attracted only three or four people.

He said he tries to combine the classical knowledge with contemporary psychological thinking.

"It's not only important to show the mystics' of the 15th century belief in life after death. It is important to show what we do with it today," he said. "It helps people dealing with grief. It helps people saying goodbye."

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adjunct faculty member at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, both in Philadelphia. He also is a therapist in private practice.

He will be the first scholar-in-residence at Adat Shalom.

Greenspoon said the goal of the program is to provide a cultural approach to Judaism with different programs that could include Jewish story telling, music and other subjects.

Laure Cioffi is a reporter for the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review.