



# THE ILLUMINATOR

Or Emet – The Minnesota Congregation for Humanistic Judaism

Winter 2020-2021 issue  
Published in December 2020



## Commentary

by Eva Cohen

Ritual Leader and Rabbinic Student

**2020** has been a nerve-wracking, heartbreaking year. The COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged global health, produced enormous economic fallout, and upended our daily lives. Minnesota is bracing itself to weather the disease's worst surge yet. Black lives remain under assault by police; George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis now symbolizes racial injustice for the whole world. While Joe Biden is our president-elect, unsupported claims of election fraud undermine trust in American democratic institutions. Like people everywhere, Or Emet members are struggling with isolation, stress, fear, and loss. This year has been relentless.

In the midst of this 2020 dumpster fire, I am trying to offer comfort. I take [the junior rabbi in the Coen brothers' 2009 tragicomic film, \*A Serious Man\*](#), as my personal model of what not to do. The junior rabbi meets with the film's hapless Job-like hero, Larry Gopnik, as Larry's marriage is ending and his life is falling apart. Instead of empathizing with Larry, the junior rabbi pins Larry's issues on a loss of connection with HaShem — with God. If only Larry could see the holiness that fills even their suburban synagogue parking lot, he suggests, this would solve all the unfortunate man's problems. "Look at the parking lot, Larry!" the junior rabbi exhorts.

I don't want to do the Humanistic Jewish equivalent of urging us all to look at the parking lot!

Even removing God from the conversation, platitudes

about appreciating the world's beauty or people's goodness are not helpful right now. Instead, I want to highlight the following two things:

**F**irst, our struggles are real and deserve empathy. What we are experiencing in 2020 is *hard*. We can feel gratitude for things like financial security or loving family while also acknowledging that we are grappling with previously unimaginable losses and challenges. Giving ourselves space to cry out against the unfairness of the universe without self-judgment will emotionally fortify us to meet the challenges of this moment.

**S**econd, I want to reiterate Dr. Anthony Fauci's comment that "the cavalry is coming." Global collaboration has already yielded multiple highly effective vaccines against COVID-19. By next fall, broad public vaccination campaigns will likely allow safe return to many in-person activities. While racial injustices and other deep wounds in our democracy remain, freedom from COVID-fear will let more of us actively participate in *tikkun olam* — work to heal the world.

I am sending hugs from a distance. With continued strength and self-compassion, we will get through the next challenging months. When we can be together in person, *then* I will look at the parking lot. Seeing all of you outside walking toward our gathering-spaces will fill me with more joy than I ever could have imagined.



### The Illuminator

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## President's Message

### *Zooming the High Holidays*

by Scott Chazdon



When the Executive Committee met in early November, we had to decide once again whether to contact the Sabes JCC and St. Paul Talmud Torah to cancel our reservations for space. We decided to do that through March, 2021. The pandemic rages on, now worse than ever, so our need to connect virtually continues.

I have major Zoom fatigue, but I also know that we continue to offer excellent programs and opportunities to connect with each other.

I want to share some of the reactions from our High Holiday feedback this year. First, I want to again thank Carrie Dickson for chairing the High Holiday committee and setting up our feedback survey.

There was much positive feedback about Eva's service leadership, the music, the scaled-down time since we were meeting over Zoom, the humanistic content, and the commentaries. Here are some specific comments:

- The entire service was well-organized and thoughtfully presented.
- The readings and musical selections were meaningful, and Eva's comments were relevant, impactful and very well-delivered.
- Seeing us gather together as a community. I love the music.
- Appreciated Eva's commentaries and poem she read instead of a discussion about the binding of Isaac.
- Time reduced for Zoom attendance; thoughtful commentary by leader; post-service break-out/social time; inclusion of families/young Or Emet member readers.
- Appreciate learning about the rituals and the humanist interpretations, just cannot be found anywhere else. And Eva's commentary and guidance, so amazing.
- Liked the personal commentary a great deal. The ways liturgy and songs are adapted for humanists, and how these adaptations are explained, are effective and meaningful.
- The three renditions of Kol Nidre were all beautiful. Seth Binder's commentary was a brave call to action, which befits our community as humanists.
- Tammy Bloom's commentary was especially insightful, and it was good to have Marissa Dongre-Hill share her beautiful voice with us.



There weren't as many things that people didn't like, but there were some requests to offer more options for children during the High Holidays. Following up on that, we did a poll during our November JCS session, and learned that 18 of 31 respondents (58%) want us to offer one or two children's services at the same time as adult services. We'll try to do that next year.

Another thing we can't change is the lack of ability to sing together over Zoom. We have talented singers, but it's always nice to join in. I sincerely hope we'll be able to sing together by the High Holidays next year.

## Jewish Cultural School Update

by Arty Dorman

Director of the Or Emet Jewish Cultural School



The 24 students in Jewish Cultural School have been faithfully attending monthly Zoom class sessions. They remain engaged in learning, connecting with JCS friends, and enjoying a range of activities that promote their intellectual growth and stimulate their creativity.

While we all miss meeting face to face, and look forward to being able to do so in the future, our teachers have done a wonderful job of making JCS a rewarding experience. One benefit to gathering on Zoom is that it has allowed robust attendance, as students can still take part if they are nursing a cold, and don't have competing family schedules that might make driving students to Talmud Torah difficult on a given Sunday morning. Here's a sampling of what our students have been doing during their class times:

In September, all four groups talked about the approaching High Holidays in terms appropriate for each age group — the Littles (Pre-K - K), Middles (grades 1-2), Juniors (grades 3-5) and b mitzvah Prep (grades 6-7). In October all four discussed Sukkot and prepared for the Sukkot service and party that followed. The event featured an at-home "Build Your Own Sukkah" contest with ten minutes to complete a structure comprised of at least three sides and a roof that let light through, that used only materials found in or immediately outside the home, and was large enough to accommodate a Sukkot celebrant — a role filled in some cases by a pet or a doll.

In other lessons, the Middles took a virtual tour of Israel, stopping at Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, the Negev, the Red Sea, the Dead Sea and a kibbutz, learning that Israel is the home of all kinds of people. The Juniors applied humanist values to events unfolding during the election season and developed proposed constitutions for an imagined colony on Mars. Some of our students might even be future inhabitants of such a colony. The b mitzvah group learned about competing schools of thought in the Talmud represented by Rabbis Shammai and Hillel. Shammai promoted rigid adherence to the Torah, citing it as the unassailable word of God, while Hillel advocated more flexibility in Talmudic interpretation to adjust to changing times. These two opposing views continue to weigh heavily in society today, whether about religious text or the United States Constitution.

We also have been working toward the launch of a Youth Program, aimed at maintaining meaningful connections with the Or Emet community for students beyond b mitzvah through high school. Sam Wegner, an alumnus of our JCS and recent graduate of Middlebury College, is leading this initiative which will likely take place outside of the time and space restrictions of JCS classes. For now, those activities will be limited to online events, but future options are likely to include social justice initiatives, outings to museums, music events, movie screenings, game parties, and more.

**Hanukkah  
and more**



For more information about Or Emet's Jewish Cultural School, visit the *School Blog* on the Or Emet website [oremnet.org](http://oremnet.org). Visitors are welcome to join JCS classes on Zoom. To arrange a visit, learn more about JCS, the Youth Program, and/or for JCS-related questions and issues, contact Arty Dorman at [school-1@oremnet.org](mailto:school-1@oremnet.org).



## Social Justice/Social Action Committee Update

Gwyn Leder and Howard Schneider  
Social Justice/Social Action Co-Chairs



### **Hanukkah Gift Bag Project**

*B'Yachad. B'Yachad* (Hebrew for “together”) is a program of St. Paul’s Jewish Family Service. Arty Dorman and Howard Schneider were among volunteers who helped to distribute 181 B’Yachad Gift Bags to isolated seniors, mostly Russian refugees. Bags included holiday treats, grocery gift cards and holiday greeting cards made by kids from Talmud Torah, Lubavitch Cheder, and Temple of Aaron. *For more than a century, Jewish Family Service of St. Paul has strengthened our community by providing an array of human services that reflect the Jewish traditions of loving-kindness, dignity, compassion, and tikkun olam — repairing the world.*

### **Mitten Menorah and More**

At previous Hanukkah parties, our giant Mitten Menorah was draped with mittens, scarves, hats. Because the 2020 party was virtual, donations expanded into an array of winter gear. Using Or Emet’s food collection model created by Risa Cohen, donations were delivered to and gathered from collection sites at member homes. Arty and Coleen Dorman then brought items to Neighborhood House/Wellstone center where Or Emet’s Hanukkah parties are held in non-pandemic times.



Mitten Menorah *before* and *after* donations added

### **High Holiday Food Drive**

Virtual High Holiday services necessitated changing our usual ways of collecting grocery donations during High Holiday services. Donated food was brought to member drop-off homes around the Twin Cities and then collected for delivery to Hallie Q Brown Community Services. The volume of donated items significantly exceeded prior years.



### **Seeking**

On December 14, Or Emet members joined the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) National Jews for Refugees Assembly Zoom event. Or Emet is one of seven Minnesota congregations that are members of the HIAS Welcome Campaign. The plight of over 60+ million refugees worldwide resonates with our history and teachings to “welcome the stranger.” On March 5, Or Emet will have a Refugee Shabbat (see pg 13). *Founded as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society in 1881 to assist Jews fleeing pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe, HIAS has touched the life of nearly every Jewish family in America and now welcomes all who have fled persecution.*



*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) 651.278.2286*

## *Donations*

### **For use wherever needed**

Harry Lerner | Barry Cohen | Sonny Taylor  
Janet Mayer and Paul Petzschke



### **To celebrate the birth of Roxie Tsai-Logan, granddaughter of Richard and Carol Logan**

Janet Mayer and Paul Petzschke  
David and Joan Barnett

### **To honor Richard Logan — the 2020 recipient of The Sherwin T. Wine Lifetime Achievement Award**

Arty Dorman  
David and Joan Barnett  
Janet Mayer and Paul Petzschke

## *My Journey to Becoming a Rabbi – Eva Cohen*



Eva Cohen

This strange fall marks the start of my fifth year as a Humanistic rabbinical student and my fourth year as Or Emet’s ritual leader. In each of these roles, recent months have brought significant opportunities for learning and growth.

Over the past few months as a rabbinical student at the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism (IISHJ), I completed a paper to fulfill requirements for the Philosophic Guidance and Counseling course and began a weekly Second Temple Judaism course.

Gabriele Boccaccini, professor of Second Temple Judaism and early rabbinic literature at the University of Michigan, teaches this course for the IISHJ. He is a great instructor who conveys the dynamic complexity of the diverse forms of Judaism that evolved in the period between the Babylonian Exile and the Bar Kokhba Revolt. One cool aspect of the course has been attending online proceedings of academic conferences that Professor Boccaccini organizes. These include the International Conference of the Aramaic Manuscripts of 1 Enoch which is connected to scholarship of Aramaic Dead Sea Scrolls fragments. Another program, the Enoch Seminar Colloquium, focused on discussion of a new book, *A Guide to Early Jewish Texts and Traditions in Christian Transmission* on “the place of Matthew within the diversity of Second Temple Judaism and the Jesus Movement.” It was exciting to hear important scholars of Second Temple Judaism speak and debate live on Zoom. I have read and learned from many of the scholars, but never expected to have the opportunity to hear them speak. In the midst of the pandemic’s ongoing challenges, this has been an unexpected upside.

Acting as Or Emet’s fully online ritual leader has also brought unexpected joys in recent months. It was a pleasure to work with Sascha Katzung and her family to perform her hybrid b mitzvah service in August. I kvelled from across town as I watched Sascha stand with her house silhouetted behind her and deliver her Humanistic Torah commentary and her fluent, well-researched, and creatively inspiring presentation on Marc Chagall to guests gathered in her backyard and on Zoom. While all my involvement with the event — from mentoring Sascha, to meeting her grandparents, to officiating her service — happened over video-conferencing or phone, the experience felt deeply meaningful and connecting. I felt similarly about our online High Holiday services and events. Zoom planning meetings with the High Holidays committee were genuinely fun. Moments in services taking in member commentaries and cleverly-edited videos of Sarah Berman-Young harmonizing with Gwendolyn Rockler-Gladen and Marissa Hill-Dongre over Johanna Lester’s piano recordings made me feel inspired and connected to our community. It was also exciting to innovate, building a virtual Tashlich program around a short service, Zoom polls to facilitate self-reflection, and a yoga therapy workshop in ‘casting off’ the past year’s baggage capably led by Emily Kaspari. Pivoting our ritual online has been challenging but gratifying.

Considering how virtual events promote accessibility and make changing service liturgy easy, I want to carry this knowledge into the post-pandemic moment.

- Maybe our future in-person services should stream simultaneously over Zoom?
- Maybe we can supplement our in-person yearly event calendar with virtual events?
- Maybe our in-person Shabbat services will replace static printed booklets with PowerPoints incorporating new readings each month?

When we are past the current crisis, I hope that some of its digital lessons will continue to bear fruit.

*Editor’s note:* In addition to being Or Emet’s ritual leader, Eva teaches the b mitzvah prep class, coaches candidates, and officiates at the b mitzvah services.

## 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.



### *Rosh Hashanah Commentary by Seth Binder*

*Ah-sham-noo. We have trespassed. Baghdad-noo. We have betrayed. Gah-zahl-noo. We have stolen.*

The list goes on. The sounds and rhythms of the traditional Yom Kippur confession are as familiar to many of us as the sins themselves. Throughout the year I think of my own list of sins for atonement.

In recent years, I have been contemplating another list: *Harvey Weinstein. Eric Schneiderman. James Levine.*

The list goes on. The sounds and rhythms of the names are as familiar as the sinners themselves. They are **our** sounds. They are **our** sinners.

Of the 201 powerful men listed by the New York Times as having been “brought down” in the #MeToo movement, thirty-two are Jewish. For statistics fans, that’s 16%. Even with a liberal definition of Jewish identity, we make up only 2.3% of the U.S. population. Sure, we’re over-represented in the cultural and political halls of power — but not by a factor of seven.

They are **our** sinners. And this — sexual harassment, assault and other forms of sexual violence — is **our** problem. It is not uniquely or exclusively so — indeed, it is a problem of **men** — but it is our problem nevertheless. Why it might be even more pronounced in our community, I can only speculate.

Growing up I was acutely aware of the extraordinary accomplishments of many Jews across the board from entertainment to finance to science. I and my Jewish friends and family took great pride in these accomplishments — because they were the accomplishments of **our** people. There was a competitiveness, a striving to live up to extraordinary standards, and even a certain expectation — an entitlement — of doing so. Imagine now how this sort of striving and entitlement might interact with the broader, pervasive culture of toxic masculinity, and it is not hard to see how this terrible synergy could contribute to a disproportionate incidence of sexual violence. I cannot say with clarity or certainty what makes our community more susceptible to the problem of sexual violence. But I know this:

*Tah-ee-noo. We have gone astray.*

And the only way to find our way back — to our full and true collective humanity — is to confront the problem.

How might we do that in our congregation? First, through our programming. In our adult programming, we ought to seek out wisdom on the various causes — and consequences — of sexual violence within the Jewish community and beyond. We also need to tackle the issue in our youth programming. We need to act affirmatively in building the values and knowledge in our children to eradicate sexual violence and promote healthy relationships. One model is the OWL program implemented in many Unitarian Universalist congregations. OWL stands for Our Whole Lives and is a comprehensive, values-based curriculum of sexual education for children through young adults.

Secondly, we need to make sure that we have the processes and resources in place to support members of our congregation who have been victims of sexual violence. We are fortunate to have a ritual leader who is dedicated, experienced and knowledgeable and welcome her leadership on this front. We have work to do, and a path forward.



### *Yom Kippur Commentary by Tammy Bloom*

As the leaves change and nights get colder and longer, we enter the time of year rich with religious and secular rituals, giving structure and meaning to our days. They mark the change of seasons, passing of time and the importance of family and tradition. We look forward to those familiar and comforting celebrations and traditions. But sometimes the familiarity of rituals can evolve into going through the motions. Our intelligent and crafty human brains learn ways to make the uncomfortable parts of these rituals easier — fueling up like a marathon runner on Erev Yom Kippur to set the table for an “easy fast.” Aren’t these particular rituals, if we choose to do them, supposed to be uncomfortable? Discomfort pulls us out of our daily rhythms, and makes us think, reflect, and act.

At Yom Kippur, when we ritualize such an important human act as atonement, it makes it a priority, puts it on the calendar and our “to do” list. But it can also reduce it to a performative act.

In the days of yore, when we went into offices for work, on the day before Yom Kippur, I’d always wish my office mate, who was often my only Jewish co-worker, a tongue-in-cheek “Happy Day of Atonement!” She is more observant than me and would offer an apology for “any wrongs” she had committed against me, I would reflexively offer her the same, and then we’d literally go on with our business. It was an easy and comfortable ritual that bonded us in our Jewishness but had little, if any, true meaning. I can guarantee you that two type A, Jewish women, working together in a tiny office, in the often ridiculous, and high-stress TV business had specific “wrongs” we could reflect on, apologize for, and work to better with each other. But that conversation at work would have been...awkward, uncomfortable.

For many of us, apologies are easy. True atonement takes work: reflection, taking responsibility, remorse, resolve, redress and reparations. It can all be really uncomfortable, but ultimately incredibly rewarding. The people or institutions on the receiving end of this redress have an uncomfortable proposition of their own, forgiveness. In a year that is already full of discomfort coming at us from all directions, reflecting on what we need to atone for and how we can forgive feels extra daunting.

We may need to do this uncomfortable work in our personal relationships, some strained by COVID stress: isolation, distance learning, Zoom exhaustion, illness, or economic hardship. As we sit sandwiched between record breaking wildfires and hurricanes, it may be reckoning with our personal and societal role in global warming, committing to making epic changes when it’s easier to make small adjustments. After the murder of George Floyd, it may be recognizing that protesting for social justice can only do so much when we still take advantage of the white privilege that contributes to so many well-being disparities with communities of color.

Saying “I was wrong,” or “I’m still part of the problem” is uncomfortable. For me personally, finding the resolve and courage to do the tough and often uncomfortable work to repair and redress can be challenging.

Roy L. Brooks, writing about atonement and forgiveness as a model for Black reparations says, “The fundamental purpose for redress . . . is to accentuate a common humanity between perpetrator and victims. Properly understood, a reparation is the revelation and realization of this common humanity.” We fully accept responsibility, sincerely apologize for, and actively work and pay to repair the wrongs we inflicted. Brooks clarifies that “no reparation can fully compensate — reparations give substance to the perpetrator’s apology.” The next step is forgiveness. “The question of forgiveness arrives on each victim’s desk like a subpoena; it necessitates a response.” Atonement and forgiveness are not about the past, but about our future.

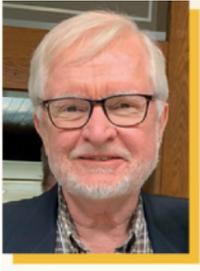
As we steel ourselves for a new year, we need to find the resolve to do uncomfortable, but valuable work. As a nation we will only move forward, atone and forgive productively, if we all realize our common humanity.

*On Emet High Holiday Family Observances*

Tashlich



## *Richard Logan: Recipient of the 2020 Sherwin Wine Lifetime Achievement Award*



Society for Humanistic Judaism award proclamation opening declaration:

Because Richard Logan is the ideal model of a visionary, intelligent, energetic, compassionate, and quirky leader of the SHJ and the movement

*This article was written by Arty Dorman for The Humanistic Judaism Magazine (Winter 2020-2021 Issue)*

Richard Logan, former president of Or Emet, has been named this year's recipient of the Sherwin T. Wine Lifetime Achievement Award. The award commemorates Rabbi Sherwin Wine, founder of the Society for Humanistic Judaism (SHJ) and the Jewish Humanistic movement.

### **From Paul Golin:**

Or Emetniks already know how engaged a board president Richard Logan is. He brought that leadership to the movement nationally as SHJ president for four years, including my first three at the organization. We spoke every week during that time. I was being paid, he was losing money on the gig! Yet Richard was equally as dedicated. He successfully navigated the organization through choppy waters, utilizing his trademark thoughtfulness and good humor. We're a stronger movement now because of his efforts. We all owe him a debt of gratitude.

Thank you, Richard!

As president of Or Emet from 2011-2015, Richard worked tirelessly to strengthen the presence of Humanistic Judaism in Minnesota. He connected with leadership of the Jewish Federations and the JCCs of both Minneapolis and St. Paul, and the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas. He reached out to humanist and atheist organizations in Minnesota, leading to Or Emet co-sponsoring the annual National Day of Reason event. As Or Emet's Jewish Cultural School and concurrent adult programs outgrew rented space at Friends School of Minnesota, he helped negotiate a move to Talmud Torah of St. Paul.

Richard's national SHJ service began with attending board meetings as Or Emet's president. He remained on the SHJ board as an at-large member, and served two consecutive terms as SHJ president. Accomplishments in which he takes greatest pride include launching Jews for a Secular Democracy as a separate but affiliated entity, hosting the "SHJ at 50" celebration, and especially recruiting Paul Golin as SHJ's Executive Director. Richard is quick

to deflect credit for those achievements, noting that SHJ comprises an extraordinary group of people who took leading roles in those endeavors.

Logan, who grew up as the son of a Methodist minister in Vermont, describes his journey to Humanistic Judaism as the outgrowth of an affinity for Jewish people going back to his Jewish roommates and close friends in college at Harvard, and their commitment to pursuing social justice during the turbulent 1960s. He has an abiding interest in understanding both the uniqueness and commonality among human cultures, reflected in his career as an anthropologist and professor of human development. He references Spinoza, a major figure in the creation of the modern world, as a key influencer of humanistic Jewish thought.

After moving to the Twin Cities following his retirement from the University of Wisconsin, Green Bay, Richard's wife Carol found in Or Emet a community that nurtured her Jewish identity. Richard attended with Carol, drawn to the warmth and wit of Or Emet's members, and their keenly insightful conversations. He was further impressed by the wisdom in the writings of Sherwin Wine. At Or Emet and SHJ, he experienced intellectual nourishment in a community of caring people deeply committed to ethical action.

Or Emet has greatly benefited from Richard's contributions to our community, and along with the entire Humanistic Judaism movement, by his dedicated work on behalf of SHJ. We congratulate Richard and take great pride in the Society's bestowal of this most significant of honors.

## Member Articles

### ***Where Do We Go From Here?***

by Allan Malkis

Thankfully the election is now over. But many of us have a problem. Almost half of American voters disagree with us and were willing to vote for a candidate, who it is commonly agreed, lies, bullies and fosters a climate in which racism and antisemitism flourish. We need to understand why and figure out how to bridge the gap.

How do secular humanistic Jews respond? Well, let's think about our core beliefs as Jews and as humanists. A humanist is one who believes and trusts in human beings. I identify as a Jew with the liberation-focused parts of our tradition. So I need to trust and believe that the human beings with whom I disagree (however misguided I may think they are) are deserving of respect and should be treated as equals whose liberation is as important as my own. I have a responsibility to accept them as they are and try to find the chance for real discussion. I need to be able to listen and try to get the conversation beyond blaming, invective and over the top emotions.

This is not very satisfying emotionally and makes an important assumption — that a climate conducive to civil discourse and not winner take all politics can be restored. If it was possible 15-20 years ago, it is logically possible again. Getting there will not be easy or enjoyable, but it's the only path forward. Alan Miller's success on his cable show proves conversations are possible. Realistically we cannot exile the half of the population with whom we disagree, so serious discussion is our only option.

With those who insist on continuing racist, anti-semitic, obstructionist, and anti-democratic policies, it will be even more difficult to have the conversations I envision. I will not stop protecting and non-violently standing up for all those they oppress and attack.

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### ***Fearful Imaginings***

by Michal Moskow

Tired of social media, I've begun listening to books and that led me to Philip Roth. Now, I'm not fond of Roth with a few exceptions. *Operation Shylock* is an excellent choice for our community of somewhat skeptical Jews, and I enjoyed the short story, "The Conversion of the Jews." *The Plot Against America* joins my list as a captivating book.

Roth is typically misogynistic and egocentric, but he provides nostalgia for those who grew up Jewish in the New Jersey area, depicting a time when boys (girls are mentioned only peripherally as boys imagine their undergarments) could roam the streets freely. It delves into a boy's fearful imaginings that the antisemite, Charles Lindbergh, beats Franklin D. Roosevelt in the presidential election of 1940.

As the voice of liberal America, Walter Winchell becomes a leitmotif and more until deciding to run for president himself. Alas, he dies. The ending is a bit unbelievable, even for fiction, but see what you think.

Narrators are crucial to audiobooks. Ron Silver does a good job. What advantages the print book *The Plot Against America* over the audiobook is that a postscript outlines the historical facts against the fictional. With the book's publication date of 2004 and the audiobook publication in 2017, they are not divorced from political events, produced in the wake of the invasions following 9/11 and the most recent election.

***Rabbi Jonathan Sacks: A Focus on Humanity***  
by Susan Weinberg



Rabbi Sacks

In November we lost one of Judaism's most important thinkers and teachers. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks was the former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, serving in that role for 22 years and was globally respected for his ability to reach across divides and explain Judaism to today's world. His death was mourned by Jews and non-Jews alike.

My introduction to him was through one of his many books *Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence*.

If we care for the future of democracy, we must recover that sense of shared morality that binds us to one another.

I was intrigued by his ability to make Biblical stories meaningful to today. I'm a lover of story, and what is the Bible between all the "begats," but story? Story is how we make sense of the world, so the Bible is an anthropological dig into the heart of mankind.

I was curious about Sacks' background and was surprised to learn that he was a modern Orthodox rabbi. He brings a strong focus on humanity and an openness to the world that felt rather humanist in its nature. I was to learn that his thoughtful analysis speaks to people across a broad spectrum.

Much of what he explored is relevant to understanding today's world of division. His focus was on the human tendency to turn on those we perceive as "other." He attributed it to our search for identity and for those who we identify as our tribe. To have an "us," we need a "them." When our world fractures and we are unable to deal with change, we simplify the world into good and bad, us and them. Scapegoats are targeted and we tighten our group bonds by attacking the "other."

Antisemitism is never ultimately about Jews. It is about a profound human failure to accept the fact that we are diverse and must create space for diversity if we are to preserve our humanity.

Sacks examines this concept through the metaphor of sibling rivalry, a frequent Biblical theme; from Cain and Abel, to Jacob and Esau, to Joseph and his brothers. Rabbi Sacks considers why such violence exists between brothers, but he asks an additional question. What is the model by which they resolve it? How do we make things right? This echoes many of the discussions we have had at Or Emet.

Instead of viewing it as a hopeless repetition, Sacks analyzed the pattern of each successive story discovering that each occurrence moved us further down the road in understanding the need for and method of reconciliation. We begin with a murder between Cain and Abel, then move to a deception by Jacob, but a reconciliation as Jacob returns the stolen blessing to Esau. Perhaps the most interesting evolution is between

The greatest single antidote to violence is conversation, speaking our fears, listening to the fears of others, and in that sharing of vulnerabilities discovering a genesis of hope.

Joseph and his brothers. Joseph, abandoned by his brothers in a pit and sold into slavery, encounters his brothers again after he has moved out of slavery and into a position of power. He is not recognized by his brothers and does not initially reveal his identity. Joseph creates a situation in which his youngest brother is threatened with slavery, much as Joseph had been. This time his older brother rises to the occasion and offers to step into his brother's shoes and assume the punishment himself. All is forgiven and the brothers are reunited.

Sacks believed that this is in fact the ultimate resolution, to step into the shoes of another and no longer view them as outside of oneself, but as part of a shared humanity.

*All quotes are from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. You may also want to check out his whiteboard presentation on the [Politics of Hope](#).*

## Caring Circle

Let us know how we can help you!

### Need help connecting to virtual programs?



Caring Circle is often thought of as supporting those facing health challenges, but with COVID-19 we have new challenges and our members have new needs. Many events are now available through Zoom, but not everyone is familiar with how to access it. Accessibility is an issue that is important to our quality of life and ability to participate in Or Emet's community. We are available to assist members in connecting with virtual programs and events.

For assistance with virtual programs on Zoom —

- Shana (612-310-1490) or [shana.tanenbaum@gmail.com](mailto:shana.tanenbaum@gmail.com)
- Faith [faitho711@aol.com](mailto:faitho711@aol.com)

### Need help getting food and/or other necessities?

If you need assistance getting food and other necessities, we have members willing to bring these items to those of our congregation who cannot otherwise obtain these supplies. Shana will create a meal train for those who would benefit from food delivery to their home (e.g., illness, new baby). Strict safety guidelines will be followed. Contact Shana (612-310-1490 or [shana.tanenbaum@gmail.com](mailto:shana.tanenbaum@gmail.com)) for meal train information. Or Emet Caring Circle is committed to staying in contact with members, especially those who live alone.

### Or Emet Cards

Contact Faith to send out cards for illness, loss, mitzvah or other life-cycle events.

### Caring Circle Committee:

Shana Tanenbaum, Eva Rose Cohen, Janet Mayer, Faith Oremland

## Or Emet Member News Simchas and Tsuris (Joys and Concerns)



“Access to Democracy,” the long running Eagan cable access show, hosted and produced by Or Emet members **Alan and Sharon Miller**, was featured in a November 3rd StarTribune article.

The show celebrated its 20th anniversary last year after more than 2,200 interviews of many appointed and elected officials, offering insights into both the well-known as well as lesser-known. The show has become recognized for its depth and nuance in a polarized time that is seldom described by those attributes.



*Alan and Sharon have earned well deserved kudos for their efforts to elevate the discourse.*

### In Memoriam

Ernest Ruiz died on November 5. He was the father, father-in-law, and grandfather of **Sarah Ruiz, Sergei Rakhmanov, Phoenix, and Anna**. Dr. Ruiz was a leader in emergency medicine and University of Minnesota professor emeritus.

*May his memory be a blessing*

Programs/events in January - February - March are on the Zoom platform.  
Venue for programs/events in April and beyond depend on status of COVID-19.

### SHABBAT PROGRAMS

**Saturday, January 16 | 10:00 am**

**Program:** *Healing Justice and Transformative Organizing through the Climate Crisis to Ecological Democracy*

**Presenter:** Sam Grant, Executive Director of MN350, an organization dedicated to a clean-energy future. Sam has a long history as an organizer and educator.

**Saturday, February 13 | 10:00 am**

**Program:** *Promoting Anti-Racism in Public Schools*  
**Presenters:** High school students from MN Coalition for Equitable Education and a U of MN law student

**Friday, March 5 at 7:30 pm**

**Program:** *Refugee Shabbat to Observe the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) Annual Event.*

**Presenter:** Michal Moskow



**Friday, March 12 at 7:30 pm**

**Program:** *Freud in Film: How Movies Have Portrayed Sigmund Freud and His Ideas*

**Presenter:** Don Larsson, Or Emet member, Emeritus Professor Minnesota State University, Mankato, retired English department faculty member

**Friday, April 9 | 7:30 pm**

**Program:** *Ancient Roots: Origins of the Israelite People and the Bible*

**Presenters:** Or Emet members Allan Malkis and Eva Cohen, ritual leader and rabbinic candidate

**Friday, May 7 | 7:30 p.m.**

**Program:** *Israel: A Love-Hate Relationship in War and Peace*

**Presenter:** Alan Miller, Or Emet member who served as a foreign correspondent in Israel during Operation Desert Storm

### SUNDAY PROGRAMS

**Sunday, January 24 | 10:00 am - 12:30 pm**

**Program:** *Discussion about The Indomitable Florence Finch, Mrazek's WWII historical non-fiction book*

**Presenter:** Robert Mrazek, author and former member of United States Congress

**Sunday, February 21 | 10:00 am - 12:30 pm**

**Program:** *Abayudaya: the Jews of Uganda*

**Presenter:** Michal Moskow, linguistic and cultural anthropologist, professor in Communication/Media Studies at Metro State University, graduate adjunct faculty in Second Language Teaching and Learning at Hamline University, works and lectures in Kenya and Uganda

**Sunday, March 21 | 10:00 am - 12:30 pm**

**Program:** *Humanistic Jewish Role Model of 2020-2021 the late Helen Suzman, anti-apartheid activist and South African member of parliament*

**Presenters:** Richard Logan, SHJ past president, and Paul Suzman, nephew of Helen Suzman

**Sunday, April 18 | 10:00 am - 12:30 pm**

**Program and Presenter:** TBA

**Sunday, May 16 | 10:00 am - 12:30 pm**

**Program and Presenter:** TBA

Sarah Berman-Young, Or Emet's song leader and daughter Leta leading the Aleph Bet song at the December JCS.



***Virtual Game Night and Happy Hour*** — a fun and relaxed virtual event — BYOB

Saturday | January 9 | 6:00 - 7:00 pm

— Computer with a “larger screen” recommended

***Jewish fiction book club*** — a virtual event — hosted by Scott and Ellen Chazdon

Thursday | January 21 | 6:30 - 8:00 pm

— The first book is *The Lost Shtetl* by Max Gross***New and prospective member brunch*** — a virtual event

Sunday | January 31 | 10:00 - 12:00 noon

***Or Emet Leadership Team Meeting*** | Sunday | February 28 | 10:00 am - 12:00 noon

— An opportunity to help Or Emet shape its future through planning and discussion of initiatives such as creating an adult b mitzvah program

Members are welcome to attend. Contact [president@oremet.org](mailto:president@oremet.org) for further information.***Humanistic Passover Seder*** — a virtual event

Sunday | March 28 | 4:00 - 7:00 pm

***Annual Meeting and Picnic*** — virtual or in-person event? TBD

Sunday | June 6

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

