The Pursuit of Happiness
By Madrikh, Harold Londer

Is Humanistic Judaism a religion? Is Or Emet a synagogue? I have heard these questions asked many times, in print, and in conversations about our movement. What is a religion anyway? Does the word “religion” imply a theistic basis? Is a better term for what we offer a “life philosophy” (or some similar phrase without the baggage that the term “religion” implies)? I think one way to think about these questions is to first ask what do we expect from a “religion,” and then try to see if Humanistic Judaism supplies these elements. And is this why we belong to Or Emet?

The answers that come to me off the top of my head (and I am sure this is not a complete list) are fairly straightforward. A religion provides a community in the highest sense of the word. A religion offers a guide to morals, and a pathway to living an ethical life. A religion provides a framework to try to understand the uncertainty of human existence. A religion provides support and comfort at times of loss or stress. A religion offers a connection to our past and to our future. Hours and hours could be spent dissecting these concepts, and how well Or Emet fulfills these criteria: book clubs analyzing “Good Without God,” discussion groups reviewing Jewish history and its secular tradition, seminars focusing on the Humanistic Jewish concept of mourning, etc. It all sounds quite “heavy,” doesn’t it? Is this religion?

I then sit back and look at what Or Emet has provided to its members these past few months. A spectacular discussion of Spinoza led by a retired physics professor (Roger Jones), a personal introduction to the Minnesota Science Museum Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit by the exhibit director (Joe Imholte), an inspiring woman discussing her “adult learning” exploration of Klezmer music (Judith Eisner), a community Passover Seder with over 120 attending, and for me, personally, the opportunity to work with two bright teenagers preparing Bar/Bat Mitzvah presentations for the congregation and their families. What do these experiences have to do with “religion,” or “life philosophy,” for that matter? Do they fulfill any of the criteria outlined above?

This week I ran into an article, “Eudaimonia, existentialism, and the practice of medicine” (Radu, 2008). I realize the title sounds terribly academic and boring. As my wife, Jan, will tell...
President’s Message

Amazing! Did you know?

Let’s see how well we know each other. Do you know who:

- was a “cover girl” this year?
- was in a motion picture that received an Academy Award nomination?
- was honored by Mpls/St. Paul Magazine?
- is a college chemistry professor?
- is a book publisher?
- plays the cello? the guitar? the piano? the harmonica? the saxophone? the violin?
- lectured on Wagner?
- has a cable TV show?
- is an artist and art instructor?
- was on the Today Show about his new book and will be at his book signing on May 19 at Garrison Keillor’s book store in St. Paul, Common Good Books?
- is also a published author?
- is an inspiring educator?
- has been a streetcar conductor?
- is an expert on movies?
- is a singer?
- will have their bar and bat mitzvahs this year?
- has been recognized as an advocate for seniors?
- is working toward a master’s degree in gerontology?
- is a leader in an effort to attain peace in the middle east?
- has again been elected to the SHJ Executive Board?
- has traveled near and far?

When people ask me about Or Emet, the very first thing I say is “Or Emet is a community of wonderful people.” If it were nothing else, I’d still love it, because Or Emet members are amazing.

Your volunteering has made Or Emet a vital, nourishing, flourishing, intellectually stimulating, and fun-loving congregation.

You are a very impressive!

~ Margo

Donations & Tributes

In Memory of Tom Wegner’s father by David and Margo Fox
Other donations from Janet Mayer, and Curt and Suzanne Leavitt

Donations can be mailed to Sharon Miller, c/o Or Emet, at
4316 Aries Court, Eagan, MN 55123
ELECTING OUR 2010-2011 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Do you have a person in mind who you think would be an excellent member to serve on our Executive Committee? Would you like to run for a position?

At its annual meeting on June 6, 2010, Or Emet will elect officers and Executive Committee Members for the 2010-2011 season. All members who are present will be eligible to vote. We will be electing people to serve as President, Vice President, Secretary-Treasurer and one (of two) members elected at large.

**Our current Executive Committee members are:**
- President – Margo Fox
- Vice President – Erica Fishman
- Secretary/Treasurer – Sharon Miller
- At-large 1st year – Arty Dorman
- At-large 2nd year – Nancy Schwartz

The by-laws (copies available) define the Executive Committee members’ functions and responsibilities. The committee meets monthly on weekday evenings. This year meetings were held at Margo’s in St. Paul.

It is the Executive Committee’s responsibility to present a slate of nominees for offices and at-large members at the annual meeting. Nominations from the floor are also accepted. In preparation for this year’s elections, an ad hoc committee has been formed to recommend a slate of candidates.

If you have suggestions for nominations (including yourself), please feel free to talk to anyone on the nominations committee and let us know who you think would be a fine candidate. Then, come and vote at the annual meeting on June 6th!

**Members of the committee are:**
- Janet Mayer at janetmayer@elitemail.org
- Rich Sonenblum at rsonenblum@logis.org
- Scott Landsman at slandsman@hbklaw.com
- Arty Dorman at broadwayturtle@yahoo.com
- Claire Press at clairehpress@aol.com
- Edna Bernstein at edna.bernstein@yahoo.com
- Paul Petzschke at paulptz@elitemail.org

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

you, I thrive on obscure articles that I trace down from internet and other sources, often late at night, when she and the cats are snuggled in bed, at peace. I learned about eudaimonia for the first time (No, not soy beans; that is edamame). I guess I didn’t have much of a classical education. The literal Greek translation is eu (good) daimon (spirit). It is commonly translated as “happiness,” but a closer sense of the word comes in the phrase “human flourishing.” To many of the ancient philosophers it is the highest level of human achievement. Aristotle defines it succinctly: “living well and faring well with being happy.” To quote Socrates (from Wikipedia, that wonderful cheat sheet): “Socrates thought that all human beings wanted eudaimonia more than anything else.” We just want to be happy, live a moral life and “flourish!”

I like this viewpoint! It resonates with my personal view of Or Emet, and of life. I need to add to my list above: “A religion needs to make people happy. It needs to bring about eudaimonia, literally “good spirits.” So obvious that was to the ancient Greek philosophers. We do not always have to answer deep moral questions, or justify our legitimacy to others. We just need to “unlock the secret” to our own edaimonia, and that of those with whom we interact. Or, as the old song stated so succinctly, “Don’t Worry, Be Happy!”

What happens in the classes at the Jewish Cultural School is truly quite remarkable. Much of this is in large part thanks to the Or Emet community. You are all mensches -- a word that the Littles learned about in April.

When Rabbi Miriam Jerris visited Or Emet in February, she met with each of the classes. For some of the students, this was their first time meeting a real rabbi, so this was quite a treat for all involved.

At our Purim Party in February, we had a terrific turnout. At first the Middles and Littles enjoyed the wealth of craft activities, such as mask making and finger puppets. Barb Weisman and Tom Wegner helped all of the students make delicious hamentaschen. Harold Londer did his usual wonderful interpretation of the Book of Esther. And the Juniors took charge of our carnival activities.

March classes focused on teaching the students about different aspects of Passover. The Middles and Littles helped to make the wonderful matzoh covers that were present at Or Emet’s Passover Seder. The Juniors explored the Ethiopian Jewish community, known as Beta Israel people, and Ethiopian Jewish observance of Passover. Through role-playing, students learned about the challenges and discrimination Beta Israel people faced in Ethiopia, and discovered how tens of thousands of Ethiopian Jews were rescued from civil war and famine and brought to Israel by airlift in the ‘80s and ’90s. The Littles class had some practice in hunting for the afikomen through a scavenger hunt for hidden pictures of the contents of a seder plate, along with some pictures of matzo, around our classroom.

The students enjoyed participating in Or Emet’s Passover Seder by reading the four questions and in (eventually) looking for the afikomen.

April classes turned more to Jewish history and culture. The Middles class looked at where Jews live in the world today. The kids were amazed to realize how Jews make up such a small portion of the entire population. The class looked at how Jews have moved all over the world, and about how many Jews ended up settling in Eastern Europe, where many of the students ancestors are from. Muriel Sterne, our Hebrew teacher, showed the children photos from "A Vanished World" by Roman Vishniac of Jews in Eastern Europe in the 1930s and taught them a Yiddish song about children studying in the cheder. The class also learned about shtetl life and are in the process of making their own dioramas of a shtetl.

If you are curious about what the students in all our classes have been learning since September, please feel free to look around the Jewish Cultural School website at http://oremet.wordpress.com.

May 23 will be this school year’s last class. Two of our students, Sam Wegner and Lili Weisman will be having a joint bar/bat mitzvah on June 18. The Juniors teacher, Eva Cohen, is looking to schedule an off-site service learning project on June 17 focused on food and hunger, so Juniors parents, please stay tuned for details. The school is also exploring setting up a youth group for our older students for next year.

I’d like to take this opportunity to thank Lindsay Smith, our Littles teacher, and to wish her well. She is graduating from law school this year and will be relocating to Washington DC. Unfortunately, she will be heading to DC at the same time as our May class, so we will have a sub for our final Littles class. Scott Oremland, who has been teaching the Middles class for several years, will also, regretfully, be stepping down this year in his teaching role. He has offered to continue contributing to our music efforts and to participate in some of the classes. Eva Cohen will be staying on next year, which is great news.

The JCS will shortly be posting job openings for the Littles and Middles teaching positions, as we’ve had a number of new students in these groups this year. **If you know anyone who might be interested in taking on either of these teaching roles, please get in touch with Lisa at school-1@oremet.org.**

Finally, the school year may be coming to close, but if you know of any families that might be interested in a Humanist approach to Judaism, please have them email school-1@oremet.org. Families may want to give the JCS a test run in the spring and make a decision about bringing their children here in the fall.

The Or Emet school website (http://oremet.wordpress.com) has details about the school and membership as does www.oremet.org.
Photos from Or Emet’s Purim Carnival

From recent Or Emet programs: Prof. Earl Schwartz (left), Joe Imholte (above), and Judith Eisner (right)
On April 23 – 24, I had the privilege of representing Or Emet at the spring meeting of the Society of Humanistic Judaism Board of Directors. This was my first experience among professed Humanistic Jews beyond the shores of Or Emet, and it was very positive. I gained appreciation for the support and resources SHJ makes available to its constituent communities, including ours, such as school curriculum, holiday celebration ideas, music and leadership training. I was impressed especially by a presentation made by the youth program, and was inspired to see Or Emet develop a program for our youth to keep them engaged beyond bar/bat mitzvah.

I also was pleased to learn that SHJ provides a voice for non-theist thought in national arenas. For example, SHJ leadership was invited, along with other members of the Secular Coalition, to a White House briefing to present our concerns that non-theist views be represented along with other religious perspectives in setting national policy. SHJ also filed a brief in support of the city of Philadelphia, siding with the city in their action to revoke free use of city facilities for the Boy Scouts because of the Boy Scout’s policy of discrimination against gays and atheists in leadership selection.

For those who have been there, you know that the Birmingham Temple is a spacious, welcoming facility, set on a beautiful site. Spending the weekend there with Humanistic Jews who hailed from Boston to Florida to San Diego to Portland – and points in between – indeed opened up my awareness of being part not only of our wonderful, caring community at Or Emet, but of a larger circle of support, and indeed, a movement. That was an uplifting and affirming feeling. It took nothing way from the joy I feel as part of Or Emet, but added a heightened sense of pride and purpose.

At the meeting, the SHJ board approved a new mission statement:

*The Society for Humanistic Judaism mobilizes people to celebrate Jewish identity and culture consistent with a humanistic philosophy of life, independent of supernatural authority.*

*As the central body for the Humanistic Jewish movement in North America, the Society assists in organizing new communities, supporting its member communities and providing a voice for Humanistic Jews.*

This is important and valuable work. I have always intuitively felt that our being part of a national organization was a good thing. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to experience that goodness first hand, and to come away with pride, not only as a member of Or Emet, but as a member (as all Or Emet members are) of the Society for Humanistic Judaism. Both are deserving of support.

---

**Program Committee**

**Another great year for programs at Or Emet!**

Thank you to all who contributed ideas and presented topics – Carol Logan, Harold Londer and others! The program committee searches for and schedules programs for the monthly Friday and Sunday Or Emet meetings. The committee currently includes Rich Sonenblum (chair), Janet Mayer, Jane Katz, Lionel Davis, Erica Fishman, Edna Bernstein and Scott Landsman. **We could use your help!** Program topic suggestions from the Or Emet membership are extremely helpful, necessary! The topics typically have something to do with Judaism, history, humanism, justice, a personal story or a unique combination of one or more of these areas.

Here’s how you can help: **Join the committee, or submit program ideas (how about a topic you can present).** It is best if your program ideas can be submitted by June 15th so they can be included in the committee’s brainstorming and initial scheduling for the 2010/2011 season that takes place this summer. We meet about every three weeks starting in early June through mid August, then once in October and once in February. Need more information? Contact anyone on the committee (we’re in the Or Emet directory), or Rich Sonenblum at 952-473-6025, rsonenblum@logis.org.
Did you know that J Street just had its second birthday? I'm not planning a party, but I do want to invite your support on this occasion. For those who are unfamiliar with what J Street is about, let me give a little background.

It was only two years ago that J Street merged with the 50,000 member grass roots organization Brit Tzedek v' Shalom to become a voice for Americans, Jewish and non-Jewish, who desire a peaceful, two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Active leadership by the U.S. government is seen as essential to the success of this mission. As a non-profit corporation and a registered lobbying organization, J Street vigorously advocates in Congress, in the media, and in Jewish communities for a fair and just diplomatic approach to the issues.

Unfortunately, not everyone shares an interest in an even-handed two-state approach. The World Jewish Congress, for example, recently took out full page ads in which they expressed doubt about President Obama's commitment to Israel and argued that U.S. support of Israel should be unquestioning. At the other extreme, a student organization at the University of California in Berkeley is seeking boycott action against Israel and for the University to divest itself of investments in companies which do business with Israel. J Street does not support unilateral approaches to conflict resolution such as these. Instead it favors multilateral, negotiated efforts with the concerned parties.

Somewhat related to this, I am reminded of a meeting that some half-dozen Or Emeters and I attended recently on an evening in early April. Our Fifth District Congressman Keith Ellison sponsored a forum at the Zurah Shrine Center addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The panel of speakers consisted of a Palestinian-American who is the president of the Kairos Project, which seeks to educate faith based leaders about the conflict in the Holy Land and the importance of the U.S. to a diplomatic solution; the J Street director of policy and strategy who is an Israeli-American; and a Palestinian physician whose three young daughters were killed during the war in Gaza last year. Each of these men spoke with deep conviction, and even with humor, of the work they have done in negotiating differences among people. They advocated for a spirit of cooperation in the belief that a resolution of this mid-east conflict was both desirable and possible.

Following their presentations, Congressman Ellison, as moderator, opened the meeting to questions and comments from the audience. Recognizing that the topic is one that can provoke strong feelings, he urged respectfulness and skillfully set firm ground rules for participation with a one minute time limit. In fact, what ensued was a barrage of irate statements from the audience members who lined up at the microphone. Their anger was directed primarily at Israel for actions it has taken but also toward America for its role in support of Israel. Their hostility and strident words were in such contrast to the previously measured remarks of the panelists that it was almost breathtaking.

I must admit to having felt somewhat overwhelmed by the events of that evening. But as I thought about it further and talked with others, I realized that this experience only confirmed for me the importance of J Street's work: to achieve a secure Jewish homeland existing side-by-side in peace with a sovereign Palestinian state. To quote from its info sheet, "Ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is in the best interests of Israel, the United States, the Palestinians, and the region as a whole."

If you would like to learn more about J Street and how you can contribute to the growth and development of this important and vital young organization, please go to www.JStreet.org. Information on the recently formed local chapter is available at http://JStreet.org/Minnesota. And if you have questions and want to speak to a live person, I would welcome hearing from you.

An additional reference, one I just heard about, is a lengthy article in the March-April edition of Moment Magazine which states "The new 'pro-Israel, pro-peace' lobby has created a storm in the Jewish world." You can access it online and it is a very interesting read. One bit of information: the father of Jeremy Ben-Ami, executive Director of J Street, was a member of Irgun.
**Member Contributions**

**“Edna’s Story”**

I was mentioned in an article on Seniors and Reverse Mortgages (RM) in a national journal entitled *Innovations*, which is concerned with trends in aging. The reason was that staff at The Jewish Family and Childrens’ Society (JFCS) saw how effective it was to include a family member by speaker phone while presenting their legally-approved course on RMs to me in person. The National Council On Aging in Washington, DC was interested in my reactions for their story on RMs in the Spring Issue 2009. The journal is found in many libraries. I feel honored to have had some input. Find the article and photo by “googling” **Edna Bernstein Reverse Mortgage**.

*Now for the funny part:* Last week I got a call from a long-lost friend from my working days at The Pollution Control Agency. She had seen the article while visiting the Duluth Library. It lay open to my picture as she passed by!

-Edna Bernstein

---

**Thank You to**

**Or Emet’s 2009-2010 Leadership Team**

While many organizations have trouble finding leadership, we are teeming with leaders. And our leaders actually are “teaming!”

Members of Or Emet’s first official Leadership Team have been our elected Executive Committee members, our committee chairs, and some of the many others who have taken on key roles.

**Thanks** to: Joan Barnett, Mark Dahlgren, Arty Dorman, Erica Fishman, Margo Fox, Lisa Gardner-Springer, Scott Landsman, Carol Logan, Harold Londer, Janet Mayer, Laura Melnick, Sharon Miller, Faith Oremland, Rich Sonenblum, Kirsten Rose, Rob Rossi, Alex Schwartz, Nancy Schwartz, Amy Stubenhaus, Barbara Weisman, and Dave Zukor for a job well done!

---

**It’s Spring, Time to Hatch.**

“What should we hatch?” you ask.
“Very good question,” I say.
“Shall we hatch eggs?” you ask.
And in response, I say, “Nay.”

“Let’s hatch a big batch
Of whatever we hatch.
Let’s do it together.
We make a good match.

Let’s think with our thinkers,
Our very good thinkers,
(No doubt the results
Will be winners, not clinkers.)

Let’s hatch big ideas
And little ones, too;
And some in between ones.
Yes. That’s what we’ll do!

On Sunday, June 6,
We’ll all get together.
We’ll all get together,
No matter the weather.

We’ll all meet at Newell,
a park that’s a jewel.
We’ll hatch our ideas,
and then we’ll all drool.”

“Why drool?” you ask.
“That doesn’t sound cool.”

“Oh dear, don’t you know?
I thought that you did.
You won’t want to miss it.
And do bring your kid!

Or Emet’s picnic is on the same day.
Good hatching is work.
Good hatchers need food.
Good hatching and eating assures a good mood.”

Happy Spring!

~ Margo
MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Or Emet Annual Meeting
Sunday, June 6th
10:00 AM - noon
Newell Park Building (directions below)

Following the meeting will be our
Annual "Potluck" Picnic
Noon to 2:30 PM
Come prepared for good food and good company
~ Rain or Shine ~

Allan Malkis a.malkis@comcast.net is chairing the Picnic this year; so, do let him know when you decide what food you'll be bringing. Or Emet will provide plates, plastic-ware, cups and bottled water, but feel free to also bring other beverages to share.

Newell Park in St. Paul
900 North Fairview Avenue
St. Paul, MN
(located at the corner of N. Fairview Ave and Pierce Butler Route)

Directions:
I-94 exit at Snelling Ave: Go North on Snelling toward the Fair Grounds. Turn left on Minnehaha Ave and go to N. Fairview Av. Turn right on N. Fairview to Newell Park
Upcoming Events:

The History of the Freethought Movement in the US and Minnesota

On Friday, May 7, 2010, at 7:30pm, at the Minneapolis Sabes JCC, we will host a presentation on the history of the freethought movement in the US and Minnesota, including Unitarians, Freethinkers, Rationalists, Humanists, Secular Humanists, Humanistic Jews and Atheists, by August Berkshire, who has been active in the freethought movement since 1984. The presentation will be preceded by a short Humanistic Jewish Sabbath service, and followed by an Oneg Shabbat.

Arab, Berber and Sephardi:

On the Jews of Morocco's Atlas Mountains and Sahara Desert

On Sunday, May 23, 2010 from 10 am to noon, at the Friends School of Minnesota in St. Paul, we will host Daniel Schroeter who will show rare photographs of rural Jews from the Moroccan Atlas Mountains and will discuss his exceptional research on the Sephardi Jewish Mediterranean world.

(Daniel J. Schroeter is the Amos S. Deinard Memorial Chair in Jewish History and the Director of the Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Minnesota. A specialist in the history of Morocco and the Sephardi communities around the Mediterranean, he has written widely on the Jews of the Muslim world. He has conducted extensive research in Morocco and has explored many of the sites in the Atlas Mountains where Jews once lived.)

These programs are free and open to the public.

For more information, call 651-699-6302 or visit www.oremet.org.