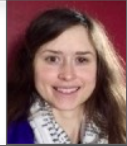




# THE ILLUMINATOR

Or Emet – The Minnesota Congregation for Humanistic Judaism

Winter/Spring 2024 issue  
Published in December 2023



## *Be a Voice of Conscience*

by Eva R. Cohen  
Ritual Leader and Rabbinic Student

*Eva delivered a slightly different version of the following remarks during Or Emet's October 20, 2023 Shabbat service. Subsequent escalation has significantly increased civilian casualties in Gaza.*

When it comes to Israel/Palestine, will our children's children live to know that truth and kindness have embraced, and that peace and justice have united and are one? Like many of you, [the events of the last two weeks](#) have rocked my already shaky confidence in that possibility. I'm horrified by Hamas's murder of over 1,200 Israelis and 200 citizens of other countries. Most of the murdered were civilians, many of them children. I'm horrified that Hamas took hundreds of hostages, whose lives now hang in the balance. I'm horrified that Israel's retaliatory airstrikes on Gaza have killed over 3,300 Palestinian civilians—here, too, many of them children. I'm horrified that the Israeli siege of Gaza has deprived millions of civilians of access to food, water, electricity, and fuel.

What dragged us here? For [Zionists](#), Israel is the Jewish homeland, with a Jewish indigenous history millennia-long. It's been a haven for Jews fleeing Nazism and other antisemitic terror when the world's nations have barred their doors. For [anti-Zionists](#), the land is Palestine, homeland to Palestinians who have been displaced from the villages and olive groves of their indigenous ancestors by Jewish settler-colonists. Israel terrorizes Palestinians and constrains their lives.

I'm not going to retrace the hundred-plus years of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians over land and these competing visions. I will argue, though, that seeing the elements of truth in each vision helps us recognize the human fears on each side.

War in general, and this war in particular, encourages us to dehumanize. It makes us think in terms of 'us/ them,' and to imagine that human casualties are, best

case, merely regrettable, and, worst case, something to celebrate, so long as the victims are on our enemy's side. When Hamas massacred hundreds of Israelis at a trance music festival, when Israel bombs Gazan homes and schools, each is thinking along these lines. Because of what the other side has done, their violence is justified. "And yet," Israeli human rights lawyer Michael Sfard reminds us in a [recent Haaretz editorial](#), "the laws of war weren't designed only for situations in which our blood is cool, in which there is no justified anger or understandable desire for revenge." A commitment to humanism means drawing an inviolable line. Anger may be justified, desire for revenge may be understandable, but *acting* on that anger, *acting* on that desire leads us down a frightening path to a place where any atrocity can be rationalized.

When we rationalize atrocity, it doesn't play by the rules. It doesn't care where we live; the whole world becomes a conflict zone that's crisscrossed by extremists. They [murder a Palestinian-American six-year-old](#) near Chicago; they [firebomb a synagogue](#) in Berlin. Children hear everything, and they shout antisemitic taunts on this playground, Islamophobic taunts on that one.

I won't tell you whether or not you should be angry. I won't tell you which rallies to attend or what petitions to sign or who you should blame for this war. I only ask that wherever you go, and whatever you do, be a voice of conscience. Stand up for the value of human life and for the civilian right to safety. What we justify and what we deplore reverberates. Not only adults but children, too, are listening.

*Editor's note:* In addition to serving as Or Emet's ritual leader, Eva teaches B Mitzvah prep class, coaches candidates, and officiates at B Mitzvah services.



OR EMET  
MINNESOTA CONGREGATION  
FOR HUMANISTIC JUDAISM

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## President's Message

by Allan Malkis



Winter is here and we are looking forward to the secular new year. Or Emet has had a terrific start to the 2023-24 program year and there is much more to come.

The Jewish Cultural Sunday School is bursting at the seams with students, especially our Littles class. We are lucky to have excellent folks serving as teachers' assistants to help cope with the surge in attendance. We are also looking at options for new space, as Talmud Torah goes through a renovation of the building and a new major tenant, a charter school, prepares to move in. Stay tuned to hear what options we turn up.

Our new annual *Introduction to Humanistic Judaism* event attracted lots of interest and resulted in several families becoming new members and/or JCSS students. Many thanks to Richard Logan who helped with the presentation and Eva Cohen whose excellent notes from last year provided the framework for the talk.

Our High Holidays were well presented and well attended once again. We even had pictures of the Yom Kippur/Break the Fast event in the StarTribune. Thanks to the High Holidays committee and all those who volunteered and took part this year.

We closed out the season with a festive Hanukkah party on December 9. This always-popular event was well attended and provided plenty of fun — details on page 9.

We will have a New and Prospective Member Brunch on February 4, 2024. This is an opportunity for folks who are new to Or Emet or still considering membership to learn more about who we are and what we do as a congregation. See page 14 for details.

I am very excited about the preparations we are making to celebrate Eva's ordination next spring and welcome her as our full-fledged rabbi. There will be announcements and events coming up between May and September 2024, so stay tuned.

Finally, I am pleased to be among the four adults planning our B Mitzvahs with Eva. Sometime next year you will be able to hear details about our projects and celebrate with us. See the article on page 11 for more information.

Thanks again to everyone in the congregation for making Or Emet such an active and vibrant community.



## New Members

*New Members including families with children in Or Emet's Jewish Cultural Sunday School*

Rachel Gorski  
Nikki Giardina  
Lydia Fess and Garrett Schultz  
Stacy Brooks  
Stu Abraham

Judith Tiferes and David LaVergne  
Mackenzie Kester "Kenzie"  
Herb Grika  
Meredith Fox and Jon Steadland

**Jewish Cultural Sunday School Update**  
by Molly Phipps  
Director of the Or Emet Jewish Cultural Sunday School



Jewish Cultural Sunday School is well underway for the 2023-2024 school year! We have around 30 students enrolled in four classes. We're adapting to the new setup at Talmud Torah while the building undergoes major renovations. We're actively searching for a new JCSS home for the 2024-2025 school year and will provide updates as things unfold.

We celebrated ***Sukkot*** in October with a ceremony led by Eva Cohen, a teeny-tiny (yet kosher) sukkah, apple cider, and graham cracker sukkah-making. Eva introduced us to the Minnesota *lulav* and *etrog* (a bundle of local grasses and tree branches and a yellow gourd), a way to embrace the spirit of the original Middle Eastern plants traditionally used.

***The Littles*** with Teacher Ian have been singing Jewish songs, making tzedakah boxes and menorahs, and learning about being Jewish and peace. They've been joined by aides including Kai, Neva, and Aayush.

***The Middles*** with Teacher Colline have been learning about Jewish traditions, cross-cultural friendships,

forming Jewish friendships, and making Jewish crafts. They read and discussed the excellent new book *The Promise* by Bridget Hodder and Fawzia Gilani-Williams about the lasting friendship between an Islamic boy and his Jewish neighbor in Morocco. Many in the class noted that cross-cultural friendships were the norm for them, and they didn't find that element of the story worth noting.

***The Juniors*** have been learning about Israeli history and immigration with Teacher Renee. They've also been strengthening their Jewish friendships, celebrating Jewish holidays, and doing lots of crafts.

***The B Mitzvah youth*** have been learning about Jewish culture, history, and thought with Teacher Eva as they prepare for their B Mitzvahs this spring. They had their class off-site in November, so they could attend the Twin Cities Jewish Film Festival's showing of *Children of Peace* about children who grew up in a Palestinian/Israeli community. In December they attended part of the adult program on Sephardic songs of Hanukkah.



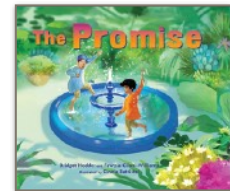
Creating clay oil lamps



The tiny sukkah and making graham cracker sukkahs



B Mitzvah service project: raking leaves with a Specialized Community Supports program



"The Promise" read by the *Middles* class



*Littles* working on Tzedakah boxes with teacher aide Kai

For more information about Or Emet's Jewish Cultural Sunday School, visit the [School Blog](https://www.oremetschool.org/blog) on the Or Emet website [oremetschool.org](https://www.oremetschool.org). Visitors are welcome to join JCSS classes. To arrange a visit, learn more about JCSS, the Youth Program, and/or for school-related questions and issues, email [school-1@oremetschool.org](mailto:school-1@oremetschool.org).





## Social Justice/Social Action Committee Update

Howard Schneider and Gwyn Leder, Committee Co-Chairs



## Or Emet's Reverse *Tashlich* Event An Opportunity to Participate in Global Waterfront Cleanup

Or Emet has long observed a High Holiday Tashlich by symbolically casting away transgressions of the past year. Our traditional Tashlich was on September 16.

Reverse Tashlich switches the process by removing debris and trash from bodies of water. This exemplifies our communal responsibility to "repair the world." On September 17, seven adults and four children gathered at St. Paul's Marydale Park to clean up litter and trash from the park grounds and Loeb Lake. We first shared food and beverages, then sang along with a video of the lively Israeli folk song/dance tune, *Mayim Mayim* (Water, Water). Then we got to work and filled eight garbage bags, hauled out a printer, and two lengths of PVC pipe. The adults enjoyed socializing and the children worked together to retrieve hard-to-get items from the lake.



*Tikkun HaYam* — Our Reverse Tashlich was part of a growing movement, the sixth annual Reverse Tashlich event in the US and around the globe, coordinated by Tikkun HaYam — Repair the Sea. Or Emet's participation in the international event is aimed at fostering a sense of responsibility and stewardship for the environment. For more information: <https://www.repairthesea.org/>



## Or Emet Refugee Shabbat

Or Emet's annual Refugee Program will follow the Shabbat service on February 24. Dana Mach from the Center for Victims of Torture will be the presenter.

### *Why do we do this?*

People seeking asylum are turned away at borders around the world and the number of forcibly displaced people has grown to over 110 million. The impact of climate change exacerbates the situation for already vulnerable populations. Education, legislative advocacy, and support of refugee agencies are important components for attacking the continuing crisis. While the Biden administration grapples with the growing number of migrants and asylum-seekers at the U.S.-Mexico border, conservative pundits and politicians falsely blame Democrats for "open borders."

## High Holiday Collection of Food and Personal Care Items

Non-perishables, collected at High Holiday services, weighed in at 126 pounds. Hallie Q. Brown Food Shelf gratefully received the boxes and bags delivered by Arty Dorman.

## Jewish Community Action Tzedek Committee

Michal Moskow and Howard Schneider attended JCA's Tzedek Committee on November 9. The group's purpose is: — For congregational social justice/action groups to share activities and to support and/or join other congregational programs.

— To advance congregational involvement in JCA's four campaigns: Housing Justice, Decriminalizing Communities, Combating Hate, Multi-Racial Democracy.

*Our conclusion?* Though just beginning, this group has the potential to boost Or Emet's role and impact issues that are so important to us.

## Letters to Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith for support of *Asylum Seeker Work Authorization Act*

In the Fall Illuminator we requested letters to Minnesota's senators in support of the Asylum Seeker Work Authorization Act. Lengthy replies from both senators did not confirm their support for legislation that would allow asylum seekers to work immediately rather than waiting three months. Rather disappointing.

*Or Emet members are welcome to join the Social Justice/Social Action Committee and/or offer input on activities and issues. If you wish to be involved, contact Howard Schneider [hamptonmeadow@msn.com](mailto:hamptonmeadow@msn.com) or 651-278-2286.*

## High Holiday Member Commentaries

*The following presentations by Or Emet members were featured at Or Emet's 2023 High Holiday services. These original commentaries offering unique, individual perspectives are an enduring and meaningful congregational tradition. The articles have been lightly edited for length.*

### **Introducing Myself to Or Emet**

by Megan Narvey



Hello everyone. I took on the Kol Nidre commentary because, as Or Emet's newest board member, I thought it's probably a good way to introduce myself. So hello. The awkward part is that this is the first time I've ever been to a Kol Nidre service, and actually, earlier this week I had to google what Kol Nidre means. But don't worry, I still have some comments to share with you all!

One of the things that drew me to Or Emet is that it felt like a safe place for me to learn and explore more about Jewish history and culture. I grew up in a culturally Jewish home, in a small town without a synagogue. The only other Jews in town were my grandparents, who we referred to as Baba and Zaida. We would celebrate major holidays like Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur with them by eating a lot of good food together. (But nobody ever told me about Kol Nidre!)

About a month ago, I travelled back to Winnipeg, near where I'm from, for my Baba's unveiling. For those unfamiliar, this is a ceremony a year after someone's funeral, when the gravestone is unveiled. My Baba is buried in a conservative Jewish cemetery, and I wasn't super impressed with the rabbi. In one notable moment, he proclaimed that my Baba must have been a patient woman because she practiced tai chi. I snorted so loud the person in front of me turned around to give me a stern look.

My grandmother and I were very close. I gave a eulogy at her funeral, and she was DEFINITELY not a patient woman. One of my favorite stories about her is, as a young woman, she got fed up with people asking her to spell her last name, Karbachinsky. So she responded: "K as in Karbachinsky. A as in Karbachinsky. R as in Karbachinsky."

Anyway, I do want to give the rabbi some credit. He noticed the season, and suggested we take a moment to reflect on our ancestors and the lessons we can learn from them on how to live our lives better. A very humanistic moment. For me, I want to take a moment to reflect on my Baba, Mildred Narvey.

A first-generation Canadian born to grocers, her parents moved to Winnipeg from a small town to support her at university. She studied commerce at the University of Manitoba and was top of her class! I found her college yearbook this week and learned that she was captain of the public speaking team, so this commentary does feel apt. Many of her female classmates wrote that they intended to marry after graduation, but Mildred hoped to find an opening in merchandising. My sister joked that she did find an opening when she married my Zaida, who ran a men's clothing store. A funny story — my Baba and Zaida met while on a double date with the other couple, which is basically a romantic comedy.

Mildred Narvey loved music, always looked perfectly put together, had close girlfriends throughout her life, could bake a mighty fine pie, loved to watch football with my dad, and drank a glass of sherry every night at five o'clock. She wasn't perfect. Her sharp wit could cut like a knife. She cared too much about her figure for someone who probably topped the scale at 120, and she wasn't always very thoughtful about how her words and actions affected the people around her. She taught me specific lessons — how to make shortbread, to love my big hair, to enjoy my youth. But she also taught me unintended lessons — to pursue your dreams, that people are complicated, that you can be the valedictorian and also like to bake. And if I could add one thing to her legacy, it would be to try to be a little bit more patient.

## High Holiday Member Commentary

### *Good evening and Shana Tovah*

by Carrie Dickson



Sunday, September 10, 2023, something monumental happened. It was a clear, comfortable day in St. Paul, MN. To most, it was just the start of another new school year. But for me and my family, it was the first time in 14 years that there was no Dickson child enrolled in Or Emet's Jewish Cultural Sunday School. Hard to believe!

For the past 48 days, since the end of Ari's Bar Mitzvah, I've been thinking about what it means that my family has graduated from Or Emet's school and B Mitzvah program. What will my family's relationship with Or Emet be like from now on?

I was hoping to have some answers by the time that I came here to give this commentary, but I have more questions than answers. As this new season starts for me and my family, I find myself reflecting back on what it has meant to us to be a part of this community.

Picture this. It was 2009. Barack Obama was in his first term as president and the United States was coming out of the Great Recession.

My sister and my parents told me they were going to attend a High Holiday service at their Humanistic synagogue in Phoenix... and I thought I could give it a try here too.

I'm pretty sure the first person I met when I arrived here was Janet... because some things never change.

Kai was three, Rei was one, and I was pregnant with Ari. Kai started in Sunday school pretty shortly thereafter.

At some point in that first or second year at Or Emet I attended my first B Mitzvah ceremony. It was the joint B Mitzvah of cousins Sam Wegner and Lily Weisman, where I learned about Jews in sports and klezmer music. I left feeling hopeful, for the very first time, that my own kids would have a B Mitzvah.

I have many other memories and highlights along the years: our first Purim carnival in the basement of a church or school, when all of the kids sat at Harold's feet listening to the story of Purim. I remember one Hanukkah party when Margo and David Fox gave gelt to all of the children like they were everybody's Bubbe and Zayde.

Ten years ago in 2013, I stood in front of many of you and gave my first High Holiday commentary, on the importance of reflection.

In 2015, Kai and I did a Rosh Hashanah reading together. A few days ago, I saw the picture of Kai and me, and standing a few steps away from us was Harold Londer.

I remember one Sukkot outside Talmud Torah, which must have been Harold's final Sukkot with us, hearing his voice break very slightly as he read the words "Autumn is here. Everything is changing. Nothing lasts forever. What is born must also die. What is new must also grow old...."

Of course the biggest highlights came during my three sons' Bar Mitzvahs, moments of great pride for Lewis and me, and something that never would have happened without Or Emet.

Through it all, I stand here with many questions. Where do culture and religion overlap; where do they diverge?

What does the Shema — the most important prayer in the Jewish religion, and one that was so incredibly important to my grandparents — what does it mean to me, if I don't believe in any God?

Am I a Humanistic Jew or a Humanistic Askenazi? What do I have in common with a Sefardi or Mizrahi Jew if I don't read the Torah or say the same prayers?

Should my kids be learning Hebrew or Yiddish, the spoken language of their great-grandparents?

What does one do with the experience of putting on three Bar Mitzvahs over the span of about four years?

And probably the most important question weighing on my mind right now: what does one do with all the leftover Bar Mitzvah stuff?

As we step into 5784, and this new chapter in our family's life, I thought I'd have some answers, or something interesting or profound to share. But what I came here to say is that with Or Emet — you get more questions than answers.

I want to close with one final thought. Each of you has important questions to pose, each of you has analysis or perspectives to share. And each of you now has 383 days to prepare your commentary for the next High Holidays. Start thinking, start writing, and reach out to the High Holidays committee next summer.

Shana Tovah and Gut Yontif

### *Our Personal Genizah*

by Susan Weinberg



I am a keeper of stuff, much of which represents my personal history. In addition to my own papers, I also hold a box for each of my late parents, extending my history to that which preceded me. I have come to think of this as part of my personal *genizah*, a place of memories, documents, and history, layered through time and in fact a place that I sift through with greater frequency as I age, particularly in times of reflection such as Yom Kippur.

So, what is a genizah? The word comes from the Hebrew word *ganaz* which means hiding place. In Jewish tradition, holy writings are held within a genizah when they have been retired from use. Holy was often taken to mean containing the word "God."

Recently I have become fascinated by the Cairo Genizah. As was the custom at that time and place every document contained the words "with the help of God," hence many secular documents found their way into the genizah as well, painting a picture of bygone centuries.

Within the collection are documents in the handwriting of Maimonides (who lived in Cairo and attended the synagogue) as well as marriage contracts, leases, shopping lists and even the work of children practicing their letters. Paper didn't emerge until the 10<sup>th</sup> century so early documents were on parchment and as writing surfaces were precious, they would often purchase documents and scrape away prior writing to replace it with something new. Beneath an 11<sup>th</sup> century Hebrew text, might hide a 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century document.

The discovery of the Cairo genizah was by Scottish twin sisters who were respected scholars. They purchased manuscripts in the Cairo marketplace in 1896 that they identified as possibly significant and shared them with their friend, the British-American scholar Solomon Schechter. He identified them as an important Hebrew text that had not been seen since the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century.

Schechter believed these papers likely came from the genizah at the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Old Cairo. He paid it a visit where he charmed the community and was invited to take what and as much as he liked. He reported that he "liked it all," boxed it up, and brought it to Cambridge.

This was no orderly library he walked into. In fact, he climbed a ladder to a loft and jumped down into a pile of documents. It is a collection by accident, not carefully curated and created with a specific point of view, filtered through the eyes of a historian. It is a jumble of direct source documents, both secular and religious that captures a cross-section of society for 1000 years of Middle Eastern history. It has been mined by scholars exploring Hebrew poetry, the evolution of Judaism, and even to recreate the community between 950-1250.

So how does a genizah relate to our reflections at Yom Kippur? Remember that definition of hiding place? The Cairo genizah contained the contents of many people layered through time, but on a more granular level, we all carry a genizah within us, a personal genizah in which we store memories that may be private in nature. We sift through the history of our life, seeking to make sense of it much as the scholars did on a much larger scale. As I face a milestone birthday, I am sorting through my genizah, considering my path through life, understanding more about myself and also tripping over the things that I wish I had dealt with differently. We all carry those things we regret and have buried away from others' eyes. We are told at Yom Kippur that we are to reach out to those we have wronged to right those wrongs if possible. Sometimes that isn't possible. We may have unresolved issues with a parent, sibling or friend who has passed away and are left to make sense of that person in their absence. We need to accept who they were, release difficult emotions and carry the learnings from that relationship into our lives today. So, as we review our personal hiding place, certainly make amends where it is possible. And in those cases where it is not possible, where you fell short of your better self, affirm your effort to live more consciously and with intention.



## High Holidays 2023 — Committee Recap by Carrie Dickson, Chair



As the cold air starts to descend on our community, we reflect on another successful autumn and High Holiday season that brought us together in spirit, if not always in person. Our High Holiday Committee continued working throughout the summer and early fall, navigating the unique challenges that this time of year brings.



### ***Highlights from the past season:***

#### **1. Consistency in Unpredictable Times**

Despite the challenges, our committee meetings remained stable, online, and productive. Community attendance at services and events mirrored that of the previous year, with one notable exception — the Break-fast gathering saw a significant increase in participants.

#### **2. Childcare for All**

We owe a debt of gratitude to Arielah King for spearheading the effort to offer child care during two services. This was a big hit with many Or Emet families and made it possible for more members to participate without worrying about child care arrangements.

#### **3. Harmonious Voices**

The new Or Emet singers graced our services with beautiful voices spanning all age groups. They led the congregation in much of the music, infusing our holiday celebrations with harmony. The Men's Choir continued their tradition of singing the Kol Nidre arrangement, enchanting us with their talents.

#### **4. Culinary Delights**

After Rosh Hashanah, we returned with our regular Oneg gathering featuring apples, honey, and delicious honey cakes. For Break-fast, we tried something new and enjoyed delicious Mediterranean food catered by Roti, creating a memorable culinary experience for our community.

#### **5. Health and Well-being**

We are thrilled to report that we hosted a successful flu shot clinic this year, promoting the health and well-being of our members. Safety and well-being continue to be a priority for the Or Emet community.

#### **6. Thought-Provoking Sermons**

Eva delivered a series of thought-provoking sermons, themed around the 'Ten Commandments of *Barbie*,' secular spirituality, and the harms of defining Jewish peoplehood narrowly, sparking meaningful conversations and reflection within our community.

#### **7. Celebrating Together**

To commemorate the successful completion of the High Holidays season, our committee gathered for a debrief meeting and celebration at Cecil's in St. Paul. This is a tradition we hope to continue and one that reminds us of the strength of our community.

#### **► Join Us for 2024**

If you are interested in bringing fresh energy and a new perspective to our stable, fun, and productive committee for the 2024 High Holidays, reach out to committee chair Carrie via email [cdickson@umich.edu](mailto:cdickson@umich.edu).

We extend our heartfelt thanks to this wonderful community for continued support, participation, and dedication. Your involvement makes these holidays truly special, and we look forward to the new opportunities and challenges the coming year will bring.

With gratitude, the Or Emet High Holiday Committee



High Holiday committee members are shown celebrating the end of work for 2023 High Holiday events and looking towards next year — At Cecil's Deli.

In photo: (L to R) Dan Gladen, Naomi Rockler, Sarah Berman-Young, Carrie Dickson, Eva Cohen, Scott Chazdon





## Hanukkah Party

Or Emet's Hanukkah party on December 9 was a fun, festive event at the Sabes JCC attended by approximately 100 people — mostly families and children. Eva Cohen led the program and Jesse Feinberg was chair of the working team along with Sarah Berman-Young, Molly Phipps, Eva Cohen, Jeff Pipes, and Anne Handley.

Festivities highlighted JCSS students singing traditional songs, children lighting family menorahs, an enthusiastically received call-and-response telling of the Hanukkah story, dancing, potato latkes, Hanukkah trivia, and more.

Fortunately, a potential food safety issue associated with a cantaloupe-related salmonella outbreak was averted. Melon trays on the pot luck buffet were removed before food was served. It was a safe and celebratory party!



### *The Times They Ain't A'Changin*

by Alan Miller



We had just moved to Florida, I was nine, and the topic of religion came up with a classmate. I told her I was Jewish; the next day she said that I couldn't be Jewish, because her mother told her that Jews have horns. Fast forward, having moved to Long Island, three years later — two classmates who were cousins delighted in harassing me and making me late for class, just to embarrass a "Jewboy." It's always been there, this latent antisemitism, festering just below the surface. Somehow, however, I was just naive enough to think it might be gone, at least in the U.S., by the time I reached these, my senior (very senior) years. Foolish me.

When Israel was attacked in 1991 I immediately volunteered, to offer whatever help I might. Although not an ardent Zionist and in actuality an atheist, I had lived through the World War II years, and couldn't believe that Jews might have to go through that horror again, particularly in the Jewish homeland. I spent almost three weeks in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, at the Golan Heights, furnished with press credentials, running from Scud missiles during air raids, reporting back to the U.S., until Saddam Hussein was clearly headed for defeat. It was one of the highlights of my life, yet while that threat is over, it clearly has not gone.

I decided, several years ago, that if those Operation Desert Storm years had been under a Netanyahu government, I would not have volunteered, nor gone to Israel. I believe in the dignity of human beings, and in a two-state solution. I look upon him and his ultra-right government as representing everything that I have opposed all my life.

Thus I was torn by the October 7 massacre in Gaza — the slaughter of innocents, not unlike the Holocaust, only because they were Jews. These people had done nothing except be guilty of being Jewish. Was there any difference between the slaughter of Jews in the Holocaust and the slaughter of Jews on October 7?

In my mind, there was a difference. The repression of Palestinians by Netanyahu and his right-wing government certainly was one of the catalysts to this inhuman slaughter. And while I grieve at the response, with the thousands of innocent civilians who have died in the weeks since, I recognize that these people were equally repressed by Hamas, an organization which represents inhumanity in its most despicable form, and that they died in Israel's acts of retribution. They were double victims.

I am also shocked by the knee-jerk reaction here in our country — quick to condemn Israel, but with little concept or perspective to the historical background of centuries of baseless antisemitism. The university students who cried out in protest, well-meaning, but ignorant of a historical frame of reference; the college administrators who sat silently instead of speaking out — which was their duty, but who were more interested in protecting their jobs than in doing what was their responsibility — an example of cowardice over conscience.

Politicians who claim not to be antisemitic have the audacity to call for retribution to Israel "from the river to the sea," the discredited shibboleth which calls for Israel's destruction. Israel is a democracy, flawed as it is, but a democracy which stands alone, surrounded by legions of autocracies whose repressed inhabitants mostly live under archaic laws which were discredited centuries ago. While I will go to almost any length to protect free speech, I find that reference to be a call for violence, no different than what this nation endured after the call for violence on January 6, 2021.

As I sit here writing this, I realize that today is November 9, 85 years to the day from when the brown shirts of Nazism struck at German Jews in the horror that became known as *Kristallnacht*, The Night of Broken Glass, the precursor to World War II. Words do matter, as do inappropriate reactions out of historical context.

I am reminded of the expression attributed to Albert Einstein — "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." Sadly, will we never learn?

## ***Update: Adult B Mitzvah Class***

by Jeff Pipes, Or Emet Vice President



We are pleased to update you about our Adult B Mitzvah program. All of us are excited to be participating and are exploring new and challenging information. In addition to Eva's deep insights and guiding hand, one of the best parts of the class has been the broad scope of knowledge that each of our cohort brings to the table. We began meeting last February under Eva's leadership and the classes will continue through February 2024. Once classes are completed, each of the members will then complete a B Mitzvah project just like the more traditional 12- and 13-year-olds in Eva's Jewish Cultural Sunday School (JCSS) class. We only hope that our projects will be nearly as good as the youngsters' projects! This is the first time Or Emet has offered an adult B Mitzvah program and only a few of our SHJ affiliates have done so.

We began with classes on the history and evolution of why ritual and ceremony matter to secular organizations. This included readings by Rabbi Sherwin Wine and an article by our own Richard Logan. I personally was shocked and intrigued by the idea that the modern B Mitzvah ceremony developed in reaction to and alongside the Christian confirmation traditions. Eva's readings and discussions addressed how we as Humanistic Jews have made this ritual our own and how the larger movement, to be truly inclusive of all genders, has influenced our traditions. It was both heartwarming and enlightening.

The next few classes covered a "brief" history of Judaism and a history of SHJ's beginnings from "Jewish tradition" to the Enlightenment (Haskalah), from Yiddish and Jewish socialism to modern Jewish thought, and Humanistic Judaism's history and philosophy, along with comparing and contrasting with other denominations. Whew — you get the idea!

From there, we delved into looking at traditional Jewish texts through a critical academic lens by drawing on diverse modern scholarship, from archaeological and historical-critical approaches to gender studies and postmodern theory. This included readings from ancient texts like the *Enuma Elish*, the Genesis creation stories, the *Eve Bible* by Carol Meyers, Dov Weiss' *Midrash*, and readings from Plato and Philo. The December class will explore the Israeli/Palestinian issue and conflict from a Secular Humanistic Jewish perspective.

Each of the class participants is working diligently to organize an individual B Mitzvah project. This will culminate in a presentation similar to what the JCSS B Mitzvah kids do, and dare we say, a party or two this coming summer and into the fall! The first adult B Mitzvah cohort is small and each of us has followed a different path to arrive at B Mitzvah and Secular Humanistic Judaism itself. We represent those who grew up Jewish, but didn't have a B Mitzvah when they were 12 or 13, those who came to Judaism later in life, and one who is even the son and grandson of Methodist pastors.

### **Adult B Mitzvah Project Topics:**

- *Allan* will focus his project on the history of Jewish Anti-Zionism.
- *Megan* will focus on the history of Jewish women's crafts.
- *Richard* will focus on Jewish culture as the center of Secular Humanistic Judaism.
- *Jeff* will explore the traditions, customs, and rules around wine in Judaism past and present.

We all look forward to presenting our projects and experiences to the whole of Or Emet.

Eva will be looking to continue the Adult B Mitzvah classes with another cohort next year. We encourage anyone interested in this to consider joining the next group.



## *Member News, Simchas and Tsuris (Joys and Concerns)*



**Muriel Sterne** celebrated her 90th birthday on December 7.

**Kai Dickson** will be graduating from Roseville Area High School where he has been involved with the robotics team. Kai plans to study mechanical engineering.



**Ian Zukor** is graduating from the University of Minnesota with a major in history and a minor in special education. He will be a substitute teacher in Plymouth before pursuing a master's degree at the U of M in the fall. Ian aims to be a history teacher in the Twin Cities area. Currently, he teaches Or Emet's JCSS Littles class.

### *In Memoriam*



**Kristen "Kris" Langer**, daughter of Rollie and Len Langer, died on October 18. Kris' parents, Rollie and Len Langer, were involved with Or Emet throughout Or Emet's history until Rollie's 2013 death. Over the years, their daughters Kris and Sara, also made significant contributions to the congregation.

**Andrea "Andee" Weinberg-Chestnut**, sister of Susan Weinberg, died unexpectedly on December 12. Susan says, "she is the mother of my two amazing nieces and the last person who shared the memories of my childhood family."

*May their Memory Be a Blessing*



*The Birches* by Jane Katz

**ART BENEFIT** — Jane Katz has a show of her original and giclée print watercolors through December at The Kenwood, 825 Summit Ave., Minneapolis. Prices negotiable. *All proceeds will go to Doctors Without Borders or Planned Parenthood.* Stop by for a cup of tea or glass of wine. jkatz6000@gmail.com or 952.393.2833.

## *Donations*

### **In memory of David Barnett**

Bruce Pomerantz

### **In memory of Kristen Langer**

Joan Barnett

Richard and Carol Logan

Paul Petzschke and Janet Mayer

### **In memory of Andrea Weinberg-Chestnut**

Joan Barnett

Richard and Carol Logan

Paul Petzschke and Janet Mayer

### **To Or Emet through *Give to the Max***

Gwyn Leder

Anne Handley

Tammy Bloom

Sarah Berman-Young

Dana Fox

Sharon and Alan Miller

Erica Fishman

Michal Moskow

Karen Cohen

*Thank You!*

\* Donations may be made through Or Emet's website [oremnet.org](http://oremnet.org) or by sending a check to Seth Binder, 3820 Lyndale Ave. S., Mpls 55409



**SHABBAT PROGRAMS**

Shabbat programs meet at the Minnesota JCC Sabes Center, 4330 S. Cedar Lake Rd., Minneapolis. Programs include a Humanistic Shabbat service and are followed by social time.

**Saturday | January 13 | 10 - 11:30 a.m.**

**Program:** *Immigration Detention in Minnesota*

**Presenter:** Gregory King, President of the Board and Advocacy Coordinator for the Interfaith Coalition on Immigration (ICOM)

**Saturday | February 24 | 10 - 11:30 a.m.**

**Program:** *Refugee Shabbat*

**Presenter:** Dana Mach, Strategic Partnerships Officer at Center for Victims of Torture

**Friday | March 22 | 7:30 - 9 p.m.**

**Program:** *Jews for a Secular Democracy*

**Presenter:** Jeff Pipes, Or Emet Vice President

**Friday | April 19 | 7:30 - 9 p.m.**

**Program:** *Exterminating Pests: Fireflies, Ladybugs and Children* at Terezin concentration camp. An illustrated talk about discoveries uncovered in the creative work by children of Terezin.

**Presenter:** Judith Brin Ingber, former head of the Dance Department at the U of MN.

**Friday | May 24 | 7:30 - 9 p.m.**

**Program:** TBD

**Presenter:**

**SUNDAY PROGRAMS**

Sunday programs are at the Talmud Torah of St. Paul, 768 Hamline Ave. S., St. Paul.

Adult programs meet concurrently with Jewish Cultural Sunday School classes. Programs conclude with social time.

**Sunday | January 21 | 10 a.m. - noon**

**Program:** *How Are We Doing?* Presenting spiritual and secular strategies to help us live through the Israel-Gaza War, rising antisemitism, Islamophobia, and the fear and anxiety of the unknown in 2024.

**Presenters:** Rabbi Lynn Liberman and Jewish Family Service of St. Paul staff

**Sunday | February 11 | 10 a.m. - noon**

**Program:** TBD

**Presenter:**

**Sunday | March 17 (St. Patrick's Day) | 10 a.m. - noon**

**Program:** *Irish-Jewish Connections: Exploring the History of Irish-Jewish Connections*

**Presenters:** Dr. David Gardiner, Director of Irish Studies, St. Thomas University and editor of the *New Hibernia Review*; Professor Emerita Michal Moskow

**Sunday | April 14 | 10 a.m. - noon**

**Program:** TBD

**Presenter:**

**Sunday | May 19 | 10 a.m. - noon**

**Program:** Johnny Clegg, South African musician, and 2023-2024 Jewish Humanist of the Year. How Clegg earned the status of Jewish Humanist of the Year.

**Presenter:** Richard Logan, former president of both

***On Emet Book Club***

**Next Book Club Meeting:** Sunday | February 4, 2024 | 10:30 a.m. - noon | location TBD

*People of the Book, by Geraldine Brooks*

If interested in joining the book club, contact Scott Chazdon [schazdon@umn.edu](mailto:schazdon@umn.edu).

Called "a tour de force" by the San Francisco Chronicle, this ambitious, electrifying work traces the harrowing journey of the famed Sarajevo Haggadah, a beautifully illuminated Hebrew manuscript created in fifteenth-century Spain.

***Caring Circle***

***We're here when you need a little extra support***



Or Emet's Caring Circle (CC) offers simple, practical, short-term assistance and support to members in times of illness, loss, and crisis. This support supplements and coordinates with other resources (e.g. family, friends, community, professional). Caring Circle can provide,

for example, a simple card, a personal phone call, an email and/or a visit. A Meal Train can be organized if needed. Contact Caring Circle at [CaringCircle@oremet.org](mailto:CaringCircle@oremet.org).

**New and Prospective Member Brunch | Sunday | February 4 | 10:00 - 11:30 am | location TBD**

Join Or Emet members to learn more about Humanistic Judaism, Or Emet, and why this might be the home you didn't know you were missing!

If interested in attending, contact [president@oremet.org](mailto:president@oremet.org).

**Or Emet Book Club | Sunday | February 4 | 10:30 a.m. - noon | location to be announced**

To be discussed: *People of the Book* by Geraldine Brooks. Additional information on previous page.

If interested in participating, contact Scott Chazdon at [schazdon@umn.edu](mailto:schazdon@umn.edu).

**Humanistic Passover Seder | Saturday | April 27**

Additional details will be posted on [oremet.org](http://oremet.org) calendar and shared with Or Emet's listserv when available.

**Or Emet's Annual Meeting and Picnic | Sunday | June 9 | Talmud Torah of St. Paul**

- Annual Meeting with election of officers | 10 am - noon
  - Annual meeting will include celebration of Eva Cohen's ordination and becoming Or Emet's rabbi
- Potluck Picnic | setup noon - 12:30 pm | picnic gathering 12:30 - 2 pm

