



THE ILLUMINATOR

Or Emet – The Minnesota Congregation for Humanistic Judaism

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What is Humanistic Judaism?

by Eva R. Cohen
Ritual Leader and Rabbinic Student

The Sunday before Thanksgiving, I spoke with a group of new and prospective Or Emet members about “What Is Humanistic Judaism?” As a kid growing up at Or Emet in the 1990s, I heard adults complain about this topic being the perennial dead horse at congregational programs. While I unconsciously filed it under “things people are tired of talking about,” newsflash to self, most of the people in our community today haven’t *had the opportunity* to get bored learning about our philosophy. We’ve under-discussed it for the last decade! It’s important to make time for new *and* longtime members and friends to have deep conversations about Humanistic Judaism. How does it bring positive meaning to our lives?

[In the words of the Society for Humanistic Judaism](#), Humanistic Judaism “defines Judaism as the historical and cultural experience of the Jewish people while affirming that people are independent of supernatural authority and responsible for themselves and their behavior.” I want to unpack this definition.

What is “the historical and cultural experience of the Jewish people”? It covers a whole lot — from millennia of rich global Jewish cultural and literary tradition to the Jewish experience of oppression that fosters commitment to social justice. It encompasses [humor](#), diverse languages (Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, Judeo-Arabic), and beautiful music from [klezmer](#) to [Yemenite Jewish hip-hop](#). It’s great food, from

[charoset](#) to [hamantaschen](#), [sabih](#) to [bagels and lox](#).

All of this — all of the ways that generations of Jews have responded with strength and cultural creativity to what [Rabbi Sherwin Wine describes](#) as “the absence of a just and loving God in the universe” — inspires our Judaism.

This idea connects to the other key part of our philosophy — the affirmation that “people are independent of supernatural authority and responsible for themselves and their behavior.” While other Jewish denominations also urge people to work for *tikkun olam*, for world-repair, Humanistic Judaism is the only one that doesn’t call on God or supernatural powers to intervene in the world and solve our problems. Instead, as Humanistic Jews we emphasize *human* power and responsibility to fix what’s wrong. We certainly recognize that change is hard; we don’t glibly deny how intersecting inequalities or human limitations constrain freedom of action. We just recognize that no “supernatural authority” is coming to save us, and that if people don’t try — to stand against bigotry, to reverse climate change, to heal our trauma and dysfunction — it’s almost a guarantee that things won’t get better.

This philosophy inspires me to step out of resignation and into possibility. I want to do a better job of spreading the Humanistic Jewish good news, so that members and friends, new and old, can be inspired, too.

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



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President's Message

by Allan Malkis



Or Emet's new program year is off to a roaring start. We have had a wonderful start with our High Holiday services and events in the fall drawing good attendance, new visitors and members along with generous donations. Hats off to the hard-working High Holidays Committee!

The Jewish Cultural Sunday School is also thriving, with 24 students, including more than 10 in the Littles class. As I mentioned in an earlier column, Or Emet is one of the few SHJ affiliates to have this kind of increase in enrollment over the COVID years. It looks like we are building on that success again this year. Congratulations to our past (Arty Dorman) and present (Molly Phipps) school directors and our wonderful teachers.

With Or Emet growing as an organization, management requirements also have grown. Our ritual leader and school director positions started on a contractual basis, but over time have evolved to fit the definition of employees. We have redefined them as such and will assume tax and reporting responsibilities.

Starting February 2023, we are looking forward to having an adult B Mitzvah program. Prospective participants have been developing ideas for expectations and resources that will be shared with our rabbinic student, Eva Cohen, so that the first cohort of adults can begin preparations this coming calendar year.

Our programming has continued to be excellent. It was a highlight for me to hear Professor David Schultz's presentation about the mid-term elections before they happened. I look forward to the winter/spring schedule on page 15.

Lots of thanks to the Caring Circle members who have helped coordinate assistance for members in need and kept us all informed. Finally, our sympathies to Joan Barnett on the loss of her husband and longtime Or Emet member, David.

The recent new member brunch was a highly successful event as described below.



New Members

The new member brunch on November 20 welcomed those prospective and new members/families who were able to attend.

Eva Cohen read a statement of inclusiveness from the Society for Humanistic Judaism shj.org (see bottom of webpage) that is reflective of Or Emet values.

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

Megan Narvey and Grant Brakob
Allan Frisch and Sue Schinske
Bella and Yanek Shagalov
Sarah Jordan
Ephraim Aelony
Janice Gould

Daniel Lupton and Claire Wahmanholm
Eric Schulman and Sarah Pruett
Andrea Struss and David Royce
Laura and Simon Akerman
Nikki Giardina and Sarah Gordon

Jewish Cultural Sunday School Update

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



The 2022-2023 JCSS year is off to a great start! We have 24 students in our four classes.

This autumn we've learned High Holiday and Shabbat songs with our song leader, Sarah Berman-Young, celebrated Sukkot in a joint party with the St. Paul Talmud Torah afternoon school families, and celebrated many aspects of our shared Jewish culture — at the party 170 pounds of food were collected and donated to Neighborhood House.

- The Littles and Teacher Amy have been busy baking Rosh Hashanah challahs, reading books, playing Sukkot bingo, and working on their Shabbat boxes — a kit of supplies for celebrating Shabbat at home.
- The Middles and Teacher Colline learned about the High Holidays, Sukkot, and Israel through stories, song, and great art projects.
- Teacher Renee and the Juniors have learned about *tikkun olam* and the fall Jewish holidays, worked on the Hebrew *alef-bet*, made and decorated *hamsas*, and formed a strong classroom community.
- The B Mitzvah students have been hard at work with Eva learning about the four Jewish new years, Second Temple history, the famous Hillel Shammai debates, Mizrahi Judaism, and the Babylonian Talmud, including an animated musical of *The Oven of Akhnai*.

In addition to all the great learning, our students are enjoying socializing with their Jewish peers.

JCSS is in search of substitute teachers and possibly teacher aides for our growing Littles group (preschool and kindergarteners). As norms around working sick have changed due to COVID, we've had more teacher absences than in the past. Substitute teachers will be provided with a lesson plan and will be compensated \$100 for the day. Please reach out to school@oremet.org if you're interested in being a substitute or an aide in the Littles group.

Littles Group students showed off challah



Littles Group students made a sukkah



Middles students made passports to go to Israel.



B Mitzvah students made hamsas.



For more information about Or Emet's Jewish Cultural Sunday School, visit the [School Blog](#) on the Or Emet website, 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.



Social Justice/Social Action Committee Update

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



High Holiday Food and Personal Item Collection Drive

Or Emet continued its tradition of successful High Holiday drives for nonperishable food and personal hygiene items. Our congregation collected and delivered nearly 300 pounds of food and personal care items to the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center in St. Paul after the High Holidays. Though concerned about declining participation in the last two food drives, we rebounded nicely in October. When Claire Press delivered the items, the food shelf director, Althea, expressed her appreciation for the amount and variety of donated items.



Well done! We're back on track to making a difference in our Twin Cities community through this longstanding Or Emet activity.

REVERSE TASHLICH: A NEW TWIST ON THE TRADITION

We reversed Tashlich with an environmental cleanup

Or Emet continued the traditional Tashlich service after Rosh Hashanah by 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.



Cleanup participants were (left to right): Howard Schneider, Gary Ash, Molly Wilbur-Cohen, Bruce Pomerantz, Janice Gould, Arielah King with Leela and Rosalie, Michal Moskow. Not shown: Lewis and Rei Dickson

Though we had a short planning time frame, committee members organized a **Reverse Tashlich** event in partnership with Tikkun HaYam ("repair the sea"), headquartered in Tampa, Florida.

Reverse Tashlich switches the traditional tashlich ceremony by removing trash from bodies of water and increasing awareness about the current climate calamity that has distressed oceans, rivers, and lakes.

Eight adults, three children, and two dogs gathered in Marydale Park in St. Paul on October 2 to clean up Loeb Lake and park land. We gathered more than eight trash bags of "stuff" — and one rusty kid's bike.

After sharing snacks we all agreed that the "RT" was meaningful and rewarding. Let's make it bigger and better next year! By the way, Or Emet was one of only two participating congregations in Minnesota; Duluth's Temple Israel was the other.



Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

On December 20, at 6:00 pm CST, join HIAS for a community virtual candle lighting on the third night of Hanukkah: <https://hias.org/events/hias-community-virtual-candle-lighting/>

Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society promises a moment of shared reflection, song, light, and words from activists across the country who help make a difference for refugees in their communities.

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 or 651-278-2286.

Preserving Or Emet History Through Oral History

by Scott Chazdon



During the past two years, a team of Or Emet members conducted 14 interviews with long-term and founding members. This was funded by a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society. The project was a big achievement for a small, mostly volunteer-run organization! We collected rich stories that tell us important details about the history of our organization, as well as the personal stories that led members to become Humanistic Jews. Videos and transcripts of these interviews will now be kept in the Upper Midwest Jewish Archives at the University of Minnesota.

A big thanks to Alan Miller, Arielah King, and Amy Stubenhaus for working with me on this project!

How did this all happen?

Anticipating our 30th anniversary in 2019, the adult program for our September 2018 monthly meeting had approximately fifty Or Emet members in attendance reflecting together about our organization's past, employing a facilitation method known as the Wall of Wonder Historical Scan. We paired participants for three different discussions: one about personal connections to Or Emet; another about organizational development milestones; and the third about challenge or change points in our history.

Some of the identified change/challenge points included right-sizing membership and more firmly establishing Or Emet's identity within the larger Twin Cities and greater Minnesota Jewish communities. This latter point spoke directly to one of the benefits of documenting our history.

We then wrote the grant and (on the third try) were successful. We got the grant award in January of 2020. We are fortunate in Minnesota to have funding support for arts and culture through the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund under Minnesota's Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment. Our grant is administered by the Minnesota Historical Society.



We were planning to conduct all the interviews face-to-face, but then the pandemic hit, so we completed nearly all the interviews using Zoom. Many of the members we interviewed were founding members of Or Emet and we are happy we were able to record their stories for posterity. We heard many stories about the founding of our organization, our Jewish Cultural School, and the enormous contributions of our founding ritual leader Harold Londer, who passed away in 2020.

We finished the project in June 2022, and to facilitate further discussions within our congregation about next steps with the oral history interviews, we hired a video editor (our daughter Leah, who is interested in film) to review the videos and transcripts to identify themes that could lead to further projects. She compiled a one-hour video titled *Or Emet 101: Interviews with founding and long-term members*. If you haven't seen the video, it's a great way to learn some of the "back story" of our organization and its members. The video has four thematic sections:

- Forming a Jewish identity
- Early beliefs about God
- Discovery of Humanistic Judaism
- Or Emet has never had an edifice complex

We are hoping to conduct more interviews and perhaps write another grant to create a documentary film about Humanistic Judaism in Minnesota. If you are interested in further work on this project or if you would like to watch the video, please contact me at schazdon@umn.edu.

On Emet High Holiday Highlights

by Carrie Dickson

High Holiday Committee

The High Holiday Committee continued our online planning meetings with a number of repeat members and added two new members this year. The committee especially enjoyed the return of well-loved, long time Or Emet members whom we hadn't seen in a while. As always, we appreciate how the community pitched in to make this year such a success!

Rosh Hashanah



This service was well attended with over 70 attendees in person and an additional 30 online!

Highlights included:

- Sarah Berman-Young song leader with Johanna Lester on piano
- The musical trio of Rosalie King, Lila Busby, and Leta Young singing “The Song of Old”
- Jeanie Klitzner Hoffman and Johanna Lester performing “Come to Me Philosopher”
- A Duet of Sarah Berman-Young and Amy Stubenhaus of “Lo Yisa Goy” with Amy on guitar
- Isaac Rinerson leading a meditation on his flute
- A brand new Or Emet shofar masterfully blown by Dan Gladen
- Several “family” readings including a grandmother/granddaughter and sister/brother
- Clever and interesting comments by Arielah King on the Akeda “The Binding of Isaac”
- Eva’s holistic teaching on masking, while unmasked!
- Grab-and-go oneg bags, with challah, apple, and honey sticks, which made for enjoyable socializing outside the front door

Tashlich on September 26 offered a beautiful day, lots of children in attendance, and a lovely “Nashlich” potluck, as dubbed by a first-time visitor at the Miller’s home.

Reverse Tashlich — see article on page 4 about Or Emet’s first effort with a collaborative environmental cleanup of trash and debris at a body of water on October 2.



Kol Nidre and Yom Kippur

Highlights included:

- Molly Wilbur-Cohen was back to play “Kol Nidre” on the cello with Johanna Lester on piano
- Don Larsson sang the “Kol Nidre”
- Jeff Pipes gave interesting and well-received comments on Dacie Moses and Radical Hospitality
- Eva’s sermon on asylum seekers in Martha’s Vineyard and whether religion encourages people to “Welcome the Stranger”
- Dan Gladen back on the shofar
- A duet with Don Larsson and Molly Phipps of “Zog Nit” in Yiddish and English
- A thoughtful and interesting commentary by Molly Phipps, our new JCSS coordinator, about what it means to be a part of the Jewish community and her journey to Humanistic Judaism
- Many kids who attended and enjoyed the service
- Eva’s sermon on the afterlife, and humanistic narratives and “beliefs” on the topic

Break-fast was a lovely evening picnic for 30 attendees who enjoyed delicious bagels, rugelach from Common Roots, and the laughter of children on the playground. Thanks to Molly Phipps for tents and tables.

Anyone who is interested in joining this fun and productive committee for 2023, please email Carrie Dickson at cdickson@umich.edu.

Our thanks to this wonderful community!



High Holiday Member Commentaries

The following presentations by Or Emet members were featured at Or Emet's 2022 High Holiday services. These original commentaries offering unique, individual perspectives are an enduring and meaningful congregational tradition. The articles have been lightly edited for length.

Radical Hospitality

by Jeffrey W. Pipes



This evening is a solemn time in the calendar for repentance and asking for forgiveness; for giving charity and making an attempt to repair the world; and for deep reflection about the year past and the year upcoming.

I want to tell a story about a friend named Dacie Moses. Dacie lived an exceptional life from whose simple and constant acts of kindness made the world a better place. She did this through her own brand of Radical Hospitality, forgiveness, and welcoming the stranger into her home and into her life.

Dacie was born in 1883 and passed in 1981, days shy of her 98th birthday. She was born in the house now named for her and lived her entire life at 110 Union St., near Carleton College in Northfield. Her husband, Roy, and only son, Rounce, passed in the 1950s. She supported herself by working at the Carleton library and later as a secretary to the college's president. She owned a 1949 Buick that was seemingly 30 feet long and which she used to drive quite fast. She could barely see over the steering wheel.

She loved the students and began inviting them into her home for chocolate chip cookies, a game of cribbage, or a place to stay between semesters, or when someone was down on their luck. Soon after, she began having an open brunch every Sunday, attended by old friends, farmers, faculty, students, and a lot of hippies back in the day. As an homage to her husband, the men's glee club practiced there in the late 1950s, a tradition that still continues along with the women's glee club, beginning in the early 1980s. There was someone always sleeping on the front porch between jobs or housing.

Pretty soon, her house was open 24 hours a day for anyone to come by and grab a chocolate chip cookie, play cards, sit on the porch or get some advice or an open, nonjudgmental ear. The door was never locked, a tradition that continues to this day.

The house was grandma's house — old clocks, gifts from foreign students, cribbage boards, lemon drop candy, bran muffins. And the porch, the best place to sit on a warm fall day, just three doors from campus on the way to downtown. She and her house became known for a type of openness and caring for everyone.

She drew the student who was awkward, needed respite from campus, students struggling with life, lending her ear in a nonjudgmental way, and always welcoming the stranger.

After she passed, we found her checkbook with hundreds of checks to students in a bind, from someone who had very little of her own. She welcomed students of color, poor students, many struggling with mental health issues, and those struggling with gender and sexuality issues. When Dacie passed, she left the house to the college with the idea to keep it open to ALL. Forty years later it is still open to ALL, as she wished. The house is the safest and most welcoming place on campus and Northfield. I lived there the year after she passed, baking cookies, putting on the Sunday brunch, and welcoming any stranger who walked through the door! I am now on the guiding committee.

She simply lived a life that required her to not only welcome the stranger, but to do it in a way of constantly offering forgiveness, small acts of charity, and a deep sense of reflection and understanding of her place in the community. She's been gone over 40 years, and her legacy lasts and inspires me every single day.

Expressing Our Jewishness

by Molly Phipps



The High Holidays are a time for reflection on our lives, our impact on the world and others, and a time to atone for wrongs we have committed. The traditions are ancient and incorporate rituals that bind us to both our ancestors and the wider Jewish community.

For many Jews the High Holidays are the only time they attend services. There are many meaningful ways to engage in Judaism beyond the High Holidays — religious, gastronomical, mystical, cultural, philosophical, and intellectual pursuits. How do people come to understand their Judaism and find their place in the Jewish community?

Over the course of Jewish history most Jews were Jews for the simple reason that their parents were Jewish, and they were born into the community. Many of these communities were outsider minority communities in hostile lands. Jewish customs and language set us apart from others. Mixing between communities was discouraged and conversion of outsiders to Judaism was strongly discouraged.

My mom was born and raised Jewish, my father Unitarian. They sent me to JCC preschool and at home we celebrated Jewish and Christian holidays. But I felt Jewish. We were hanging Christmas lights when I was about five, and I asked what we were doing since we were Jewish. That was the last year we had a Christmas tree or lights. We later moved to Rhode Island and joined a small Reform Temple where I immediately felt at home. I loved the songs, the people, the food, the rituals, the worldview, and the community. I embraced the community, was active in the youth group, and worked as a sixth-grade teacher in our religious school in my early 20s, teaching modern Jewish history.

Yet I was dissatisfied, disturbed by the oppression of Palestinians in Israel and the insistence that as Jews it was our duty to support Israel in all it did. When I left Rhode Island for graduate school, I didn't think too much about practicing Judaism. However, we always celebrated Passover with Jewish friends of my Catholic mother-in-law, went for hikes on Jewish holidays, ate Jewish foods, and I kept my questioning, skeptical Jewish way of seeing the world.

When we relocated here, I attended or hosted a seder most years, had latkes on Hanukkah and brisket at Rosh Hashanah, but couldn't quite bring myself to join a synagogue because of their "We support Israel" signs. We started sporadically attending some Tot Shabbats, but they felt too religious.

I considered joining the Unitarian community, but to me it felt like Christianity-lite. I deeply love being Jewish, but wasn't sure where I fit in. We finally decided it was time to check out Or Emet. Why did it take me so long?

Over the years I've met many people who considered themselves cultural Jews — identifying with Jewish traditions at some level, but not religious and not really affiliated with the greater Jewish community. What does it mean to be Jewish? Is it just having a Jewish mother, or Jewish grandparent if you're the Nazis? Is it following the 613 mitzvahs? Making aliyah and being invested in Zionism? Is it marking the holidays and lifecycle events? Reading books by Jewish authors, learning/speaking Yiddish or Hebrew, studying Jewish history? Practicing *tikkun olam*?

How we each choose to express our Jewishness is valid and to be celebrated by the community. I'm glad Or Emet and Humanistic Judaism are here to share Jewish song, food, ritual, and values of curiosity and honesty with Jews and those looking to explore their connection to Judaism. There are many Jews looking for a meaningful way to express connection to our deep culture. Why restrict who considers themselves a part of this great tradition?

Unnecessary Sacrifice

by Arielah King



The Torah should come with a trigger warning. I haven't read much Torah since my Bat Mitzvah and I forgot how much brutality it contains. The story of the Binding of Isaac is a particularly tough one to grapple with, and it's hard to be impressed with Abraham's actions. God suggests to Abraham that he sacrifice his son, and Abraham just — goes with it. What happened to the Abraham from three chapters ago who argues with God about sparing the city of Sodom if he can find 10 decent people in it? And why would God see the murder of a child as a desirable proof of Abraham's love? I have a visceral response to this story, and I'm not alone — the mental gymnastics of the Talmudic rabbis on this one are impressive.

One interpretation goes: maybe the whole story is actually a public service announcement. "Hey parents — DON'T sacrifice your kids. It's not what God actually wants."

Or maybe Abraham knew all along that God would let him off the hook, because he'd already been promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens. Perhaps ... but it doesn't sound like anyone let Isaac in on the joke.

Some rabbis argue that Isaac was 37 years old at the time of this event, making him more of a martyr than a victim. Problematic, but in a less-problematic way.

As humanists, we question the basic premise of the story — that divine commandments are actually a thing. But like the medieval rabbis, I want this story to have some kind of usable lesson. The message seems to be that obedience trumps all other human morals or values. Now, I'm a rule-follower, and I own that. The rules are there for a reason. But blind obedience is nothing to strive for, not when it results in harm to others.

As a therapist, I can find a useful metaphor here at least. This idea came out of a conversation with a client, where we were talking about the assumption that sacrifice itself is somehow redemptive in nature, and makes us more worthy as humans. But we don't always step far enough back to see whether our sacrifices are helpful or wanted, or are ultimately serving our growth or keeping us stagnant.

In Jungian psychology, the characters in a dream represent parts of the self, and the dream itself is an attempt to resolve internal conflict. An angel represents a mediator between the conscious and the unconscious, the ego and the Self, representing fullest human potential. The angel appears at moments of crisis, in order to lead the way toward growth and transcendence.

So this is a moment of crisis for Abraham.

We could think of God in this story as the Idealized Self, the things we consciously strive for — God might represent power, order, justice in a chaotic and frightening world. Isaac, the child, represents innocence but also vulnerability and dependence. How can Abraham have both? He seems to think he can't — in order to have one, the other has to go. A sacrifice by definition is a crisis. It means giving up something valuable and cherished; otherwise, it's just decluttering.

So many people come to therapy wanting to get rid of the parts of themselves that they don't like, what Jung calls our "shadow selves." But if we want wholeness, we can't cut off parts of ourselves. If we want growth, obedience rooted in fear doesn't serve us. And if we want to reach our full potential, we can't be violent with ourselves or anyone else. The angel shows up as a voice of compassion. The sacrifice isn't necessary after all.

2022 B Mitzvah Celebrant Commentaries

At each B Mitzvah, the candidate delivers their commentary and reflections on the weekly Torah portion (parsha). B Mitzvah celebrants Neva Finestack, Rei Dickson, and Luc Cohen LeMay, were featured in the Fall Illuminator. Isaac and Julian's B Mitzvahs were later in the summer and their commentaries are on the following pages.

Complexity and Contradictions

by Isaac Rinerson



My Torah portion was Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25, a section narrated by Moses. He describes the promises that God and the Jewish people make and the consequences if they disobey. He speaks of the “gracious covenant,” which is the promise of a good life in exchange for adhering to the laws of the Torah.

Tradition is one of the most important factors in religious culture. Deut. 11:18-21 instructs: “impress these words upon your very heart: bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead” — the origin of tefillin. “Inscribe them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates” is the instruction behind mezuzahs. This portion also lists the seven plant species that were particularly associated with the agriculture of Israel — wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates (Deut 8:8). These are the foods that are traditionally eaten and celebrated during Tu B'Shevat, the holiday that reminds us of our connection with the earth.

Some concepts that show up in my portion are more complicated. Deut 10:17-19 speaks of upholding “the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriend[ing] the stranger, providing him with food and clothing. — You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” While it says to care for or help the stranger, it later contradicts itself saying “you shall kill all the enemies that I your God bring in front of you” (Deut 7:16).

The Torah is a complex, and sometimes contradictory, book written by many different people with different roles who had their own perspective on the rules and adherence to tradition which shaped their story. Within this text, there are three messages that align with my personal values: (1) Following tradition, (2) Helping others, and (3) Sharing your beliefs. Three things that I disagree with are: (1) The false promises, (2) Killing people of other cultures to take over land, and (3) Going too far to share your thoughts/religion.

This portion of the Torah is very specific in detailing how there is only one way to act and believe. When others do not follow, then all are doomed. Many religions have similar teachings, so it is no wonder that religion is at the core of so much conflict throughout history.

My research topic explored bias between cultures through looking at the holidays of two cultures. I explored the events between Israeli Independence Day (*Yom Ha'atzmaut*) and the Palestinian day of mourning (*Nakba Day*).

The creation of the State of Israel was a day of celebration for Jews, representing a place of safety after the Holocaust. For Palestinian Arabs, of whom 750,000 fled their homes, it was a catastrophe. Five Arab armies invaded Israel hours after it was established and 800,000 Jews were expelled or forced to flee, many to Israel, because of state-sponsored anti-Zionist violence. These different, yet connected, histories are reflected in the holidays which mark these events. While the history is complicated, ancestors of today's Palestinians and of today's Jews have lived and worshipped in this area for thousands of years.

I also explored Thanksgiving Day, a celebration for European settlers to honor a good harvest as compared to Unthanksgiving Day, a Native American display of mourning. Unthanksgiving Day started on the 350th anniversary of the landing of the Mayflower. The Wampanoag and other tribes hold this festival to dispel myths about the Thanksgiving story and highlight the ongoing struggles of racism and oppression that Native Americans face.

Words

by Julian Young



My Torah portion is *Devarim*, which means “words” from the book of Deuteronomy. The first line of the portion reads: “These are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan.” (Deut 1:1) In this verse there is a hint that Moses didn’t write this portion of the Torah. The words suggest that the person speaking is across the Jordan from Moses and already inside the Promised Land. This section has many contradictions suggesting the Torah was written by multiple people at different times with different opinions.

The portion is Moses’s speech about how the Israelites found their way out of the desert, having wandered for 40 years on a trip that the Torah notes should have taken 11 days. The reason the trip took so long is because the Israelites were being punished by God for worshiping other gods and for complaining. God vows that this generation will not see the Promised Land.

Moses is also tired of the bickering and sends a command — “Pick from each of your tribes men who are wise, discerning, and experienced, and I will appoint them as your heads.” (Deut 1:13). Moses tells the heads that they shall be judges and they will be just and impartial to any man, Israelite or stranger, rich or poor. He says: “Hear out your fellow men, and decide justly between any man and a fellow Israelite or a stranger. You shall not be partial in judgment: hear out low and high alike.” (Deut 1:16-17). I like that they judge Israelites and non-Israelites, rich and poor, impartially, but this only extends to men. Women are excluded.

Moses’s speech describes how God had promised them an area of land from modern-day Israel to Iraq. When they arrived on the land, the people asked Moses to send some of his men to scout out the land. Moses sent 12 of his men, one from each tribe. The Israelites didn’t trust the land that God gave them because it was next to the Amorites.

The portion describes what the Israelites did over their years in the desert, fighting battles and taking land. “At that time we captured all his towns,” Moses says, “and we doomed every town — men, women, and children — leaving no survivor.” (Deut 2:34) The land that the Israelites took was divided up into tribes; the men were supposed to leave their wives, children, and livestock behind on this land when they went to fight. Once the rest of the Israelites are able to cross over the Jordan into the Promised Land, the men are told that they can return to their assigned land. Even though God directed the Israelite warriors to take over the cities, they are not able to enter the Promised Land because they are part of the generation that God vowed will not see it.

I think it is unfair to the people wandering in the desert who never got to see the land they were promised. I also found it shocking that God ordered the Israelites to kill anyone who gets in their path. Basically God is forcing the Israelites who have been wandering in a desert for 40 years to not complain and not worship any other gods, even though they’ve only known about this God from one person (Moses). God is expecting them to blindly follow his orders unquestioningly, the opposite of what Humanistic Jews do. We question things; we question what is real or not. We do not blindly follow the word of a person or God.

Member Poetry and Article

My Prayer For Peace

by Jane Katz

Now it seems that darkness creeps around our sacred land,
Dimming the horizons, overtaking reason,
Emboldening the cold ones who care only for power,
Gripping the hearts of the vulnerable ones who cower in fear,
Not knowing when the next threat will appear on their horizon,
Turning hope to fear, and fear to hopelessness.

May reason return, may love come into the dark places,
And protect us all from hatred and alienation,
May our best instincts prevail, and save this nation,
Save this planet at risk,
Save us all.



October 4, 2022 Kol Nidre

Schizophrenic Zionism

by Alan Miller

For those old enough to have lived through the Holocaust, there are certain memories which I know each of us has seared into our minds. I remember the day the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor — I was with my father at the department store where he worked, watching with great interest as Christmas decorations were being put up for a holiday we did not celebrate.

That was followed by my father attempting to enlist in every branch of the service and being turned down because of poor eyesight and his age. Even the Merchant Marines turned him down, so he became an air raid warden, a plane spotter, a member of the Coast Guard volunteers.

At the same time, my uncles and several cousins were marching off to war. We didn't really know what was happening in Europe — at least as far as the Jews were concerned — although there had been some reporting of ghettos, work camps and the like. My mother tried to get in touch with relatives in Austria and Hungary, my father with relatives in Kiev (now Kyiv). They had no success.

It was probably not until 1944, when I was ten, when the horror of the Nazi regime started to become known. By 1945 the war was over, and the statistics, the sadism, were unbelievable. We never did connect with any of our European relatives, and I came to the realization that they were dead. People I had never met. Why? Because they were Jews.

When President Harry Truman unexpectedly became a champion of Holocaust survivors, he lobbied the British to allow increased migration to Palestine and increased immigration quotas in the U.S., over opposition from his own State Department, but the die was cast. Months later, the State of Israel was born.

Imagine my joy, that the Jews finally had a home — or rather, were restored to land that had been theirs thousands of years earlier. A chance for a Jewish democracy! It is said that the Jews and Arabs sprang from the same roots, although was it Abraham, Ishmael, or the Canaanites? It was a great time to be a Zionist, and to be filled with hope.

The two-state solution — with Jews and Arabs living side by side in Israel and Palestine. A dream which has become a nightmare. It is clear that Israel has been taken over by fanatical right-wing zealots led by Netanyahu who is currently on trial for fraud and breach of trust. It appears they have no intention of honoring pledges made decades ago, of not encroaching further into the West Bank, and have no intention of recognizing the rights of their Arab natives.

This is not to condone the terrorism — on either side — but it leaves me with sadness to realize that the country I so respected, which I have visited, where I spent the Persian Gulf war as a correspondent and volunteer, can leave me today with such ambivalent feelings of hope, and despair.



Or Emet Book Club

Next Meeting: January 29, 2023 | 10:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon | location TBD

Book: *Operation Shylock* by Philip Roth. If interested in participating, contact Scott Chazdon schazdon@umn.edu.

Book Review by Ellen Chazdon

In October the book group gathered for a thoughtful conversation about *The Secret Chord*, a book that explores the history of King David from the Old Testament. We talked about how the book read as though narrated by a Greek chorus, led by Natan the prophet who bore witness to David's life, including the perspective of his wives, siblings, enemies, and children. King David ended up being depicted as considerably more three-dimensional than many of us had been taught in synagogue, religious school, or history class.

Natan was not always the most reliable narrator: he had "episodes" — were they seizures, or alcoholic stupors? Natan accompanied David and described his very violent and abusive behaviors that are vividly witnessed and depicted, so that he can be seen as imperfect and troubled, illuminating the "other side" of this powerful king, who was also a musician and a psalmist. Perhaps King David's biggest contribution was setting the stage for his son Solomon to lead with wisdom and justice, not simply brute force, in guiding the Jewish people.

Donations

In honor of David Barnett's memory

Faith/Steve Oremland	Seth Fine
Sonny Taylor	Don Larsson/Natalie Rosinsky
The Dickson family	Erica Fishman/Paul Rem
Scott/Ellen Chazdon	Audry Nordwall
The Walkoff-Drucker family	Linda/Jim Stein
Janet Mayer/Paul Petzschke	Judith Lu-Lawson
Arty/Coleen Dorman	Molly Henke
Susan Weinberg	Jean Moede
Richard/Carol Logan	Cheryl Henneman

*Thank
You!*

For use where needed

The Lerner Foundation
Karol Rubin
Barry Cohen
Paul Modell
Muriel Sterne
Sonny Taylor
Janet Mayer/Paul Petzschke

In honor of David Dorman's memory

Janet Mayer/Paul Petzschke
Joan Barnett

To Dr. Harold Londer Rabbi Fund

Arty Dorman
Susan Weinberg

* Donations may be made through Or Emet's website oremnet.org
or by sending a check to Seth Binder, 3820 Lyndale Ave. S., Mpls 55409

*in
Memoriam*

David Barnett, Joan Barnett's husband died on October 31

David Dorman, Arty Dorman's brother died on November 2

May their memories be a blessing.

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

CONGRATULATIONS!



Megan Narvey and Grant Brakob

will be married on June 18, 2023 at Silverwood Park in St. Anthony with Eva Cohen officiating.



Jack Spencer graduated from the Minneapolis Community and Technical College nursing program on December 17. He will become a registered nurse after taking and passing the state board exam in early 2023. For the immediate future Jack plans to work in a clinical health care setting before focusing on an area of specialization and further education.

Health and Healing

David Fox says he's doing well despite a collection of health issues and "tsuris that's to be expected at 90." He's "optimistic, mostly happy, and content — keeping a balance between what's happy and troubling" — fortunate to be living where he "can read literature that's controversial to all parties."

Barbara Cohen continues to cope with an array of health and caregiver issues involving human, canine, and feline family members. At the moment things are dicey but mostly manageable. Her partner, Don, resides at Suite Living, a long-term care facility. She enjoys connecting with Or Emet friends.

Gwyn Leder is making progress after a hip fracture with surgical repair in September. She is at home and gets around with a walker. Outpatient physical therapy sessions and Lenny's TLC keep her moving forward. Gwyn is deeply grateful to the Or Emet community who have been in contact with cards, calls, and visits.

Johanna Lester is at Masonic Homes in Bloomington recovering from surgeries and will be discharged to home soon. She gives high marks to the nursing care, physical and occupational therapy and especially the food! Johanna reports she is still looking for the piano which is reportedly somewhere in the building.

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 if you would like assistance.

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 for more information.

Caring Circle Committee 2022-23:

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

Programs and Events / January - June 2023

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

Updated program information is posted on the 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.

Saturday | January 21 | 10:00 - 11:30 am

Program: Council on American Islamic Relations' (CAIR) mission of advocacy and civil rights initiatives for Muslims and marginalized communities

Presenter: Jaylani Hussein, Executive Director of MN Chapter of CAIR

Saturday | February 18 | 10:00 - 11:30 am

Program: *Current Issues for Refugees*

Presenters: Members of Or Emet social action committee and invited guests

Friday | March 17 | 7:30 - 9 p.m.

Program: *Jewish Voice for Peace*

Presenter: TBD

Friday | April 21 | 7:30 - 9 p.m.

Program: *Empowering Our Youth: A Strong Circle of Support*

Presenter: Tedi Grey Owl, director of Migizi, an organization which prepares Native American youth for education, careers, and community leadership.

Friday | May 19 | 7:30 - 9 p.m.

Program: *Global Work and Child Labor*

Presenter: David Parker, author, physician, and photographer will present his striking visual images.

SUNDAY PROGRAMS

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

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

Sunday | January 8 | 10 a.m. - noon

Program: *In the Spirit of Harvey Milk:*

SHJ 2022-2023 Jewish Role Model of the Year

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

Sunday | February 5 | 10 a.m. - noon

Program: *Speaking for the Trees:*

Walking the Walk on Tu BiShvat

Presenter: TBD, organized by Johanna Lester

Sunday | March 5 | 10 a.m. - noon

Program and Presenter: TBD

Sunday | April 2 | 10 a.m. - noon

Program: *The Mossad in Popular Culture*

Presenters: Rich Sonenblum and Don Larsson, Or Emet members

Sunday | May 7 | 10 a.m. - noon

Program: *Stars of the Night: The Courageous Children of the Czech Kindertransport*

Presenter: Caren Stelson, organized by Michal Moskowitz

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 / January - June 2023

Or Emet Book Club | Sunday | January 29 | 10:30 a.m. - noon | location to be announced

Book to be discussed: *Operation Shylock* by Philip Roth

If interested in participating, contact Scott Chazdon at schazdon@umn.edu.

Humanistic Passover Seder | Saturday | April 8

When available, additional details will be posted on oremnet.org calendar and shared with Or Emet's listserv.

Or Emet's Annual Meeting and Picnic | Sunday | June 4 | Talmud Torah of St. Paul

- Annual Meeting with election of officers, 10 am - noon
- Potluck Picnic | setup noon - 12:30 pm | picnic gathering 12:30 - 2 pm

Opportunity to Tour “Secular Israel”



Rabbi Adam Chalom, Dean – North America, International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism www.iishj.org. Cell: 847-602-4500
Rabbi, Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation – www.kolhadash.com

Join an unforgettable tour of "Secular Israel" on December 10-21, 2023. **Follow this link for more information and to register.** The trip will be led by Rabbi Adam Chalom, Dean for North America of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism and Rabbi Jeffrey Falick of the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism - Metro Detroit. "Together we will explore the issues facing Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. Conflicts between Palestinians and settlers, tensions between ultra-religious and secular Israelis, and social and economic justice are all on this itinerary. Most significantly, we will also find hope among those working for pluralism and human rights." Book before January 1 for a \$150 discount per participant!

