



THE ILLUMINATOR

Or Emet – The Minnesota Congregation for Humanistic Judaism

Winter 2019-2020

Published in December 2019



Balancing Two Traditions

by Harold Londer, Madrikh Emeritus

Reprinted from November 2013 Illuminator Archives*

Editor's Note: As we enter yet another holiday season, Jewish school children continue to face that pivotal moment balancing the singing of religious Christmas carols with their Jewish identity, a moment that underscores their otherness. Harold offers an interesting take on how this dilemma of balancing two traditions continues to affect many of us well into adulthood, particularly those in intercultural families.

I grew up in North Minneapolis at a time when elementary school demographics of the neighborhood yielded classes with over ninety percent Jews. I hardly knew any non-Jews until age twelve, when I started seventh grade at Lincoln Junior High. With Lincoln drawing from a larger, more diverse, geographic area, I became exposed to the Christian world.

"Gym" was a disaster, and everyone I knew opted for music which got you out of gym twice a week. I did not have access to an instrument, but, even with my total lack of musical skills, I went to chorus tryouts. I was selected! I think everyone was.

At the first chorus class, I learned I was one of only two boy sopranos. Marnell Hall, a black kid, later to blossom as one of the most popular students in our high school class due to his beautiful falsetto voice, and me, the last boy to go through puberty. My voice had not "changed!" At the time, it was one of the great humiliations of my young age. I still have the Lincoln Junior High 7th grade chorus picture with Marnell, me, and all the female sopranos to one side. By the next year I was shaving, my voice had dropped two octaves and my musical career was finished.

It is amazing that I still remember words and music to the songs we sang, "The Happy Wanderer," "Yellow Bird," etc. Then came the announcement that our chorus was going to perform at the school's Holiday concert. I loved "Jingle Bells" and "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer," BUT then came "Silent Night," with the "C" word...plain as the back of my hand...Christ the savior was born. I honestly believe I had never

seen the word in print before! How could I sing these words in front of the entire assembly? Should I sing these words? Could I? My first religious crisis!

I was confused. I would not dare say the "C" word in front of my father, my rabbi or my Hebrew school teacher. I could refuse to perform, or be absent that day. What would my teachers think? The other kids? I would speak to my mother. I knew I could trust her. I remember her advice to this day.



My mother told me she had faced a similar dilemma as a young girl and the solution she devised had served her well. "Just PRETEND to sing the song. Move your lips, but don't make a sound." She smiled and confidently took a puff from her ubiquitous cigarette.

That was how I handled Christianity for the next decade or so. I have thought many times about this advice and the existential crisis I had faced. The recent Pew survey of American Jewry shows nearly 50% of American Jews are now marrying outside the faith! Challenging parenting moments will arise in many of these marriages. I have learned that balancing two traditions is not as simple as silently moving one's lips. It requires trust, compromise, patience, and sometimes a sense of humor.

May all of you have a joyous holiday season. The New York Times recently published a Thanksgiving recipe for a "latke" crusted turkey loin. Blend your traditions like your batter. All is calm...all is bright.

**lightly edited for space*



The Illuminator

Or Emet's member newsletter is published in August • December • April
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International Institute
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Wondering about Our Future

President's Message

by Scott Chazdon



It is time for Or Emet to have a strategic conversation about our future, and we plan to focus a January 26, 2020 Leadership Team meeting on this topic. The last time we made a concerted effort to do this was five years ago — and it was a really worthwhile effort that we can revisit!

In February 2015, Seth Fine and Ami Berger presented a “Growth and Marketing Strategy” at a meeting of Or Emet’s Leadership Team. First off, their presentation featured mission and vision statements, which are worth sharing once again:

Our Mission:

Or Emet’s mission is to be a caring and stimulating community celebrating Humanistic Judaism.

Our Vision:

Or Emet is a vital member of the greater Twin Cities community, whose members value Jewish culture and history while enjoying our secular outlook on life.

Or Emet’s school establishes a strong foundation for our children's sense of identity, links with the past, and how we fit in the world. Our programs help expand our horizons and enrich the greater community. We provide personal support in times of celebration and times of need. Our social action reflects a core value of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world.

Seth and Ami’s presentation highlighted the fact that Or Emet programming and marketing efforts need to be designed for people in distinct stages of life.

These are:

1. Baby boomers and other seniors seeking a community of wondering Jews and Humanists
2. Families with children wanting to raise their kids culturally Jewish
3. Unaffiliated millennials looking for a social network of culturally Jewish friends

On January 26, 2020 we’ll revisit our progress reaching each of these groups. We also know that the Society for Humanistic Judaism (SHJ) is thinking deeply about expanding its reach as well. Richard Logan, SHJ president, has shared with me that the SHJ already knows that it is important to be viewed as an **action** organization that is about **doing** more than just **being** or belonging.

I hope you will join us at our Leadership Team meeting on January 26th and help us wonder together about our future.

Jewish Cultural School Update
by Arty Dorman
Director of the Or Emet Jewish Cultural School



Season's greetings to all at this time of festive lights — Hanukkah lights and, for many of our families, Christmas lights as well. Perhaps you will share the glow of the seven candles in a Kwanzaa *kinara*. Maybe you took part in the festive lights of Diwali. Candles spread warmth and light on our Thanksgiving table. Others watch the illuminated crystal sphere marking the arrival of the New Year.

It is meaningful in all cultures to have lights when the days become shorter and colder, a reminder that the darkness will ebb and that warmth and brightness will return to us. The JCS is another way we maintain our light and warmth all year. The warm hearts and bright minds of our students fill me with gladness and hope.

One of the ways our children do this is through offering generosity and kindness to those in need. This is in keeping with the principles of Humanistic Judaism, to reach out to others, to build community, and to repair the world. Our Jewish Cultural School curriculum addresses this by teaching our kids three ways of providing service:

Tzedakah (giving to others)

Gemilut Hasadim (acts of kindness to help others)

Tikkun Olam (repairing the world)

Tzedakah is an act of generosity, giving to others — dropping coins in a collection box, bringing canned goods for a food pantry, or gloves for our Mitten Menorah at Hanukkah. Gemilut Hasadim entails acts that make a difference in the lives of others — shoveling the sidewalk for an elderly neighbor, visiting a friend in the hospital, or cooking and serving a meal to those who are hungry.

When we engage in Tikkun Olam, we roll up our

sleeves to do the work of fixing what is wrong in the world, whether it be picking up litter, marching to demonstrate support for common sense gun safety laws, or writing letters to leaders to demand more humane treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.

These types of service are distinct but overlapping. The important thing is to act on them. In the Middles Group, teacher Colline Roland had her students make dog chew toys out of old t-shirts, as a gift to the Animal Humane Society. This simple project involved both Tzedakah - giving to others, and Tikkun Olam, as it was a way of reducing waste by reusing old t-shirts. The B'Mitzvah group will be brainstorming their public policy concerns and will write letters on those issues to their state representatives.

As a community, we provide opportunities for our kids to engage in service as well. This Christmas Eve, we served supper to men spending their holiday at St. Stephen's Shelter. Children eight or older are welcome to help serve (you are the best judge if a younger child has the maturity for this activity). Kids who have taken part in the past love it. Our next St. Stephen's meal will be Saturday, February 29, 2020. We also are scheduled on Saturday, March 21, at 1:00–3:00 pm to package produce or groceries at Second Harvest Heartland. This is another activity our kids have loved. Second Harvest does have a firm requirement that children who volunteer be age eight and above.

We know many of you take part in your own service activities and may include your kids as well. Don't forget to reinforce for them that such work is not only in keeping with your values as a family, but also reflects values that are part of their Jewish heritage.





Social Justice/Social Action Committee Update *From the Ground Up*



Claire Press and Gwyn Leder, Social Justice/Social Action Co-Chairs

St. Stephen's Mens' Shelter Dinners

We continue serving at St. Stephen's Mens' Shelter in Minneapolis. Again, we provided a special Christmas dinner on 12/24. Upcoming dates are February 29, April 25, and June 27, 2020. Many people are involved and they bring an abundance of delicious, wholesome food, enough for guests to have seconds and thirds.

Additional Tikkun Olam Activities

Food shelf donations received at Or Emet's High Holiday services were very generous. Or Emet continues to deliver toiletries, personal care items, socks, gloves, empty pill bottles, and other items to the Listening House.

We will volunteer at Second Harvest Heartland on March 21, 2020. More information on page 14.

Mitten Menorah

At the Hanukkah Party on December 21, our Mitten Menorah again collected mittens, scarves, and hats that were donated to Neighborhood House. We also participated in B'Yachad with Jewish Family Service to provide gifts for needy families, elders, and immigrants.

Exploring the Theme of Immigrants

We are continuing the theme of "Immigrants" that Eva Cohen spoke about during High Holiday Services. Arty Dorman took the lead for us to send out fifty postcards to Nancy Pelosi supporting immigration reform. Or Emet member Marissa Hill-Dongre, an immigration attorney, presented an informative program on the complications and crises of our present immigration system. For the March 20th adult program we are hoping to have a speaker from Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS). HIAS is the oldest immigrant society in the world!

Thank you to all the members of the Social Justice/Social Action (SJ/SA) committee and all the members of Or Emet who participate in our *Tikkun Olam* programs and projects.

Or Emet members are welcome to join the SJ/SA Committee and/or to offer input on activities and issues that we address. The committee usually meets immediately following the Sunday program at St. Paul Talmud Torah. Contact Claire Press clairehpress@aol.com or Gwyn Leder gwynleder@comcast.net to get involved.

APPRECIATION CORNER



St. Stephen's Human Services recently extended the following recognition to Or Emet:

“a shout-out to the dedicated Or Emet Meal Group. They have been serving about four meals per year since 2012. It's truly a team effort from Or Emet, with some volunteers preparing meals, others serving them, and others offering rides to reduce barriers to volunteering.

Fun fact: This meal group served a meal at the Clinton Ave. Shelter on Christmas Day 2018 and they are doing so again on Christmas Eve 2019!

Thank you, Or Emet community, for your longstanding service. We are so appreciative of the way you live out our shared value of dignity for all.”



My Journey to Becoming a Rabbi – Eva Cohen



Eva Cohen

I am excited to be nearing the end of the final semester of my master's degree in Classical and Near Eastern studies at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities!

I am very happy to report that I have passed my Biblical Hebrew proficiency exam, one of several capstone requirements for graduation. I am revising two master's papers, incorporating arguments into these papers informed by secondary scholarship written in French and Modern Hebrew. I will be submitting the revised papers to my committee shortly, and then undergoing an oral examination on them as well as other topics related to my study of the Hebrew Bible, ancient Judaism, and religions of the broader ancient Mediterranean and ancient Near Eastern world. With submission of these papers, completion of final coursework for the two classes that I am taking this semester (Advanced Classical Hebrew — Lamentations and Readings in Religious Texts—the Gospel of Mark), and fulfillment of my teaching assistant responsibilities, I will be done with all work for this final semester.

Provided that I pass my oral exam, I will be graduating at the end of December after two and a half years in the program! I plan to walk in the May university graduation ceremony, but I am on track to officially complete the program before this year ends.

This fall I have also been continuing my rabbinic coursework with the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism (IISHJ). In addition to completing assignments for the biblical archaeology course and the philosophic guidance and counseling course I took over the summer, I am enrolled in a seminar on modern Jewish history, taught by Rabbi Adam Chalom, that runs through June 2020. This class, like a typical IISHJ distance-learning class, meets for video-conference sessions, and requires reading and writing assignments. I look forward to sharing more about this class in my spring Illuminator article, and I am excited to focus more of my time and energy on IISHJ coursework once my master's program at the U of MN is complete.

Leading Or Emet's High Holidays services as the ritual leader was a real highlight. It is always a pleasure to help shape services that I think genuinely move people to reflect on themselves, their lives and identities, and their contributions and commitments on a broader scale. It has also been an interesting experience to lead those services while pregnant! Inspired by our liturgy, I found myself thinking a lot about what the upcoming year will look like, and how I hope to meet the joys and challenges that new parenthood will bring. The baby is due February 20, and I am grateful to ritual committee members who have stepped up to lead Shabbat services this fall as I complete my master's program requirements and do my best to maintain healthy routines and get enough rest. Jack and I are excited for our child to become part of the Or Emet community!

As I begin serving the congregation in a more significant part-time capacity in January, our child will certainly be making appearances at Or Emet events.

Donations

*Thank
You!*

**In celebration of — the birth of Noah Henry,
grandson of Janet Mayer and Paul Petzschke**

David and Joan Barnett
Richard and Carol Logan

**In recognition of — Eva Cohen's
monumental achievements**

Richard and Carol Logan

In memory of — Edna Bernstein's sister, Irma Gawboy
Janet Mayer and Paul Petzschke

To celebrate recent marriages officiated by Sarah Berman-Young

Jonathan and Lara Stein
Evan and Lea Radeen

For use where most needed

Jodi and Howe Siegal
Lisa Gardner-Springer
Claire Press
Tom Wegner and Barbara Weisman
Tina Edstam
Ben and Caren Daniels

B'Mitzvah Commentary

At each of Or Emet's B'Mitzvahs, the candidate delivers their commentary and reflections on the weekly Torah portion (parsha). Emily's commentary is representative of others in depth and originality.

And I Pleaded

by Emily Springer

My Torah portion was *Parshat Va'etchanan* which translates to, "and I pleaded." It is from Deuteronomy, the fifth book in the Torah. Moses is addressing the people and telling them to follow God and God's rules, such as the Ten Commandments, before they go into the Promised Land without him.

One phrase that I found in this portion that I did not agree with is when it says, "Only this great nation is a wise and understanding people." Here God is implying that nations that don't follow him, are not a smart and understanding people. If they follow Greek gods or Roman gods, or Egyptian gods or no gods, why does that make them less than any other people? They should be allowed to believe in whoever they want to believe in. They should not be told that they are less because they believe in something different from what the Hebrew God commanded.



Emily Springer

Another thing that I found in this portion that I didn't like was how there were no women mentioned. I did some research and the first thing I saw was a lot of women in the Bible that are important. Then I looked closer and they were almost all the wife, mother, or daughter of important men. It took me a long time to find an important woman who was not just important because of her family. Someone that I found was named Deborah. She was a prophetess and the only female in the Book of Judges in the Prophets portion of the Bible. She was a legendary figure before there were kings. I think that women should have a bigger part. They make no mention of what women do in the Bible. There was even a list of nameless women in the Bible. They are all women who did great things, but are never named, they are just called something like, "Wife sold for debt."

My Torah portion has many different rules in it, some that I do not agree with but there are others that I do and want to follow. A lot of people would just skip over the rules that they don't agree with and only think about the ones they like, but I think it important to recognize everything, even if you do not agree with it. A surprising thing I found was how relevant some of the things in my portion are, even though the Bible was written about 2,700 years ago. That means there were issues then that are still going on today. For instance a commandment in my parsha that I agree with is, "You shall not murder," and, "You shall not steal," also another one says that for six days you work, but on the seventh day you shall rest and your manservant and maidservant shall perform no labor so they can rest like you. I like this because it is saying that everyone deserves a day of rest from all of their work during the the week. Some that I don't completely agree with are "You shall not worship the gods of others in my presence," and, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain."

Society for Humanistic Judaism Cultural B'Mitzvah Initiative

At a recent Society for Humanistic Judaism (SHJ) meeting, Rabbi Miriam Jerris described the Cultural B'Mitzvah Initiative. The program's objective is to reach out to secular Jews who do not have a Humanistic Judaism affiliate nearby or may need greater financial flexibility. It is designed to offer a meaningful program which is shorter and less costly than a traditional B'Mitzvah program through on-line, phone and eventually in-person support. SHJ receives approximately six to twelve individual requests for B'Mitzvah assistance per year.

SHJ's goal is to expand Cultural B'Mitzvah through affiliates such as Or Emet who maintain a program already. Together with the Rabbi, a post B'Mitzvah student might assist by offering their experience as a guide to others.

High Holiday Member Commentaries

The following presentations by Or Emet members were featured at Or Emet's 2019 High Holiday services. These original commentaries offering members' unique perspectives are an enduring and meaningful congregational tradition. The articles have been lightly edited for length.

Embracing Inner Conflict

Rosh Hashanah Commentary by Sam Wegner

Why do we tell the story of Isaac and Abraham on Rosh Hashanah? I found an article, titled “*Wrestling with Abraham*,” in which the author, Stephen S. Pierce, runs through ten different ways to interpret this story. None of the explanations satisfied me, though my favorite chalks the whole thing up to one big misunderstanding, and sounds like great material for a sitcom:

In this Midrash a mistranslation of Genesis 22:12 occurs. God rebukes Abraham: "When I told you to bring Isaac for a sacrifice, I wanted him at my altar, not on it." Furthermore, Abraham is chided for misunderstanding the Hebrew ha-ahlayhu, which should have been interpreted as "bring him up" and not "offer him up." Accordingly, God called upon Abraham to take Isaac up the mountain and to prepare a burnt offering, not to offer him as the burnt offering.

I'd like to share what goes through my head each time I hear the story of Isaac and Abraham.

First, I wonder why there's not a better Rosh Hashanah scare tactic story. Many cultures provide cautionary tales in which things end tragically and we learn to do better — yet this story involves a crisis which does not come to pass — a crisis which is averted at the last minute, not by the actions of an individual, but by divine intervention.

A common issue many Humanists have with religion is the notion that this suffering may be justified or necessary. In this instance God seemingly asks Abraham not only to endure suffering, but to actively create it. Why is Abraham rewarded for almost murdering his son? Why wouldn't he be rewarded for refusing this act, for arguing with God and taking a stand? And how is one to reconcile the values against killing passed down from God with a directive to violate those very values.

As Humanists, wouldn't we all refuse to obey this command? Would this make us unfaithful, and therefore deserving of punishment? Perhaps refusing to sacrifice Isaac would be our way of displaying faith. Standing our ground in the face of an unthinkable demand, trusting our belief that to kill the innocent could never be justified. Perhaps this, to us, is the true test.

This story offers us the chance to grapple with complicated issues of faith, sacrifice and reason. Reflect on the moments in the past year when you have had to grapple with one of these wicked problems — where your conscience tells you one thing, and the reality of the situation tells you another. Consider when you might have acted with reason, and when you might have acted rashly.

The situation Abraham was placed in forced him to reconcile an unthinkable, irrational demand with the values by which he had chosen to live his life. All of us are confronted with moments where our values are called into question. I choose to use this story, and this time, to remind myself to embrace those moments of inner conflict, to view complicated situations as opportunities to fortify my values and to act on them with confidence.

High Holidays 2019



Dream Big, Fall Forward

Thoughts for Rosh Hashanah by Risa Cohen

Rosh Hashanah is commonly known as the Jewish New Year. This name is somewhat deceptive, because there is little similarity between Rosh Hashanah, one of the holiest days of the year, and the American daytime football game and midnight drinking celebration.

There is, however, one important similarity between the Jewish New Year and the American one. Many Americans use the New Year as a time to make resolutions. Likewise, the Jewish New Year is a time to begin an introspective look at ourselves and make changes for the year ahead.

As Rosh Hashanah approaches, I find myself setting goals. I sit down with my family over apples and honey as we write out our resolutions for the new year and stick them on the refrigerator so we don't forget them.

"I will speak with a quieter voice."

"I will be more patient."

"I will learn to snow ski."

Since the High Holidays ask us to examine ourselves, it's not surprising that, as Jews, we make resolutions to help us realize our aspirations. It is a time to engage in the process of *t'shuvah*. T'shuvah means repentance but literally means turning — we turn toward wholeness in relationships with others, with a Higher Power, and with our deeper selves through the process of reflection.

For me, it is also a time to be grateful for all that I have in my life. I am grateful for finding Or Emet and for my son who pushed me to look deeper within the Twin Cities to find a place that resonated with our family's beliefs and values. I feel blessed to be a part of an inclusive and welcoming group of people who think deeply about their Jewish identity.

What are your dreams for the year ahead? Are you dreaming big and are your dreams filled with passion? Without dedication and commitment you will never start, but more importantly without consistency and persistence you will never finish and reach your goals. Take a risk and don't be afraid to go outside of the box. Dreams without goals are just dreams.

As an actor, Sylvester Stallone was so poor and desperate he sold his dog for \$25. Almost completely broke, he slept in the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York City for three weeks. In 1975, Stallone saw the Muhammad Ali–Chuck Wepner fight and over three days wrote the screenplay for the movie "Rocky." Stallone attempted to sell the script to multiple studios, with the intention of playing the lead and was continuously rejected. One company offered him \$350,000 for the rights, but had their own casting ideas for the lead role, including Robert Redford and Burt Reynolds. Stallone refused to sell unless he played the lead and after a substantial budget cut, it was agreed he could be the star. *Rocky* went on to receive ten Academy Award nominations, winning three, including Best Motion Picture.

Diagnosed with dyslexia when I was seven, my condition was and still is severe. I was put in classrooms with students who had learning difficulties and felt anxiety, and shame about it. When I was fourteen my life seemed pretty bleak, I knew that if I didn't make some big goals for myself, that I would soon be stuck in some very dark places. I had been rejected from all the schools I applied to and was academically years behind my grade level. I could have dropped out of school and fallen back on a job that didn't push me to my highest potential.

I didn't fall back, I fell forward. I got into the high school of my choice, a prep school that helped students prepare for college, and later graduated from college with honors.

As a dance teacher, when my students are dancing with little energy — when they are tired, when they refuse to push themselves. I tell them to dance big, to be bigger — they are not serving the class by dancing small. Nor will they serve life by living and acting small. When dancing big, they inspire the dancers around them to dance big. When they are performing with greatness, with vigor, they are automatically liberating others to do the same. When you live your life with greatness you too are liberating those around you to be great.

Restorative Justice: A Path to T'shuvah

Yom Kippur Commentary by Ellen Chazdon

At the High Holidays we observe the tradition of *t'shuvah*, repentance or returning. We apologize for the wrongs we have done, and request forgiveness from those we have wronged. We are also taught to make things right. Humanists can certainly find a place here, because much of the focus is on trying to be right with ourselves.

In the past year, MPR's Kerri Miller hosted a radio series entitled *Women of Faith*. There were a series of shows interviewing female clergy. Rabbi Donya Ruttenberg spoke about true repentance, describing the hard work of empathy, connection, and engagement in transformation and emotional growth. It is not easy. She distinguished between shallow apologies, vs a more soul-searching reflection. She linked it to a process of restorative justice and making amends in a twelve-step program, a demanding and challenging effort. Callers talked about asking for forgiveness, but being denied. Rabbi Ruttenberg emphasized that a true apology is not about immediately receiving forgiveness, but staying open to a true sense of empathy and being present with the damage done. The point is *t'shuvah*, return to one's values. It is an opportunity to get it right with ourselves and others.

As a therapist I have experience with people working their twelve-step programs, but I was less familiar with restorative justice, so did some research. The foundational principles are that crime causes harm and justice should focus on repairing that harm. The people most affected by the crime should be able to participate in its resolution. In an article in the *Omaha World Herald* by Matthew Hansen, I found an example of such a gesture.



Around the time of the restoration of the original Dakota name of Minneapolis' largest lake, Bde Maka Ska, Mayo Clinic had a big issue it was time to address. In 1862, thirty-eight Dakota men were hanged in Mankato for alleged crimes against white settlers. Adding insult to injury, William Mayo "gained possession" of the body of one of these hanged men, a man named Marpiya te Najin (also called "He Who Stands in the Clouds," or "Cut Nose"), and displayed his skeleton at Mayo Clinic. Last September, a Mayo Clinic representative contacted his descendant, LeAnn Red Owl, to offer an apology. She agreed to hear the apology, but said, "You need to come here, to the reservation, and say what needs to be said to the whole family." So Jeffrey Bolton, VP and Chief Administrative Officer at Mayo, flew to the Santee Sioux Reservation in Nebraska, where the man's descendants are now located, to deliver the apology. LeAnn Red Owl and many in the family, descendants of the Santee Dakota people, showed up. There was a four-hour ceremony with drumming, chanting, singing, and with the tribal elders talking about the history. Mayo created a scholarship for Native Americans seeking education in health care and the apology was given.

Here is part of the written apology: "The Dakota people and the Mayo Clinic are connected...History can also bind us in broken ways. We acknowledge our role in that broken relationship." The apology was apparently not accepted by everyone, but was by some. When asked what she thought, LeAnn said, "They are taking responsibility for what they did. They are making it right. That is how I view it."

I found this a helpful example of increased depth, understanding, and truth-telling. I was also struck by Mayo Clinic acknowledging the brokenness in our history.

The traditions of the High Holidays offer us an opportunity to reflect. In psychoanalysis and in Judaism, we are taught that the world is broken, that the human condition includes a certain brokenness. We are taught to work on *tikkun olam*, on repairing the brokenness. Let us work together to understand and repair what is broken at this time when it is so clearly and urgently needed.

What is Sin? One Humanistic Jew's Perspective

Yom Kippur Thoughts by Rachel Wexelbaum

Merriam-Webster offers several definitions of sin that involve either a transgression of the law of God or a state of human nature in which the self is estranged from God.

How does a Humanistic Jew atone for sins if they might not believe in God?

Humans sin every day, whether intentionally or not. We all have shortcomings, and 21st century secular humanists all commit acts that would go against the religious laws of the Old Testament. Wearing cotton and wool together is a sin — should we ask forgiveness for this in the modern world, from a God that we are not even sure exists? What about eating shrimp or pork? Should we ask forgiveness for this in the modern world, and from whom?

Perhaps we, Humanistic Jews, should see Yom Kippur as a step in a non-theistic twelve-step program for mindfulness, as opposed to recovery. We will never be cured of the seven deadly sins of pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed, or sloth. Ancient Greeks — as well as the Jewish founders of psychoanalysis — believed that these were the forces behind all human behavior and interpretation of the world. They are not wrong. We hurt people in our animal drive to satisfy these dark forces. Perhaps the trampling of our fellow humans to satisfy these seven deadly sins — this is the real sin.

We see those results in such practices as racism, nationalism, narcissism, sexism and all the many *isms* that affect our world. Think about how many of these structures of human oppression we participate in every day. If you think too long about it, you will get really depressed. Or you might get really angry and insist that you are not the cause of the world's problems, that you are not a racist, that you didn't start the fire.

It's never too late to learn from mistakes of the past and avoid making them in the future. On Yom Kippur, we can acknowledge these wrongs and admit our part in them. For the rest of the year, we can work toward change.

Being a change agent does not bring you closer to Heaven. You will face resistance at all levels. You will face danger. You may lose family and friends as you work towards what you believe is a higher good.

So be mindful.

Keep your own Book of Life that records your strengths, your shortcomings, your reflections, and your call to action.

Stick to the people who will love, forgive, support, and stand by you no matter what as you fulfill your call to action.

Build the community that will create a better way, a better society. It's not too late.

Member Contributions

L'Dor V'Dor: Or Emet from Generation to Generation

by Janet Mayer, Ritual Committee Chair

This fall, as we have done for 30 years, Or Emet enjoyed High Holiday services complete with Tashlich brunch and Yom Kippur break-fast. Ritual leader Eva Cohen and vocal lead Sarah Berman-Young have continued a uniquely Humanistic Jewish experience in the Twin Cities. Dr. Harold Londer, Co-Founder and Madrikh Emeritus, is pleased to see that succession has happened and the next generation is doing an excellent job. A look back gives us much reason to celebrate where we are today and to be excited about the future.

In 2011 we decided to form a ritual leadership structure to provide Shabbat, holiday services, and lifecycle ceremonies along with Harold. By 2014 we had created a Shabbat services team. That was the beginning of the transition that Harold had encouraged as he moved toward retirement.

— article continues on next page

L'Dor V'Dor: Or Emet from Generation to Generation — continued from previous page

In the spring of 2016 Or Emet hosted Rabbi Adam Chalom, Dean of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism (IISHJ) for a weekend seminar. One of the goals for the program was to strengthen Or Emet's leadership capacity. Both Sarah and Eva attended the seminar for credit, and we were excited to learn that Eva had decided to apply to IISHJ to become a rabbi.

In 2017 Or Emet created a lifecycle ceremonies team, and Sarah achieved celebrant certification to perform weddings through the American Humanist Association. Ritual committee, Shabbat leaders, and other members also volunteered to update our Shabbat, High Holidays, and (for 2020) Passover Haggadah service booklets.

This year Eva and Sarah reached several milestones. Sarah officiated, to glowing feedback, at two weddings. We are delighted to welcome one of the couples, Lea and Evan, and their daughter, Neva, to Or Emet and the Jewish Cultural School.



As a rabbinic candidate Eva is sharing the knowledge she is gaining from IISHJ courses at services, B'Mitzvahs, and adult programs. She has completed classwork toward a master's degree in Classical and Near Eastern Studies, will become our Shabbat service leader in 2020, and begin to add lifecycle ceremonies to her activities.

Kudos to our interim Shabbat and lifecycle ceremony ritual leadership who have filled the spaces as Harold was stepping back. And kudos to Eva and Sarah for making us all proud Or Emet members.

A Different Route to Judaism

by Michal Moskow

In August, I visited the Abayudaya Jewish community of Uganda at Nabogoya Hill. To understand these Jews, we need to know a little about Christianity in Africa. My friend Phoebe, daughter of a Kenyan Anglican pastor, told me, "When the Europeans came to Africa, they had the Bible and the Africans had the land. The Europeans said, 'Close your eyes and pray.' When the Africans opened their eyes, they had the Bible and the Europeans had the land."

The Abayudaya came to Judaism through Bibles from Christian missionaries. They discovered they lived much as Jews did and began to consider themselves Jews. The first Jew they met several years later told them that Jews do not adhere to the New Testament so they began to follow only the Hebrew Bible. Needless to say, they have difficulty being accepted by the Orthodox, and they suffered under Idi Amin, but they finally received conversions. Rabbi Gershom Sizomu, also a Member of Parliament, studied five years in Los Angeles and a year in Israel. He receives no salary as rabbi.

The traditional service was enlivened by a six-year-old boy playing a drum, and I was honored with an Aliyah. Johanna Lester and Sarah Berman-Young would envy the singing. Why can't we sing with such enthusiasm? Have our voices disappeared as we have become wealthier and more complacent? Are we hesitant to assert who we are?

Shabbat and Havdalah suppers were in a courtyard at the rabbi's house. They grow all their food organically. After Saturday services, everyone sat outside under the trees with a view of Mount Elgon for a lengthy D'var Torah. Three Israelis on safari stopped by to see if there really were Jews in Uganda. They ate and left, having satisfied their curiosity.

The community is far from wealthy. Currently, four students studying business in Kenyan universities lost their funding and cannot even take the needed exams. You can offer support through [Be'chol Lashon](#). Click on "Donate" and then "Specify a specific project" by typing in "Abayudaya."

We forget how fortunate we are, standing in the shower while hot water runs down the drain, hopping in the car or going online to immediately satisfy our needs and wishes. To see people committed to being Jewish in a world where subsistence can still be minimal should inspire all of us to be more appreciative of what we have — and to share when we can. If you are on safari in the region, the guest house is lovely, with private baths and running water, \$30 per night or \$50 per night with three meals. Kosher, of course.

Simchas and Tsuris (Joys and Concerns)

Or Emet has received a \$10,000 grant from the Minnesota Historical Society!



Just before this issue went to press, we learned that Or Emet has received a grant entitled: *Humanistic Judaism in Minnesota: An Oral History of Or Emet*. Grant dollars will be used to hire an oral history interviewer and a video editor, pay for transcription, as well as purchase camera equipment. We hope to conduct oral history interviews with up to ten long-term members of Or Emet between May and July of 2020. The impetus for this project came from our 30th anniversary and September 2018 *Wall of Wondering Jews* event. If you are interested in being involved in this project, please email Scott Chazdon at president@oremet.org.

More Mazel Tovs!

Sarah Berman-Young, Or Emet's Humanist Celebrant, officiated at two weddings this past fall for Jonathan and Lara Stein, and Evan and Lea Radeen.

Richard and Carol Logan's granddaughter Beatrice, 17, was the only student from her Minneapolis high school selected to be in the MN Music Educators All-State Choir. They performed at St. Olaf College during the summer and will perform again at Orchestra Hall in February.

Noah Henry was born on October 11 in Oakland, CA, to Janet Mayer's daughter Liz and her husband Chris. Both Liz and Noah are healthy and happy, as are Chris and dog Rufus. Of course Janet and Paul are thrilled.

Steve and Faith Oremland's granddaughter, Alexa, has been accepted to Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD) and given a substantial scholarship. MCAD is one of the top 20 art schools in the US.

Donations/Collections Update

- ▶ Attendees at Or Emet's High Holiday services donated 89 pounds of grocery and personal care products. The collected items were donated to Hallie Q. Brown Community Center.
- ▶ Personal care products continue to be collected at Or Emet programs. Recently, a large quantity of donated items were delivered to Listening House, a day and community center for the homeless in St. Paul.

In Memoriam

Stan Maisel, a friend of Or Emet, died on December 3. Stan and Jean Efron have often volunteered to help with meals at St. Stephen's shelter.

Evan Radeen's grandmother died on December 18 in Connecticut.

May their memory be for a blessing

Member News

Susan Weinberg recently became President of the Minnesota Jewish Genealogical Society ([MNJGS](http://mnjgs.org)) where she will be involved in planning support and education for those with an interest in Jewish family history.

Don Larsson has been cast in the play "Black Comedy" by British playwright Peter Shaffer, which will be performed at Theatre in the Round in Minneapolis, January 10-February 2. Details are available at <http://www.theatreintheround.org/new-homepage/on-stage/black/>.

From Harold Londer and Jan Withers

Thank you for the tremendous support, cards, and gifts of food over these past few months. They are happy to report being on the mend and back in their apartment together. They are grateful for the outpouring of friendship and help from Or Emet. Harold and Jan are planning to escape the cold and travel to Florida soon.

SHABBAT PROGRAMS

Programs meet at the Sabes Jewish Community Center, 4330 South Cedar Lake Rd, St. Louis Park. The programs include a brief Humanistic Shabbat service and Oneg Shabbat reception.

SATURDAY PROGRAMS ARE AT 10:00 AM.

FRIDAY PROGRAMS ARE AT 7:30 PM.

Saturday, January 25 at 10:00 am

Program: *Communities in Action: Contextualizing Direct Social Service.*

Presenter: Sam Wegner, a Family Advocate working with homeless families and a coordinator for the American Indian Youth Enrichment Program.

Saturday, February 22 at 10:00 am

Program: *Stories My Father Never Told Me A Holocaust Survivor's Story From the Grave*

Presenter: Fred Wysoki, retired teacher and documentary film maker

Friday, March 20 at 7:30 pm

Program: *National Refugee Shabbat*

Presenters: Michal Moskow, Or Emet member, Professor of Communication, Metro State University; Graduate adjunct faculty, Second Language Teaching, Hamline University, and speakers from HIAS or another agency working with refugees

Friday, April 17 at 7:30 pm

Program: *Music by 20th Century Jewish Composers*

Presenters: Johanna Lester and Molly Wilbur-Cohen. Johanna is Or Emet's pianist, a former professor, music director, and piano teacher. Molly is a former orchestra musician, cello teacher, and currently a freelance cellist and chamber musician.

Friday, May 22 at 7:30 pm

Program: *Avre tu puerta cerrada: Opening the Doors of Sephardic Music and Culture*

Presenter: David Jordan Harris, co-founder and Artistic Director of *Voices of Sepharad*.

SUNDAY PROGRAMS

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

ADULT PROGRAMS MEET FROM 10:00 AM -12:30 PM (CONCURRENTLY WITH JEWISH CULTURAL SCHOOL).

January 12

Program: *Separation of Church and State: How the US Government is Undermining Freedom of Religion*

Presenters: Allan Malkis, researcher at Ramsey County and Or Emet member, together with a panel of experts

February 9

Program: *Israel and its Neighbors, 1882-Present — Putting Things into Context*

Additional insights on the Jewish people, the creation of Israel, and Israel's relationship with the Arab and Persian worlds.

Presenter: Steven Lear, financial advisor, consolutionist, The Consolutionist Project

March 8

Program: *Jewish LGBTQ + identity in history, contemporary issues, and how to be an advocate*

Presenters: Noam Sienna, Jewish educator, artist, doctoral candidate, author of *A Rainbow Thread* and Jayce Koester, J-Pride program coordinator at Jewish Family and Children's Service of Minneapolis

April 5

Program: *Amos Oz, Humanistic Jewish Role Model of the Year, topic TBA*

Presenter: Dan Wildeson, Director of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, St. Cloud State University

May 17

Program: *Freud, Secular Humanism, and Psychoanalysis as a "Jewish Science"*

Presenter: Ellen Chazdon, Psy.D, LP, Or Emet member



**Or Emet's Passover Seder
In the Humanistic Tradition**

SAVE THE DATE!

Saturday, April 11, 2020 at 5:00 pm
at First Unitarian Society, 900 Mt Curve Ave, Mpls

Nominal fee | everyone contributes to the potluck
Reservations are required | capacity is limited

Special Events / January - June 2020

Or Emet Leadership Team Meeting | Sunday, January 26, 2020 | 10:00 am - 12:00 noon | Members are welcome to attend. Contact president@oremet.org for further information.

St. Stephen's Shelter dinners | Saturdays, February 29, April 25 and June 27 | 7:00 - 8:30 pm

In the spirit of *tikkun olam*, volunteers provide and serve dinner to shelter guests. Or Emet members and friends, including children over eight-years-old, are invited to participate. Watch your inbox for signup details.

Second Harvest Heartland | Saturday, March 21 | 1:00 - 3:00 pm | 7101 Winnetka Ave. N. | Brooklyn Park
A volunteer opportunity for families — children over eight years are welcome.

Humanistic Passover Seder | Saturday, April 11 | 5:00 - 8:00 pm | at The First Unitarian Society | more details available closer to the event

Annual Meeting and Picnic | Sunday, June 7

Pearl Park Recreation Center | 414 East Diamond Lake Road | Minneapolis

- Annual Meeting with election of officers 10:00 am - 12:00 noon
- Potluck Picnic 12:00 noon – 2:00 pm

