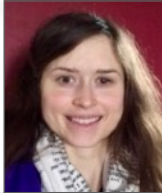




# THE ILLUMINATOR

Or Emet – The Minnesota Congregation for Humanistic Judaism

Fall 2022 issue  
Published in August 2022



***Jewish and Humanist Belief:  
Valuing Dignity and Agency***

by Eva R. Cohen  
Ritual Leader and Rabbinic Student

Since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in June, I have spoken to so many people who are horrified. Expressing anger at the loss of federal protection for abortion rights, some have also shared their regrets. How could we have allowed these hard-won rights to slip through our fingers? Now, how can we help every woman and every person with a womb regain the right, as [Marge Piercy puts it](#), to “choose what enters me, what becomes of my flesh?”

Grounding our defense of abortion rights in Humanistic Jewish values is a first step. Christian fundamentalism distorts the conversation, claiming “the religious perspective” is that life begins at conception. However, in Jewish tradition, meaningful life begins at birth. [Exodus 21:22-25](#), which famously requires “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” from fighting men who wound or kill bystanders, only imposes a fine with no other damages if they cause a miscarriage. This passage understands the fetus as something whose regrettable loss can be compensated with money — unlike the pregnant woman herself, who is a priceless person. Rabbinic Jewish tradition supports this understanding. Authorities from the [Mishnah](#) (~200 CE) to eighteenth century German Orthodox rabbi [Jacob Emden](#) prioritize concern for the life, health, and psychological needs of the pregnant woman and authorize abortion on those grounds. Here Jewish tradition aligns with the Humanistic Jewish emphasis on human dignity and agency.

We challenge the cruel idea of fetal personhood, which grants more rights to a cluster of fetal cells than to the thinking, feeling person whose body may unwittingly harbor that cluster.

In the words of the Society for Humanistic Judaism’s Rabbi Miriam Jerris, “the preservation of dignity for each and every individual is a core value. ... Dignity requires that each and every individual has [the right to choose](#) what will happen to their body.” Concerned about social justice, we recognize that loss of abortion rights means more suffering for the most marginalized — for [women](#), [nonbinary people](#), and [trans men](#), especially those who are [people of color](#) and [living in poverty](#). We cannot let Christian fundamentalists appropriate the religious or moral high ground. [Standing up for abortion rights](#) is [deeply Jewish and deeply moral](#).

As we stand up, we can be inspired by this summer’s abortion victories. From the [ruling by a Ramsey County judge](#) striking down most of Minnesota’s abortion restrictions to [Kansas voters’ rejection of an anti-abortion amendment](#), abortion defenders are meeting the challenges of this moment. We can meet these challenges, too: [vote](#), [phone bank](#), [donate](#), [clinic escort](#), [share your story](#), and [get involved](#). Our sisters and all our siblings, our daughters and all our children are counting on us to try.



MINNESOTA CONGREGATION  
FOR HUMANISTIC JUDAISM

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## President's Message

by Allan Malkis



I write at summer's peak during the hot days of August. The summer is a time of beauty, vacations, and relaxation for many of us — a recompense for the trials of winter now only a few months away.

While most of our formal activities have been suspended for the summer there has still been a lot of Or Emet activity going on. This summer I have participated in five B Mitzvahs. They have been fantastic events and our young celebrants have demonstrated their intelligence and commitment to learning about Jewish culture in wonderful ways.

I attended the summer book club event which, thankfully, was in person and quite well attended. We even had two prospective members join the group to discuss *Why People Love Dead Jews* by Dara Horn, a provocative and thoughtful set of essays on antisemitism and Jewish history.

Several of us carried the Or Emet banner at the late July march and rally for reproductive freedom at the Minnesota Capitol (look for a photo and article on pg. 14). We joined together with other Jewish contingents, as well as other humanist groups such as the Humanists of Minnesota.

There is work being done behind the scenes throughout the summer to plan the fall schedule, organize the High Holiday celebrations, and invite speakers to our Shabbat and adult programs. A big shoutout to all the volunteers who are ensuring that we hit the ground running in the fall.

I also want to point out the distribution of antisemitic literature around Highland Park and the western suburbs. It is a disturbing reminder of the hold that conspiracy theories, lies, and old myths still have over some of our fellow citizens and of the need to continue working to end racial, religious, and ethnic hatred. Please check out Jewish Community Action's [website](#) for information about the terrific work they are doing in this area.

Finally, I am committed to getting a new member database which will help consolidate information about membership, volunteer activity, dues and fees, and interests/skills that members can update and customize as they wish. Along with this will come a new generation of name tags. This should be in place by the end of 2022.

Fall is the season to renew your Or Emet membership.

**Please fill out [this form](#) and renew your membership today!**

I am looking forward to seeing folks again in person or via Zoom as we resume our regular programs in September. As the ancient Jewish sage Leonard Nimoy says, "Live Long and Prosper!"

## 2022 Or Emet Annual Meeting Update

by Allan Malkis, President

The 2022 Annual Meeting was a big success. More than 40 people attended in person, along with Jewish Cultural Sunday School (JCSS) students. Molly Phipps was introduced as the new director of our JCSS. Over 40 volunteers were recognized with packets of seeds and provided in cards created by our own Jane Katz. The proposed budget was adopted, and the nominees for the Executive Committee were elected by acclamation. Eva Cohen reported on her journey to become an ordained Humanistic rabbi. We look forward to her achievement of this impressive goal.

What a year! We have finally been able to occasionally meet in person and have improved our ability to provide hybrid programming for folks unable to or not comfortable with attending in person. We had a hybrid Passover Seder and a face-to-face Hanukkah party. Most of our Shabbat and Sunday programs were attended by 25-35 participants, similar to the in-person averages of previous years.

This year's Jewish Cultural Sunday School (JCSS) was a brilliant success, allowing us to grow enrollment at a time when many other Society for Humanistic Judaism schools were losing students. As Arty Dorman stepped down from directing the JCSS, we celebrated his leadership and welcomed Molly Phipps, the incoming director.

Our programs were informative and thought-provoking, and we had a wonderful book club season. *Apeirogon* by Colum McCann was one of several excellent books we read. You can still join in and participate! See pg. 11.

Five youth prepared for their B Mitzvahs this summer, and planning started for the long-awaited adult B Mitzvah program.

The New Member Welcome event was well attended with several families and individuals choosing to become members.

Or Emet participated with Humanists of Minnesota and First Unitarian Society in organizing and hosting a Day of Reason event at the Minnesota State Capitol, which attracted several dozen attendees and about a dozen legislators.

We had three valuable leadership gatherings via Zoom where we discussed Or Emet's finances, leadership development, and publicity. Ideas generated in those meetings are being implemented and are helping us plan for the congregation's future. I look forward to organizing more events next year, including at least one focused on addressing racism and other forms of disenfranchisement in the Jewish community.

As our congregation grows, we want to provide more to members and to reach out more effectively to the large proportion of unaffiliated Jews who don't realize that there is a secular home waiting for them at Or Emet.

### 2022-2023 Or Emet Officers

President: Allan Malkis - 1-year term  
Vice President: Jeff Pipes - 1-year term  
Treasurer: Seth Binder - 1-year term

At Large 1: Sarah Berman-Young - 2-year term  
At Large 2: Tammy Bloom - 2nd year of 2-year term



## Jewish Cultural Sunday School Update

by Molly Phipps

Director of the Or Emet Jewish Cultural Sunday School



As you probably know, Arty Dorman has retired as the director of the Jewish Cultural Sunday School (JCSS). I have taken over the job and would like to introduce myself.

My name is Molly Phipps. I grew up going to a Reform temple in Barrington, RI, and taught sixth-grade modern Jewish history in the religious school for four years in my early 20s. I loved my time teaching about Jews and Judaism from the Middle Ages to American immigration, Yiddish, and the Holocaust. I moved to Oregon to pursue my Ph.D. in science education and oceanography, focusing on the learning people do outside of formal schooling. A job at the Science Museum of Minnesota brought us to the Twin Cities 14 years ago, and we settled in.

In addition to my work with JCSS, I run the West Side Farmers Market and serve on the board of the Mississippi Market.

In my free time I enjoy cooking, reading, and doing yoga.

My family and I joined Or Emet during the pandemic and my two children (Lila and Max) are students in the JCSS. We feel right at home with Or Emet, and I'm excited to take a bigger role in shaping the community and strengthening our education program.

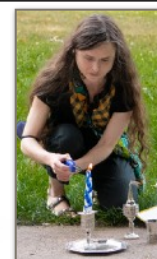
I am thrilled to announce that we are allowed back in the kitchen at Talmud Torah this year. Food is such a meaningful part of my Jewish culture and identity, and I am looking forward to bringing Jewish foods back to the JCSS experience!

The Or Emet Jewish Cultural Sunday School starts on Sunday, September 18. I welcome your input on making JCSS the best experience it can be.

### Havdalah



Or Emet's annual summer Havdalah and picnic at Crosby Farms Regional Park on July 30 was attended by 40-plus members of all ages. Eva Cohen led a beautiful participatory service observing the end of Shabbat and the dawning of a new week.



For more information about Or Emet's Jewish Cultural Sunday School, visit the [School Blog](#) on the Or Emet website [oremet.org](http://oremet.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@oremet.org](mailto:school-1@oremet.org).





## Social Justice/Social Action Committee Update

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



### Gun Violence Prevention



#### Gun Violence Prevention: Or Emet members participated in events on June 11

- Arty Dorman and Howard Schneider walked around Lake Nokomis with National Council of Jewish Women members and Rep. Frank Hornstein, holding signs provided by Jewish Allies for Gun Violence Prevention.
- The *Mothers Against Community Gun Violence* walkathon raised money for its national public safety initiative, *Not On My Block*, and its ongoing gun violence prevention, education, awareness, and support work for victims' families and survivors.
- Molly Wilbur-Cohen, Gary Ash, and Barry Cohen participated in a march and rally sponsored by March for Our Lives. About 500 people participated in the event as part of other March for Our Lives events in Minnesota and across the country.

#### March for Abortion Access: Or Emet Joins Other Jewish Groups at the MN State Capitol



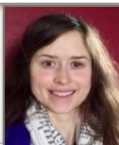
On July 17, a protest of the Supreme Court ruling overturning *Roe vs. Wade* gathered 5,000 people at the State Capitol, marching and rallying in support of abortion rights.

Refer to *Standing Up for Choice*, an article by Jeff Pipes on pg. 14 for more information about the event and Or Emet member involvement.

### Future Activities

- **Serving people in need** will take a new form. The Social Justice/Social Action Committee is investigating agencies where Or Emet members can once again prepare and serve meals to people in need. For many years Or Emet members carried out this activity through the St. Stephen's Human Services agency in Minneapolis, but that is no longer manageable after a merger with House of Charity. We expect to announce a new association this fall.
- **A new twist on an old tradition** – ever hear of “reverse Tashlich”? Or Emet will continue its traditional Tashlich service of symbolically tossing our “sins” into a body of water (on September 26). *Reverse Tashlich* calls on us to “reverse” the process and remove litter from a body of water in a cleanup project.  
— We're investigating the feasibility of such a separate hands-on event promoting environmental advocacy.

*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.*



## *My Journey to Becoming a Rabbi* by Eva R. Cohen

My [rabbinic studies](#) at the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism (IISHJ) and my work as Or Emet's ritual leader continue to keep me busy. The rabbinic program has been a primary focus of my summer. In early June, I submitted the second paper to fulfill my final requirements for the Philosophy of Secular Humanistic Judaism course. In July, after a flurry of pre-class reading, I traveled to Farmington Hills, Michigan, to take the Leadership, Management, and Community rabbinic class with Rabbi Miriam Jerris. Rabbi Jerris, the IISHJ's Associate Professor for Professional Development, is also the Society for Humanistic Judaism's staff rabbi. This was my first in-person rabbinic class since summer 2019, and it was great to discuss and collaborate with classmates in the same seminar room. Reflecting on everything we learned, I am excited to bring best practices related to congregational growth, board operations, volunteer retention, and diversity/equity/inclusion back to my work with Or Emet. I was also happy *not* to bring back COVID; masking up indoors through the whole trip kept me healthy. With this professional skills class done, I have now attended all my required rabbinic classes! Over the coming months, I will be completing final papers to fulfill class requirements, submitting internship documentation, and starting my thesis. Stay tuned!

I developed another important rabbinical skill over the summer — officiating weddings! I worked with my sister and brother-in-law, Julia and Hector, to design a creative marriage ceremony reflecting their Jewish, Venezuelan, and Colombian heritage along with their [passion for cooking](#). In addition to my rabbinic coursework, I submitted this ceremony as part of a portfolio to receive [officiant ordination from the IISHJ](#). It was an honor to officiate Julia and Hector's wedding in Asheville, North Carolina, in June. I look forward to doing more wedding officiation in the future.

At home with Or Emet this summer, B Mitzvahs have been the lifecycle ceremony focus. B Mitzvah Program students rounded out the program year with me by attending [Two Jews Walk Into A War...](#) at Six Points Theater and discussing *Maus I & II*, Art Spiegelman's Holocaust graphic novel. I have also been working individually with students and their parents to give feedback on humanistic Torah commentaries as well as with B Mitzvah projects and services — and to facilitate service dress rehearsals. I love supporting our young adults and deepening relationships with their families through this work. I also love celebrating B Mitzvah students' accomplishments and contributions as I officiate their ceremonies. Five amazing B Mitzvah ceremonies took place this summer. Please check out this Illuminator's special feature on the B Mitzvahs of Neva, Luc, and Rei. Watch for a similar feature on Julian and Isaac in the next issue. These young adults are the future of Humanistic Judaism, and they make me so proud.

Looking ahead to the High Holidays and the upcoming program year, I want to build on this summer's experiences to maintain academic momentum, refine my officiation approach, and help keep Or Emet services and programming dynamic. "A congregation either grows or dies" \* was a key takeaway from my Leadership, Management, and Community course — and growth does not need to be numerical. It can simply be about welcoming new people, new ideas, and new directions to keep congregational energy fresh.

Or Emet's culture of growth makes me excited to be this congregation's ritual leader. What new things can we do together *ba-shanah ha-ba'ah* — in the coming year? I welcome your insight.

---

\*The Unitarian Universalist Assn. *Congregational Handbook*, 1995

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

## 2022 B Mitzvah Celebrations

**The following B Mitzvah celebrants are featured in this issue of the Illuminator along with their projects and Torah commentaries,**

Rei  
Dickson



Project

Rei created the film *2022: A Cultural Space Odyssey*. His impressive film can be viewed at [bit.ly/Reismovie](https://bit.ly/Reismovie)

Neva  
Finestack



Project

Neva explored the question of *What is Jewish Feminism?* Learning about courageous women trailblazers through history inspires her to have a role in stopping everyday inequality.

Luc  
Cohen LeMay



Project

*Golems in Jewish legend.* Luc explored the historic evolution of golems. He then related golems to robots. Robots that might help people with chores would allow humans to have “a bit of divine power.”

**The following 2022 B Mitzvah celebrants will be featured in the Winter Illuminator.**

B Mitzvah Candidate	B Mitzvah Date	Project Topic
Julian Young	August 6	Knishes in Jewish food culture and family history
Isaac Rinerson	August 20	When the same day is a day of celebration in one culture and a day of mourning in another culture — Jewish and cross-cultural examples

## 2022 B Mitzvah Celebrant Commentaries

*At each B Mitzvah, the candidate delivers their commentary and reflections on the weekly Torah portion (parsha). Their commentaries are on the following pages.*

### **Knowing What to Fight For**

by Luc Cohen LeMay



My Torah portion was *Parashat Korach* (Numbers 16:1 – 18:32). Korah is a son of the Levites, cousin of Moses and Aaron. When he finds out that the Israelites have to spend the next 40 years in the desert, he begins a rebellion with the support of 250 Israelites. Korah and his supporters challenge Moses' power. Korah says that the entire congregation is holy and the Lord is above them, asking why Moses thinks he is above the rest of the community. Moses then falls to his face and tells Korah to come back with his rebels and burn incense so that the

Lord can choose who are the holy ones who will be his priests. The rebels do as told and God then tells Moses to leave, for God will kill all of the rebels. God does this by swallowing them up with the earth and sending them to Sheol. When the rest of the Israelites find out about this, they get upset.

God sends a plague to the people and tells Aaron that it will last until he atones for the sins of the community. God has Moses get the 12 tribes' chieftains together and instructs Aaron to use his walking stick to plant flowers and almonds. God does this to show that Aaron is the chosen priest. He tells the people who complain about this arrangement they will die and tells Aaron that his sons will be priests, and the sons of Levi will serve them in the sanctuary as musicians and guards.

Is Korah right to do this? Prior to this, Moses had just freed the Israelites from Egypt and they were headed toward the Promised Land. However, on their way to the Promised Land, the Israelites had already grown tired and started to think that a life as slaves would be better — others had already lost their faith in God and worshipped a golden calf. Because of this, God has said that they must wander the desert for 40 years. This is a perfect time for a power grab from Korah, for he always was just under Moses and Aaron in the hierarchy of the Israelites. Korah assembles the leaders of the Reubenites and 250 princes of all the different tribes. When they confront Moses, Korah does something I call “two truths and a lie.” He says that all the community is holy, which is true, and that God is with them all, which is also true. Then he asks why Moses exalts himself *above* the assembly of God, which is false, and thus proves that he is unworthy of being a leader for the Israelite people. Moses knows that while he is the leader of the nation, he is not above the people, but supports them. Do I agree with what Korah does? If it was someone else who wanted to try to be a better leader of the Israelite people, and to also be the holy one, then I would agree with the acts. Korah merely wanted power, while what Moses wanted was to support the people and be the messenger of God. However, the crime does not justify the punishment. God should have just shown Korah why Moses was holy.

There are times when challenging or rebelling against authority has had a positive and beneficial impact on our country and our planet. I remember reading about Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani activist who challenged a law that did not allow Pakistani girls to attend school. Her rebellion grew into an international movement. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. protested laws that oppressed African Americans and led a peaceful rebellion to stop all forms of discrimination. There is a long list of courageous people who fought for freedom and civil rights. They stood up to authority that imposed oppressive laws that stole people's freedoms.

What is important in my research on Korah's rebellion is knowing what to fight for. I will continue to learn about powerful rebels so that one day I can hopefully be part of the courageous people who help change the world and make it a better place.



## ***Double Standards: Then and Now***

Neva Finestack



My Torah portion was *Naso*, which means “take a census” or “lift up” ([Numbers 4:21-7:89](#)). In this portion, Moses gives instructions to build a camp gathering with a certain number of members from each clan. The members would each have essential tasks in the Tent of Meeting.

Moses is instructed to remove or suspend people from camp if they have impurities, such as “anyone with an eruption or a discharge and anyone defiled by a corpse.” ([Numbers 5:2](#))

Part of *Naso* is about adultery. If a woman is betrothed to a man and has relations with another, and if her husband goes into a fit of jealousy, she shall be taken to the priest where she will be fed what I would describe as water mixed with dirt. If she is guilty of adultery, “her belly shall distend and her thigh shall sag; and [she will] become a curse among her people.” ([Numbers 5:27](#))

A further section details the requirements for a Nazirite's vow to set himself apart for the Lord. ([Numbers 6:2](#)) This means that the person will abstain from drinking wine or other intoxicants, cutting their hair and being anywhere near a dead body.

After the tabernacle is created and Moses has completed setting it up, the leaders of Israel all draw near. They each bring an offering for the Lord: six draught carts and twelve oxen, a cart for every two chieftains, and an ox for each one. Then each day a chieftain brings an offering of dedication to the altar.

There is some ideology that I agree with, such as repercussions for being unfaithful, but not ones as severe as these. Another thing I can agree with is removing people from camp who have done something wrong; I wouldn't say impure, though, because using the book's definition, the word impure can apply to things that people can't control, such as menstruation.

I disagree with the ritual for adultery. I think it's wrong to have a woman drink water with dust from the floor even if she is guilty and if she weren't guilty, the chances are she wouldn't survive after drinking that concoction. There's also a double standard for women in how they are shamed for adultery, while men go unpunished.

*Naso* can connect to real-world issues that we see in today's society of double standards applied to women. An example of this double standard today is dress codes being unfair to girls. This is an issue that has been brought up in the media, where girls wearing tank tops because it's 90 degrees out are forced to change, taken away from class, and sent home because boys will be distracted, or their clothes are considered too revealing. On the other hand, boys can wear muscle tanks, and no one bats an eye.

My project on Jewish feminism relates to this topic. Being Jewish and a feminist can sometimes be difficult because those two identities can conflict with each other, from facing antisemitism inside the feminist community or from facing misogyny in the Jewish community.

The year 1971 was a big year for Jewish feminism. *Ms. Magazine* was created by the Jewish feminist Gloria Steinem and it was the beginning of the feminist group *Ezrat Nashim*. The name *Ezrat Nashim* means “assistance of women.” It is also what the women's section in a synagogue is called. It stresses the important roles women deserve in religious services and that women need to be present in all religious activity. Such changes included women serving as rabbis and cantors and young women having a bat mitzvah.

I especially liked a quote by author Judith Plaskow in her book *Standing Again at Sinai*. She says, “I am not a Jew in the synagogue and a feminist in the world. I am a Jewish feminist and a feminist Jew in every moment of my life.”

## ***The Power of Storytelling***

by Rei Dickson



My Torah portion was *Chukat* ([Numbers 19:1-22:1](#)). In *Chukat*, the Israelites are traveling across the desert without food or water. They quarrel with Moses and his brother Aaron, asking why they brought the people out into the desert just for them to die. Moses and Aaron ask God for food and water, and if they will ever arrive in the Promised Land. God gives Moses a staff and tells him to hit a rock with it to release water, the waters of Meribah. Afterward, God tells Moses he will not be able to lead the people into the Promised Land because he “did not trust the Lord enough to affirm his sanctity in the sight of the Israelite people.”

The Israelites continue to travel through the desert. God brings Moses, Aaron, and Aaron’s son Eleazar up to Mount Hor, where he tells Moses to transfer Aaron’s title of high priest to Eleazar, and leave Aaron to die there. Later, the Israelites approach Canaanite territory. The Canaanites attack the Israelites, holding some people captive. The Israelites ask for God’s help in conquering Canaan and are successful.

The Israelite people quarrel with Moses again. God, in retaliation for the people’s lack of faith, sends snakes after the people and many Israelites die. They beg Moses to ask God to stop the snakes, realizing they had “made a mistake.” God tells Moses to make a serpent statue of copper. Anyone who is bitten by a snake could look at the statue and be cured of the venom.

Later they come to Bashan, and the king of Bashan, Og, attacks them. God tells Moses to slay the people of Bashan and the Israelites kill them without hesitation. They take possession of Bashan and then continue to the steppes of Moab.

God seems very harsh. He kills Aaron just because Moses “disobeyed” when giving the waters of Meribah to the Israelites without directly giving credit to God. For the same reason, God tells Moses he could not lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. It is harsh since that might have been unintentional. And why is Aaron killed, and not Moses? Aaron had not done anything wrong.

Rather than getting rid of the snakes, God leaves the Israelites with a statue to cure them instead of removing the snakes entirely. It seems its purpose is a constant reminder of God’s power and to not “have a lack of faith in God.” This does not seem right; I believe they are justified in wondering and worrying about their journey.

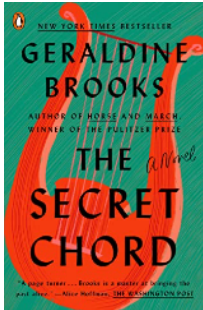
I believe the Torah is not factual or at least is distorted. It could be intentionally fake, in order to get control over people and make them compliant with what the storywriters want them to do. The stories give God all the power with the ability to punish or reward, making people comply. In addition, the person who writes the story has the power to create the story they want people to hear. They could withhold information that would change your opinion; for example, we read that the Canaanites attack the Israelites. Even if true, it’s possible they would have allowed passage under parameters left out of the story, or maybe they didn’t even attack first. Additionally, stories were often unintentionally changed, evolving over time to fit with the beliefs of a culture.

I learned about the science of storytelling and found it interesting that in response to good stories, people’s bodies release cortisol, oxytocin, and dopamine. These are chemical responses to emotions that deepen those feelings. These things happen to me when I read fiction, and likely happen to people when they read stories in the Torah. It causes emotions that may make people act on them.

Oxytocin, according to research, is released when people connect with others but also increases competition between groups. This may be one reason this story was written; to give people empathy for the Israelites and anger towards other groups. The stories can also cause a release of cortisol when fearing the power of God. This could alter people’s behavior based on what the writers want. In conclusion, stories are powerful and can influence people’s bodies and behavior. As you read the Torah, or any story, think about how it can be written to change your opinion or your behavior.

## Or Emet Book Club

**Next Meeting:** Sunday | October 30 | 10:30 a.m. - noon | location TBD  
The Or Emet Book Club will be reading *The Secret Chord* by Geraldine Brooks.



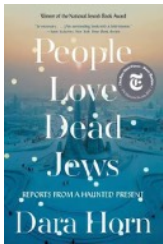
Here's a brief description of *The Secret Chord* from the Goodreads website:  
*Peeling away the myth to bring the Old Testament's King David to life in Second Iron Age Israel, Brooks traces the arc of his journey from obscurity to fame, from shepherd to soldier, from hero to traitor, from beloved king to murderous despot, and into his remorseful and diminished dotage. . . . Brooks has an uncanny ability to hear and transform characters from history, and this beautifully written, unvarnished saga of faith, desire, family, ambition, betrayal, and power will enthrall her many fans.*

If you are interested in joining the book club, email Scott Chazdon at [schazdon@gmail.com](mailto:schazdon@gmail.com).

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### ***People Love Dead Jews* by Dara Horn**

Reviewed by Arty Dorman



In July, the Or Emet Book Club met to discuss *People Love Dead Jews*. The book, with its attention-grabbing title, is a collection of essays by the Jewish novelist Dara Horn, addressing the continued presence of antisemitism, even as public sentiment demonstrates high regard for Jews of the past.

The first essay considers “everyone’s (second) favorite dead Jew, Anne Frank.” Horn takes a gimlet-eyed view of the adulation poured on Frank’s memory. Horn does not disparage Frank herself, but rather the lionization of this very young writer. Her “success” stems not from the volume or quality of her work, but that she died while offering readers a sense of redemption with her famous closing thought, “in spite of everything, I still believe that people are truly good at heart.”

The book explores a little-known Jewish settlement in the Chinese city of Harbin during the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Needing laborers to build a railroad across Siberia connecting Russia with the frozen northlands of China, Russia lured Jews to Harbin with a promise of freedom from pogroms. The plan worked, and a thriving Jewish community formed until first Japanese invaders, followed by the Chinese Communists, pushed the Jews out after seizing their businesses and property. What exists now is a re-creation of an erased community along the lines of a movie set, drawing tourists to applaud the fact that Jews were once there, paying tribute to the dead Jews of the past.

Other essays address such topics as the myth of Jewish immigrants’ names being changed by officials at Ellis Island; Varian Fry, a righteous gentile who rescued Jewish artists trapped in Vichy during World War II; and the pass scholars usually give to Shakespeare concerning the patent antisemitism imbedded in the character Shylock from *The Merchant of Venice*.

Horn responds to the murder of Jews at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, that horrific event which attuned her to the chilling contradiction of the book’s title. Yet she concludes with a hopefulness gained through a commitment to Torah study.

Throughout, Horn writes in smoothly flowing prose that connects the disparate subjects she addresses. Her tone is often cynical, and betrays a sense of mounting stress as she builds one affront to her Jewish identity upon another. At times her emotional tone led me to be dismissive of her commentary as over-reaction, and yet, her analyses are logical and hard to refute, all the more so in light of growing white Christian nationalism in the United States. *People Love Dead Jews* can be read as a cautionary tale for its truly interesting subject matter and the author’s insights and as a tool for making sense of the swirl of events that make it clear antisemitism cannot be consigned to the past.

## Member Article

### ***Religion in a Secular Society***

**by Alan Miller**

When I was in grammar school, we lived for several years in St. Petersburg, Florida. As the holiday season approached, it became a regular, scheduled activity for us to sing Christmas carols — in class, in assembly, whenever. I questioned my parents why I was expected to sing about a holiday that we, as Jews, did not celebrate. My father, the son of a secular Russian family, could have cared less. "Just sing," he said, "what's the difference?" My mother, who had been raised Orthodox (we didn't eat shellfish, except lobster, which is so delicious) took a very different view. "The songs are very beautiful," she said, "just don't say HIS name." Initially I believed that if I said HIS name, I'd be turned into a pillar of salt, like Lot's wife in the Old Testament, when she looked back at Sodom.



However, ever the skeptic, even at a young age, I was curious. "Wasn't HE a Jew?" I inquired. "If HE was a Jew, why shouldn't I mention HIS name? HE never converted, HE was crucified as a Jew, so what's wrong with songs and holidays honoring him?" My mother was stumped for a while, and then offered, "But what he stood for has changed. It has been taken over by other religions. It's not the same anymore."

And so it is with the U.S. Supreme Court. It's not the same anymore. I always gave it the greatest respect — the bastion of democracy and guardian of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Until recently. The Supreme Court has been taken over by a religious majority — representative of only a minority of the nation's population — which is imposing its religious beliefs on the nation, despite the fact that these beliefs are contrary to our lives today, and not found in their narrow construction of the Constitution.

You won't find the word "abortion" in the Constitution, but you will find in the 14th Amendment to the Bill of Rights the guarantee that you cannot deny "to any person . . . the equal protection of the laws." The recent *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision relegated women to a second-class position in society. Thus, the Court imposed its religious beliefs on the majority, and undid a "right" which has existed for a half century. The Court has never before revoked a right based on the religious beliefs of its members.

The same failing exists with the separation of church and state, a concept which the Framers of the Constitution so jealously sought to protect — a concept which was trashed in an estimated 85% of the cases involving religion before this Court. Additionally, the wide approval of the right to bear arms has been expanded, and we see the horrifying results in the daily statistics. Should I trade in my musket for an AK-15?

The Editor of "[This Week](#)" (pg. 3) recently wrote that, "In theory, judges put their personal beliefs aside." This Court made that theory a fiction. One Justice would impose even more restrictions on the rights of society — he has been waiting in the wings for two decades to take us back to the 19th or 18th centuries — and the solution has to be either expanding the Court, imposing term limits, or making these Justices recognize that by imposing their religious beliefs on the vast majority, they are ignoring the oath they took to the Constitution.

## Donations

**To Dr. Harold Londer Rabbi Fund —**

Seth Fine

Family of Luc Cohen LeMay

**To honor B Mitzvah students —**

Janet Mayer and Paul Petzschke

Carrie Dickson

*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



## Member News

### *Simchas and Tsuris (Joys and Concerns)*

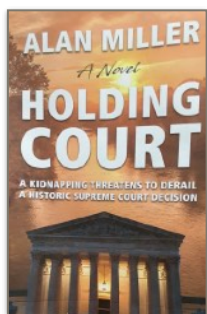
#### CONGRATULATIONS!

**Isaac Fox**, grandson of **David and Margo Fox**, graduated from Southwest High School and will be attending the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University. The photo shows Isaac with his parents Claudia and Adam Fox.



#### A SHJ rabbi in Natalie Rosinsky's family!

Through his articles in the two most recent issues of *Humanistic Judaism*, Natalie learned that her second cousin, Avi Rose, has been ordained an SHJ rabbi. The grandson of one of her father's older brothers, Rabbi Dr. Avi Rose has lived in Israel for twenty years. Natalie was delighted to send e-congratulations and hear back from Avi, whom she remembers best as a toddler.



#### **Holding Court: A soon-to-be-published novel by Alan Miller**

Longtime Or Emet member Alan Miller, a frequent contributor to the Illuminator and other publications, recently completed a novel, a political thriller, which will be published in the late fall. *Holding Court: A Kidnapping Threatens to Derail a Historic Supreme Court Decision* is about the brazen kidnapping of the Senior Supreme Court Associate Justice to keep him from voting on an important ecological/environmental case. "Miller has written a timely Washington thriller that feels ripped from today's headlines." states best-selling author Brian Freeman, author of *The Bourne Sacrifice*.



Susan's painting *Women Mourning* will be on the cover of the Yizkor book.

**Susan Weinberg** has had a busy year of genealogy presentations both locally at the Hennepin History Museum, as well as several international conferences this summer. She continues to write about genealogy for several local publications, including the *Hennepin History Magazine* and *Generations*. Past articles can be found on Susan's [website](#).

Susan was especially pleased to join her artwork and genealogy together when one of her paintings was selected for the cover of the English translation of the Yizkor (memorial) book on the former Jewish community of Radom, Poland — the town her grandfather came from.

The Jewish Artists' Lab is having its 10-year retrospective August 29-October 23 at the Tychman Shapiro Gallery to be held at the Minnesota JCC Sabes Center. An opening will be on September 15th from 6-8 p.m. Susan Weinberg has participated since the Artists' Lab began in 2012 as an artist and Resident Writer.

#### Health and Healing

**David Fox** continues to make incremental progress from major injuries sustained in an auto accident several months ago. Both he and Margo are looking forward to an imminent low-key celebration of David's 90th birthday.

**Barbara Cohen** continues to experience significant health problems but maintains her trademark upbeat attitude.

## *Caring Circle*

### ***We're here for you 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).

Anyone can let the CC know if they, or a person they know, wants/needs Caring Circle attention — from a simple card to a personal phone call, email and/or a one-time visit, or something a little more frequent.

Email [CaringCircle@oremet.org](mailto:CaringCircle@oremet.org) if you would like assistance.

Caring Circle sends out cards to members in times of illness, loss, and crisis (contact Faith Oremland at [faitho711@aol.com](mailto:faitho711@aol.com)).

Our Meal Train is available for Or Emet members who cannot obtain food any other way during recovery from an illness or when experiencing a challenge, making shopping or meal preparation problematic.

Or Emet wants to meet challenges and provide assistance to members when possible. Strict safety guidelines will be followed during meal preparation and delivery. Email [CaringCircle@oremet.org](mailto:CaringCircle@oremet.org) for more information.

Caring Circle Committee 2022-23:

Eva Rose Cohen, Megan Narvey, Karen Cohen, Janet Mayer, Daniel Lupton, Faith Oremland

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### ***Standing Up for Choice***

by Jeff Pipes

On a very warm July 17, Or Emet members and friends marched to the Minnesota State Capitol in support of women's right to abortion and to control their own health care decisions. We were joined by many other organizations and individuals. The crowd was reported to be between 5,000 and 10,000 people.



The march was organized by UNrestricted Minnesota in response to the US Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson* which affirmed a Mississippi law restricting abortions past 15 weeks. The march was co-sponsored by Gender Justice, Planned Parenthood, Jewish Community Action, National Council of Jewish Women, and others. Our HumanistMN friends walked with us.

As you are all aware, the *Dobbs* decision also overturned 50 years of what was settled law and a Constitutional right protecting a woman's right to choose (*Roe v. Wade*). Justice Thomas's concurring opinion also questioned the court's support for decisions protecting the right to contraception, and same-sex and interracial marriage.

Speakers at the Capitol included Gov. Tim Walz who spoke about Minnesota's commitment to abortion access (*Doe v. Gomez*), members of the Minnesota Congressional Reproductive Freedom Caucus, Rep. Ilhan Omar, Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan, and Attorney General Keith Ellison.

Or Emet and the Society for Humanistic Judaism have a long history of public support for the right to choose. In 1996, the SHJ Board issued the following statement of our position on the issue:

"The Board of Directors of the Society for Humanistic Judaism affirmed that all people have the fundamental right to freely determine the course of their own lives and to control the use of their own bodies, and that each person must accept the responsibility that goes along with this freedom. Reproductive freedom is a necessary part of this personal freedom, and thoughtful reproductive choice a responsibility. No group or individual has the right to use its views or beliefs as justification for interference with this or any other fundamental right. Therefore, we affirm that a woman has the moral right and should have the continuing legal right to decide whether or not to terminate a pregnancy in accordance with her own ethical standards. Because a decision to terminate a pregnancy carries serious, irreversible consequences, it is one to be made with great care and with keen awareness of the complex psychological, emotional, and ethical implications."

Programs are planned to be on-site and via Zoom.

Updated program information is posted on the [oremnet.org](http://oremnet.org) calendar and shared with Or Emet's listserv.

### SHABBAT PROGRAMS

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

**Friday | September 9 | 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.**

**Program:** *The Lamed Vavnik and The Power of Jewish Stories*

**Presenter:** Faith Oremland, a Twin Cities storyteller and longtime member of Or Emet

**Friday | October 28 | 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.**

**Program:** *What's At Stake for the Midterm Elections in Minnesota and the Nation?*

**Presenter:** David Schultz, Hamline University Distinguished Professor of Political Science, Legal Studies and Environmental Studies

**Friday | November 18 | 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.**

**Program:** *Youth in Government and The Model United Nations Program*

**Presenters:** Student activists working for legislative change. Sponsored by the YMCA Center for Youth student activists working for legislative change, sponsored by the YMCA Center for Youth Voice.

**Saturday | December 3 | 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.**

**Program:** *Rod Serling: The Art and Philosophy of a Humanist*

**Presenter:** Diane Wanner, longtime Or Emet member who has worked in nonprofits and government in various program and community development roles.

### 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 | September 18 | 10 a.m. - noon**

**Program:** *Or Emet 101: Interviews with Founding and Long Term Members.*

**Presenter:** Scott Chazdon, Or Emet member, sociologist

**Sunday | October 16 | 10 a.m. - noon**

**Program:** *The Origins of Ashkenaz*

**Presenter:** Rachel Wexelbaum, Or Emet member, writer and researcher of marginalized and intersectional identities, Education Director at the St. Cloud Correctional Facility

**Sunday | November 13 | 10 a.m. - noon**

**Program:** *Illuminating Darkness: Visitor Experiences at Dark Tourism Sites.* Scott and Michal will describe their project on visitor experiences at "dark tourism" sites — places where traumatic events are memorialized.

**Presenters:** Scott Chazdon and Michal Moskow, Or Emet members

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

**Program and Presenter - TBD**

*Reminder!* We continue to collect empty pill bottles and personal care items for clients at Listening House, a St. Paul drop-in center. Donations are gratefully accepted at all Shabbat and Sunday programs.

### *Upcoming Events / September - December 2022*

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

Book to be discussed: *The Secret Chord*, by Geraldine Brooks

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

**Hanukkah Party | Sunday | December 18 | 5:00 - 7:30 pm**



At this time, the party location and virtual offering is undetermined. Details TBD.

## OR EMET 2022 HIGH HOLIDAY EVENTS

High Holiday Services (except Tashlich) will be at the Minnesota JCC Sabes Center  
4330 S. Cedar Lake Rd., Minneapolis

*~ services will be led by Or Emet rabbinic candidate Eva Cohen ~  
~ offered virtually and in person ~*

### **Rosh Hashanah Service**

Sunday | September 25 | 7 p.m.  
Oneg following the service

### **Rosh Hashanah Tashlich Service and Potluck**

Monday | September 26 | 10:30 a.m. | location TBA

### **Kol Nidre Service**

Tuesday | October 4 | 7 p.m.

### **Yom Kippur Service**

Wednesday | October 5 | 4 p.m.

### **Break-the-Fast Potluck**

At conclusion of the Yom Kippur service

*Or Emet requires everyone attending services to mask and maintain social distancing in indoor areas of the JCC.*

In keeping with tradition, Or Emet will collect non-perishable food and personal hygiene items during the High Holidays. Donations will be shared with a local community center.

250 Turners Crossroad South  
Apt 324  
Golden Valley, MN 55416

OR EMET  
MINNESOTA CONGREGATION  
FOR HUMANISTIC JUDAISM

