



Humanistic Judaism *Magazine*

Privilege, Prejudice, and Disability

Interview:
Eddie Tabash
with Paul Golin

**Jews and White
Privilege**
by Judi Gladstone

Passover
*From the Guide to
Humanistic Judaism*

**Breaking Through
Gender and Disability**
by Rabbi Denise Handlarski

Community News
and much more

Spring 2018

Table of Contents

From the Editors

[p. 3](#)

Privilege, Prejudice, and Disability

Jews and White Privilege

[p. 4, 17](#)

by Judi Gladstone

The In-Between Spaces

[p. 5, 16](#)

by William Thompson

Eddie Tabash Interview

[p. 6–7](#)

with Paul Golin

Breaking Through Gender and Disability

[p. 8–9, 18](#)

by Rabbi Denise Handlarski

Passover

[p. 10, 15](#)

Revised by Rabbi Jeffrey Falick
Updated from the *Guide to Humanistic Judaism*

Thinking About the Torah

[p. 11](#)

by Rabbi Jeremy Kridel
A Review

Fresh Perspective

[p. 12](#)

by Dustin Hausner
My Path to Humanistic Judaism

Community News

[p. 13–15](#)

Congregation for Humanistic Judaism,
Kahal B'raira, Machar, Oraynu,
Westchester Community for
Humanistic Judaism

Board of Directors, Tributes

[p. 19](#)

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From the Editors

The first printed issue of *Humanistic Judaism* for 2018 tackles controversial topics in today's world: privilege, and prejudice in many of its forms.

That theme covers a lot of ground — and so does this issue of the magazine. Because Passover is fast approaching, we take a Humanistic look at the holiday, the myth of which is the stated rationale for many of the more progressive ideas contained in the Torah. The Society for Humanistic Judaism (SHJ) recently revised and reissued the *Guide to Humanistic Judaism* that is sent out to new members, and Rabbi Jeffrey Falick of the Birmingham Temple brought the Passover article up to date with present historical scholarship. We are happy to be able to share his work with our readers.

Bringing some of the ideas of social justice forward into our own time, this issue presents a number of articles addressing questions of ableism, sexism, homophobia, racism, religious and anti-secular discrimination, and privilege. SHJ Executive Director Paul Golin recently interviewed Eddie Tabash, an attorney heavily involved in the secular movement, including the Center for Inquiry; that interview appears here. Tabash and Golin discuss what it means for the United States to abandon a model of separation of church and state, and how Jews — especially Secular Humanistic Jews — can help advocate for the importance of that bedrock principle of a liberal democracy.

Rabbi Denise Handlarski of the Oraynu Congregation in Toronto, Ontario, presents the challenges of breaking through external and internalized prejudice. Rabbi Handlarski starts with her experiences teaching self-defense to women with disabilities and shows how the challenges imposed upon one marginalized group are often similar to those experienced by others. Rabbi Handlarski's article ends on a much-needed note of encouragement in these difficult times.

Judi Gladstone, from the Secular Jewish Circle of Puget Sound, helps readers grapple with institutional racism and questions of white privilege. After leading her own community in a discussion of these issues, Gladstone wrote an article that gives a useful “how to” guide for tackling these issues in Humanistic Jewish communities.

William Thompson, an independent member of SHJ who lives in South Carolina, gives us a window into how the privilege of others who are straight, Christian, politically conservative, or even Reform Jewish affects his life. Dustin Hausner, an SHJ board member, writes about his journey to Humanistic Judaism. And Rabbi Jeremy Kridel, a co-editor of this magazine, presents a review of a recent work on Jewish philosophy.

Finally, as always, we present news from communities across our movement. This issue's community news presents stories from congregations engaging with issues of prejudice and privilege, including Oraynu Congregation honoring Canada's First Nations during Tu B'shvat, Kahal B'raira's inclusion initiative to ensure accessibility for all its members, and the Westchester Community for Humanistic Judaism's exploration of Russian Jewish life during a congregational trip to Brighton Beach.

J. M. K. and S. A. W.



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Spring 2018

3

Jews and White Privilege

by Judi Gladstone

Talking about race and privilege in America is almost as sensitive as talking about Israel. Nonetheless, the Secular Jewish Circle of Puget Sound (SJC) Shalom Sunday School parents rose to the challenge for their discussion group to explore what it means to be Jewish in a world of white privilege and what, then, they should be teaching their children. Because the topic is of broader interest, the entire SJC community was invited to join the parents.

Two articles provided a starting point for the discussion: Emma Green's "[Are Jews White?](#)" from the December 5, 2016 issue of *The Atlantic Magazine*, and a blog post at [Mayan.org](#) by Talia Cooper titled "[A Call to My Beloved Jews: We Gotta Talk About Privilege.](#)" With these provocative readings and a list of ten ground rules to keep the conversation safe and respectful so people would be forthcoming and thoughtful, I facilitated a ninety-minute discussion that journeyed from personal experiences of antisemitism and racism to how Jews are positioned in institutional racism. The ground rules reminded people to listen more and talk less, stay on topic, and value everyone's input equally, among other things. Each of the participants came with different levels of understanding about white privilege and institutional racism, and different levels of self-reflection on the topic.

Starting with personal accounts of antisemitism and racism helped to illustrate where each participant was coming from and offered opportunities to understand how individual perspectives are shaped by those experiences. Discussion questions explored implicit and explicit racial messages about people of color and about being white. The group talked about the similarities and differences between antisemitism and racism, how Jewish historical experience has colored Jews' sense of place in America's power structure, and how living with antisemitism and white privilege present difficulties and advantages in working to end racism.

All the participants were Ashkenazi Jews and believed themselves to enjoy the privileges of being white, whether they felt white or not. For some, especially those who had experienced antisemitism, their position of privilege felt tenuous. Others were conscious that they were "passing" as white and benefitted from the privilege that it bestowed on them. Everyone recognized that Jewish persons of color would have very different experiences. There was also general understanding that racism and white privilege is a power construct, and the participants did not want to perpetuate it. That spurred a follow-up discussion about tools for change.

Online resources for advancing discussion of this topic are abundant. The Center for Racial Justice Innovation at [Raceforward.org](#) offered a helpful distinction between individual and systemic racism. "[From White Racist to White Anti-Racist — The Lifelong Journey](#)," by Tema Okun of [dRworks](#) presents a "ladder of empowerment" that identifies nine stages that white people go through in developing awareness of their relationship to racism and privilege, beginning with innocence and ignorance culminating in community of love and resistance. Another resource is the Leticia Nieto's book, *[Beyond Inclusion, Beyond Empowerment: A Developmental Strategy to Liberate Everyone](#)*. Nieto's book presents frameworks for thinking about diversity and working for social justice.

Discussion at the second session spanned the personal, institutional, and political. Participants talked about where they saw themselves on the "ladder of empowerment," and they explored how being Jewish influenced their responsibility and opportunity to work towards undoing institutional racism. At the institutional level, parents considered how they could advocate and work toward pooling public-school Parent Teacher Association (PTA) money to equalize financial support of the PTAs across all schools, better serving all populations. Everyone recognized that this would require giving up some of the benefits of their privilege — which would be hard to do.

The challenge of making change at the political level resulted in the participants intellectualizing the struggle. This is a common way white people get stuck in working to undo racism. The problem appears so big and so out of personal control that people who want to work for change feel overwhelmed. That results in not knowing how to make an impact or thinking that it's someone else's problem to solve, which leads to inaction and continuation of the status quo. In our community's discussion, this response was not recognized as it occurred, and it progressed until it dominated the conversation and became a barrier to deeper discussion about what people can do at an individual or institutional level. This is where a co-facilitator may have been beneficial. A co-facilitator provides another set of ears, which can help when discussion needs to be redirected. Once there is recognition, then the facilitator can graciously name it and persistently call it out each time discussion devolves to that. It can be a teaching moment and part of the process of change.



...continued on page 17

Humanistic Judaism

The In-Between Spaces

by William Thompson

I have spent most of my life feeling different, on the boundary of whatever groups I have been a part of, as though I were in two different worlds at all times. In Jewish spaces, I am a convert and a humanist. In gay spaces, I am a Jew. In the little town in South Carolina where I live, I am the Jewish, humanist, gay, married, vegetarian liberal. Nearly every aspect of who I am reminds me of how I differ from the majority wherever I am.

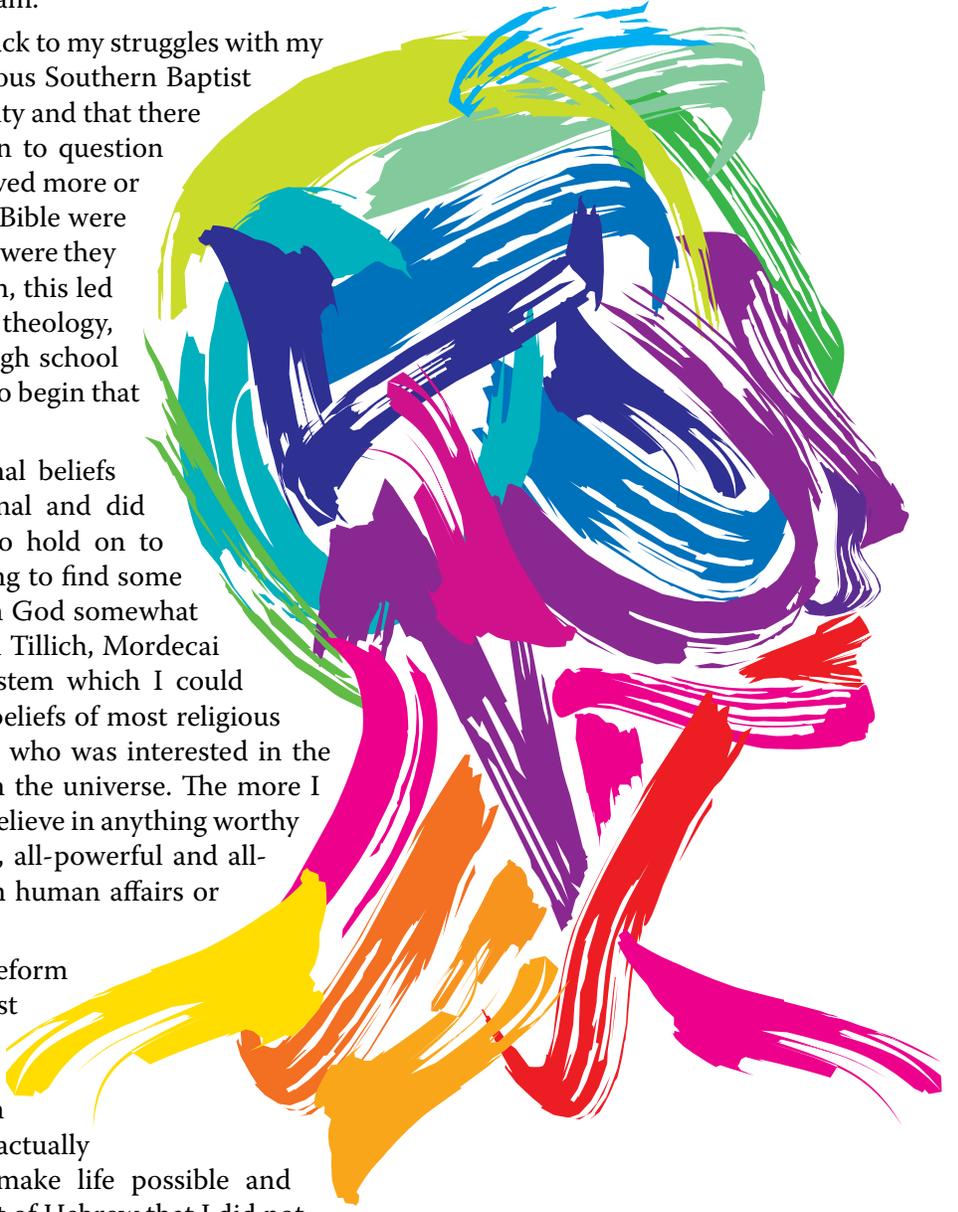
This feeling of difference can be traced back to my struggles with my sexuality. I was raised in a moderately religious Southern Baptist family. Once I accepted the fact of my sexuality and that there was no way to change my situation, I began to question the religion that, up to that point, I had believed more or less without question. If the church and the Bible were wrong about my sexual orientation, what else were they wrong about? Being the bookworm that I am, this led me to begin studying comparative religion, theology, and philosophy. (I remain thankful to my high school library for giving me the resources I needed to begin that intellectual journey.)

I realized rather early on that traditional beliefs in God and the supernatural were irrational and did not hold up under scrutiny. I attempted to hold on to these beliefs for as long as I could, attempting to find some clever theological system that made belief in God somewhat rationally acceptable, as in the works of Paul Tillich, Mordecai Kaplan, and Harold Schulweis. But any system which I could accept was abstract and removed from the beliefs of most religious doctrines that taught about a personal God who was interested in the lives of his followers and even intervened in the universe. The more I studied, the more I realized that I could not believe in anything worthy of the title God, i.e., a supernatural Creator, all-powerful and all-knowing, who may occasionally intervene in human affairs or give commandments that we must follow.

During my conversion through the Reform movement, I followed the Reconstructionist approach to the prayer service. I tried to remind myself that the words on the page meant something other than their plain meaning. For example, “God” was not actually a person, but rather all the forces that make life possible and meaningful. Luckily, the synagogue used a lot of Hebrew that I did not fully understand, which allowed me to lose myself in the chanting, and some of the “alternative” English readings in the siddur were fully humanistic. Even luckier still, I eventually found my way to the Society for Humanistic Judaism.

While my struggles with God created problems for my participation in the prayer service, my ethical commitment to vegetarianism frequently made my participation in other aspects of synagogue life difficult. For example, I cannot attend the second-night Seders at the Reform synagogue near me: they are catered with a set menu and heavily feature meat dishes. While the synagogue, understandably, goes out of its way to accommodate kosher congregants, no other dietary restrictions are taken into consideration. This has the effect of excluding many congregants who might otherwise attend.

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Breaking Through **Gender and Disability** by Rabbi Denise Handlarski



Picture it: twelve women gathered together to learn self-defense skills. This is the culmination of their course. They are breaking boards. The energy is electric as the crack of each board breaking resonates through the room. Women are literally trembling with excitement and elation. Can you picture these women? My guess is they're not what you picture. These are women with mobility disabilities. They use scooters, wheelchairs, canes, and crutches. They range in age from in their early twenties to their late sixties. Some have intellectual disabilities as well as physical ones. They are from all walks of life. They came here together for empowerment, and they found it, along with a sense of shared experience, mutual understanding, and support. These women are warriors.

If you know me through the Humanistic Jewish movement, you might know me as a rabbi; I serve the Oraynu Congregation in Toronto. You might know me as an intersectional feminist; I have written and done videos on the topics of gender and Judaism, Jews and white privilege, Jewish text from a feminist perspective, etc. You might know me as someone who loves text study; I have a background in literature that I bring to Jewish learning. You might know me as a teacher; I worked for years teaching secondary and post-secondary courses and now teach people becoming teachers themselves. You might not know that I have spent the past twenty years taking and teaching women's self-defense courses. And the self-defense part has so many applications and resonances with the Jewish parts. Especially now.

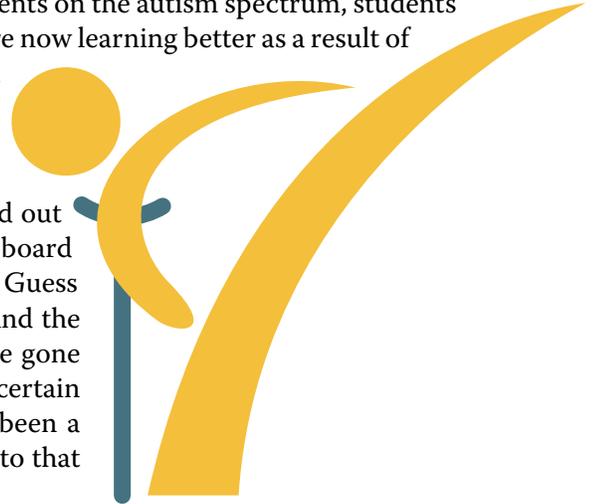
Back to the board-breaking women. When women break boards, they are not only smashing wood: they are smashing stereotypes. The first time I broke a board I remember thinking that I could do anything; that I had

been lied to my whole life about what limitations there were based on the fact that I was a woman. When I teach any group of women and girls, but especially groups with multiple disabilities, I am so aware of the myriad and multiple ways that we are disadvantaged. I would never call being female or being feminine a disability. But it is sometimes a disadvantage. Yes, women and girls are discriminated against. But a much more pervasive yet insidious disadvantage is our global culture of sexual violence. Women everywhere say no to jobs, internships, opportunities, classes and courses, lab time, and much more because of the ever-present fear of harassment and assault. Or we leave school or work because we are harassed or assaulted. The recent revelations that emerged via the #metoo movement made that very clear. And, truly, what we have heard is not even the tip of the iceberg. Gender-based violence encompasses the most underreported crimes. We will frankly never know how many women have been raped, attacked, harassed, stalked, forced to quit their jobs, forced to work with their attackers. But we do know that every woman is touched by this violence in some way or other. Even if we have never been attacked, we know we could be and it influences our decisions and actions every day.

This is even truer for women and girls with disabilities. Again, sexual harassment and assault are underreported, so no statistic can fully capture the scope of the problem. But our best research suggests that women and girls with disabilities are four times more likely to be assaulted. That might surprise you. Often when we see images of rape in the movies, the victim is "stereotypically attractive." But rape is a crime of power, not a crime of passion. And what counts as "attractive" is far broader than the images we see

anyway. Perhaps we should not be surprised that Hollywood gets this picture so very wrong, now that we know more about just how mired in sexual violence Hollywood has always been. Teaching self-defense to women with disabilities is therefore necessary but hard work. Most of these women have been assaulted. All of them are well-aware of the culture of contempt that gives rise to this violence.

I mentioned that I'm a teacher. Part of my job is to teach about how we foster meaningful inclusion for students with special education needs in the classroom. You may have heard recent buzzwords like "differentiated instruction," meaning the same concept or skill can be taught using multiple methods and means, thus reaching a diverse population of learners. I might teach math using words, pictures, or 3-D models. I might teach a short story using voice, drama, and analysis of its text. I might teach biology using computer images, textbooks, environmental study in the lab and out of doors, etc. What we know is that some of this differentiation began as a way to reach students with identified special education needs, such as students on the autism spectrum, students with learning disabilities, etc., but the impact is that many more students are now learning better as a result of this differentiation. As just one example, we found that students with special education needs often perform better with access to a personal tablet or laptop that enables them to use apps or programs such as text-to-speech software. So some students with identified needs received these tablets and laptops. But have you met adolescents? They felt strange being singled out and weren't using the technology to which they were entitled. In a school board near where I teach, there is a pilot project that gives every student a tablet. Guess what? The students with special education needs now use their tablets. And the students without special education needs also use them. And grades have gone up in both populations. What we used to think of as "accommodating" certain learning needs now is more about acknowledging that there has always been a diversity of ways of learning and we are better teachers if we are teaching to that diversity all the time.



Back to the women in self-defense classes. I teach for Wen-Do Women's Self-Defence, which is an intersectional feminist organization. The way we foster inclusion is more holistic and meaningful than I've seen anywhere else. We see diversity and difference as strengths that women can use when fighting back. And we make learning accessible for women of any ability/disability in each class we teach. When I've taught women who are blind or low-vision, I have to get sharper with my words. Usually when teaching something physical, people watch first and then do it themselves. For women who can't see what I'm doing, I need to describe in a way that paints a picture. Here's an example: I'm teaching a back kick. I say "raise your hands (already in fists) on the side of your kicking leg. Lift the kicking leg so your foot is beside the knee of the standing leg. Your goal is to kick straight back behind you. Imagine a can on a stool right behind your own knee. Crush that can with your heel." They do it perfectly.

When we teach women who use scooters and wheelchairs, we teach them how to actually use their mobility devices as weapons-at-hand — how to roll over toes or back into knees, how to turn on a dime into an attacker. We teach how to pull attackers down to our level. We teach that it is often the moment when the attacker thinks we're most vulnerable that we are at our strongest. That is one of the greatest lessons of my life, and it applies in all kinds of ways.

If you are Jewish, you can imagine how it applies to our people. We have been victimized and targeted in many ways and in many lands. Sometimes it is when we have seemed weakest that we have pulled off the most stunning feats of strength. We blew up a crematorium at Auschwitz. The Warsaw Ghetto fought much longer and stronger than anyone could have expected. We survived a genocide and then built a country. In North America, we have overcome hatred and xenophobia to become well-established and well-respected in every industry and most communities. I'm not saying things are perfect. I'm saying we come together when the odds are against us and we become better and stronger.

This has resonances for gender too. There are many theories as to why women are outpacing men in academic achievement, entrance to post-secondary institutions, and some professions now. Anti-feminists make the claim that it's because women have come "too far" and decry the oppression of men. This is an argument that is so anti-feminist and anti-woman that the makers of the argument have to ignore a lot of reality to make it jibe. There remain obvious advantages still afforded to men (especially white, non-disabled men) in all of these sectors. (If you're interested in learning more about this, please read the countless feminist accounts of women not being taken seriously, being mansplained, being mistreated and overlooked. These accounts are everywhere.) Even

...continued on page 18

Passover

Revised by Rabbi Jeffrey Falick

Passover, which begins on the eve of the fifteenth day of the Hebrew month of Nissan, is the great spring celebration of the Jewish people. In the biblical and rabbinic traditions, the holiday commemorates the Israelites' exodus from slavery in ancient Egypt. Each year Jews all over the world retell this story at the traditional Seder dinner. Yet both the holiday and the tale it transmits have much more complicated origins than most people realize.

Some scholars propose that the holiday is much older than the exodus tale. There is evidence that it may actually be a combination of two very ancient celebrations marking the arrival of spring. The first — *Pesach* — was a sacrificial holiday possibly marking the birth of livestock. *Pesach* is still the Hebrew name of the holiday, evoking the part of the story in which the angel of death “passes over” the Israelites when delivering the plague of death to the firstborn of Egypt. However, some scholars speculate that since the Hebrew word might also mean “skipping,” the holiday originally took its name from a type of spring dance also found in other ancient cultures.

The second spring festival that contributed to the current holiday was called *Chag Hamatzot*, the festival of unleavened bread that celebrated the wheat harvest, a time when farmers may have disposed of all leavened bread (*chametz*) from the previous year's crop in gratitude for new crops. In the legend the unleavened bread is transformed into a narrative element.

What emerged was the single seven-day holiday that we have today, unmoored from any agricultural origins, instead connected to the biblical legend of the liberation of the Hebrew slaves by their god, Yahveh. The story describes how Yahveh visits plagues upon Egypt to convince Pharaoh to release the slaves. In their haste to depart, they bake unleavened bread for the journey. However, once on their way to freedom, Pharaoh changes his mind, sending his chariots to chase them to the sea. Yahveh intervenes by dividing the sea for their escape and drowning their pursuers. Later the Hebrew people encounter Yahveh at a mountain, wander in the wilderness for forty years, and ultimately conquer Canaan.

The themes of spring rebirth were a good match for this story and were probably the reason that *Pesach* became associated with this story of liberation. Some of the customs and ceremonies of the older celebrations were retained and others were added. In time, the Seder, a ceremonial family meal, and the *haggadah*, the retelling of the legend, became central to the celebration. It maintains its enormous popularity among contemporary Jews due to the legend's timeless themes of liberation and freedom.

We now know that the story is fiction. No archeological evidence has ever been uncovered that substantiates a mass migration from Egypt to ancient Canaan. Moreover, what evidence we actually do possess contradicts major elements of the tale. For example, most biblical texts suggest that the exodus took place in the thirteenth century B.C.E. and culminated with the conquest of Canaan beginning at Jericho. Yet archeological remains indicate that Jericho was uninhabited at the time. There are many other examples which raise the question: what gave rise to such a story? In fact, the memory of liberation may have some basis in actual events that, while they bear little resemblance to the tale we have now, might have inspired it.

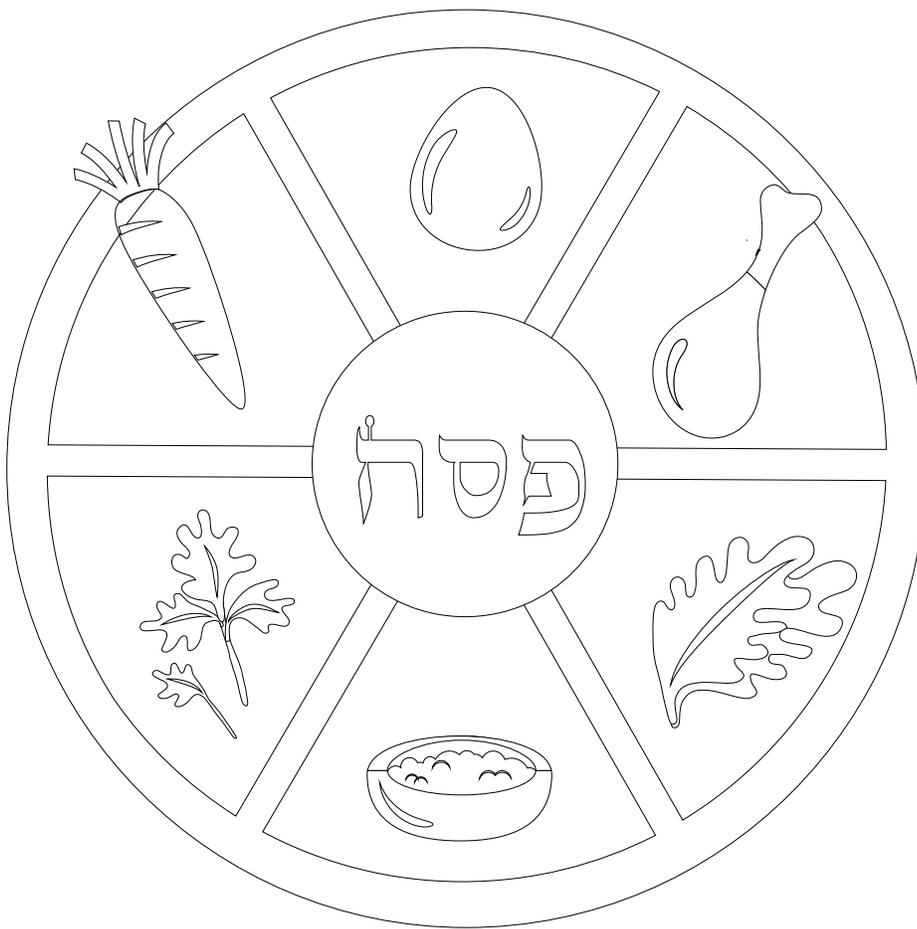
The archeological record reveals evidence that ancient Hebrews really did suffer from Egyptian domination, but that this took place in their native Canaan. Ancient Egyptian texts indicate that for centuries Egypt subjugated Canaanite vassal kings who, in turn, oppressed their own peasants. Was this the source of legends of slavery to Egypt? And while there is no evidence of external conquest, we know that the thirteenth century witnessed great upheavals and migrations due to political, climatological, and other factors. Egypt was rocked by these events. Canaanite cities fell. And remains indicate that Canaanite peasant refugees fled these cities for the central



...continued on page 15

Humanistic Judaism

What's On Your Seder Plate?



Chazeret

bitter herbs
usually romaine lettuce, especially the stems, which can be bitter

Beitzah

egg
a roasted or hard-boiled egg symbolizing rebirth

Z'roa

shank bone
commemorates the Passover offering can be any bone with a bit of meat

Maror

bitter herbs
usually horseradish, symbolizing the bitterness of life under Egyptian rule

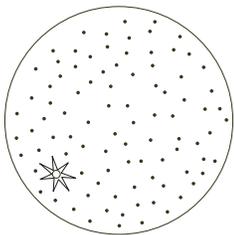
Charoset

a sweet mixture of fruit
usually nuts, wine, and apples symbolizes the mortar used by slaves in Egypt

Karpas

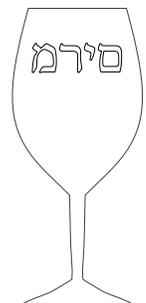
a piece of greenery
usually parsley, dipped into salt water and then eaten.

Variations



Orange: An orange on the Seder plate reminds us that Judaism is ever-evolving and that people are welcome at the table who have been left out in the past.

Miriam's Cup: A newer Passover symbol, taking its place next to the traditional Elijah's Cup. According to legend, Miriam was a prophetess who accompanied the Jewish people during the exodus from Egypt and brought forth a spring of water to quench the thirst of her people. Miriam's cup emphasizes the importance of women in the history of the Jewish people.



(YOU CAN PULL THIS SECTION OUT FOR OUR YOUNGER READERS!)

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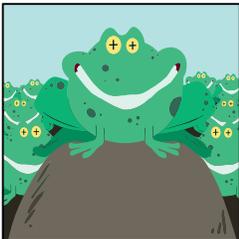
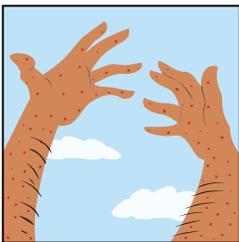
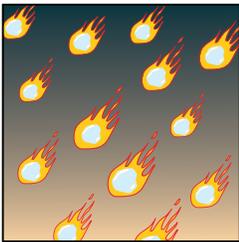
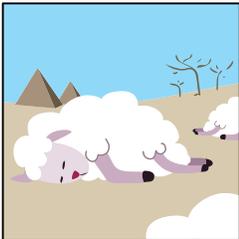
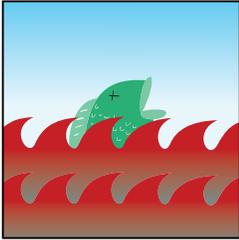
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the ten plagues

Match them up, then name some modern plagues!



Hail and Fire

Frogs

Boils

Lice

Death of Firstborn

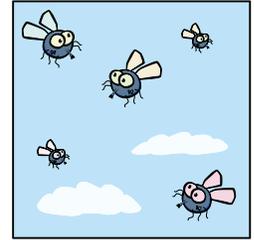
Water into Blood

Locusts

Pestilence

Diseased Livestock

Darkness



What Are Some Plagues of the Modern World?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

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Community News

Kahal B'raira — Boston, MA

Westchester Community for Humanistic Judaism — Westchester County, NY

Oraynu — Toronto, Ontario

Congregation for Humanistic Judaism — Sarasota, FL

Machar — Washington, D.C.

On Accessibility

In June 2016, Kahal B'raira, Boston, MA, committed itself to full inclusion of people with disabilities in all our activities and events. As part of this commitment, we agreed to create an accessibility checklist to ensure that all our events/activities are fully accessible to all of our members.

Committee chairs and any Kahal B'raira members organizing events for our community must adhere to the following guidelines, which include standards for:

- Programmatic Access
- Communication Access
- Food and Refreshments
- Maintaining accessible features — parking, path accessibility, bathrooms, lighting...
- Ombudsman — a Kahal B'raira member designated to investigate complaints and work out solutions
- We are also upgrading our website — to be accessible to/readable by a “screen reader” program such as having alt tags for the pictures.

Our overall point or goal is to have each of us sufficiently aware of accessibility issues and needs that we go through a process and consider: is the way that we are conducting this event/activity set up so that no one is inadvertently excluded from fully participating?

So far, we seem to be implementing these guidelines successfully. One instance cited by our Ombudsman shows how easy it is, if unaware, to overlook a need. For example, during our high holiday services, someone was not able to lip read the speakers because a floral decoration was in the way. It was a problem that was easy to rectify, once identified. Not all solutions are so easy, but once awareness has been raised it is less likely the problem will occur again.

Our Executive Committee reviews these policies annually, and committee chairs are reminded of these policies as they are planning meetings for the coming year.

Jon Levine



Westchester Learns About Modern Jewish Migration at Brighton Beach

The first annual event of the Westchester Community for Humanistic Judaism usually hosts is, very appropriately, Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. However, in the fall of 2017 the summer-like weather was too good to pass up, so we decided to have an outing. We had been on many outings in the past, mostly arranged by the Lower East Side Jewish Conservancy. However, this time the tour took us much farther afield — all the way to Brighton Beach in Brooklyn, the center of the Russian Jewish immigrant community. Another first for this outing was that we didn't have to pay the guide — our very own Dmitry Turovsky, who left the Soviet Union as a teenager and actually lived in Brighton Beach for a while, led the tour. He told members of our congregation and guests, which included a couple of participants from the City Congregation for Humanistic Judaism, how the Jews maintained their identity without religion or Jewish community of any sort (hint: antisemitism helped a lot), and how the biggest Jewish exodus in recent memory — migration out of the former Soviet Union — became possible. His wife Olga left the former Soviet Union as a child; they both recounted their personal experiences of coming to the United States as refugees from “the Evil empire” — a process that took months. The tour concluded with lunch at a Russian restaurant and a few stopovers at the Russian delis and souvenir shops that line Brighton Beach Avenue.



Dmitry Turovsky

13



Community News

“To Till and to Tend”: A Tu Bish’vat Seder

What a wonderful evening, and what a wonderful world!!!

January 30, 2018, was a time to celebrate *Tu Bish’vat*, “the new year of trees.” The program was written by Rabbi Denise Handlarski from Oraynu Congregation for Humanistic Judaism, with contributions from Ve’ahavta and Shoresh, and from Anishinaabe traditional teacher Kim Wheatley.

Upon entering the meeting room where the Seder was to be held, guests were immediately taken by the beauty of the table settings which included red “wine”, white “wine”, and a platter in the center of the table filled with nuts, dried fruit, honey, maple syrup, chocolate chips, strawberries, and blueberries. All the items on the table were symbolic according to beliefs of Canada’s native peoples. For example, pistachio nuts have hard shells and a soft edible inside. These nuts symbolize winter with their protected outside and a fleshy vulnerable inside. The shell which conceals also protects.

Before the official program began, there was a special ice-breaker at the tables. Participants stated their first names and shared with their table-mates a story about a tree that has special significance for each participant. It was a very positive exercise.

Seder guests learned about the medicinal qualities of honey, cedar tea, and maple syrup from Kim Wheatley. As part of the wonderful evening, guests tasted all these goodies. The many health benefits of plants are an important part of the Anishinaabe culture. Its people and the audience expressed gratitude for all that nature has provided for us, and it was emphasized how we must take care of our environment. We know that the environment is under great threat and that too many areas where Canada’s First Nations people live have polluted water and land. Seder guests also learned how Jewish traditions and those of Canada’s indigenous people value and approach nature. Even in the midst of winter, nature is getting ready for spring. We must be grateful for what the natural world provides.

Throughout the evening there was beautiful music. Participants sang together, and the Anishinaabe panelist, Kim, led many of the songs. Kim encouraged participants to sing along with her, even in her native language.

At the end of the evening, Seder participants were encouraged to plant parsley seeds that would bear “fruit” in time for Rosh Hashanah. Participants left the evening grateful for the people who had planned it and for an evening of warmth, fun, and learning.

Ruth Grant

He’s Almost 105, and He Can’t Stop

January 3, 2018 — Reprinted courtesy Herald-Tribune Media Group, Gatehouse Media

“If I am not doing something, I might as well die,” Joe Newman says.

Next week — Jan. 13 to be exact — Joe Newman will be 105 years old. He still gets around without a walker or cane. He drives a sporty Mercedes, though not at night. There is plenty of hair left on his head. And when he gives a visitor a hug, it is with a fierceness, strength and sincerity that would put a man decades younger to shame.

There are probably any number of reasons Newman has outlived everyone in his lineage. He has never smoked, doesn’t drink and his food and exercise regimes are sensible, though not extreme. More likely, the biggest contribution has been something less tangible.

Newman has never stopped trying to make a difference in the world.

“If I am not doing something, I might as well die,” says Newman, dapperly dressed in a cranberry button-down shirt and a white cardigan. “I remember visiting my mother and she would always say, ‘Joe, what have you been doing?’ And when I told her she’d say, ‘Well, and what are you going to do tomorrow?’ ‘We’ — it was always we, not I — ‘only have so much time. Are you rowing or are you just sitting in the boat?’”

For the rest of the profile on Joe Newman, a member of the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism in Sarasota, please visit the website for the Sarasota Herald-tribune. <http://www.heraldtribune.com/news/20180103/seidman-hes-almost-105-and-he-cant-stop>

Machar's Harry Appelman Receives Composition Honor

Jazz pianist and long-time Machar member, Harry Appelman, has for the second time been honored for his non-classical compositions by the Maryland State Arts Council. Through a process administered by the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation (MAAF), awardees are chosen, based solely on artistic merit, by an out-of-state jury of discipline-specific experts. Harry commented:

“It’s a great honor to be among the recipients of a Maryland State Arts Council 2018 Individual Artist Award for music composition. These awards provide not only financial support but, importantly, validation of an artist’s work.

“I believe that the process of writing music strengthens improvisation skills, but it requires spending many hours on an activity with no really obvious immediate benefits. The process is full of false starts, and accompanied by more or less constant self-doubt. So to me, as a performer and teacher, this type of recognition — that something of value has been created — is a sort of vindication for that investment of time.”

Harry plays all around the DC and Baltimore areas and has also performed abroad on international cultural arts exchanges for many years. He has been playing an increasing amount of Latin jazz over the past 15 years. His two award-winning compositions, “Freestyle,” a composed piece with space for completely improvised solos, and “Allemande,” which is based on the harmonic sequence of one of J.S. Bach’s French suites but with a slightly Latin rhythm, are now part of his latest CD, “Freestyle.”



Deb Godden

“Passover”

...continued from page 10

highlands of Canaan, forming a new pastoral society. Archeologists now believe that the original Israelites were native Canaanites from separate tribes that gradually formed a confederation. Over time they transmitted tales of patriarchs who were enslaved to and liberated from Egypt.

There are reasons to believe that others may have joined their confederation. Moses, Aaron, and other characters in the exodus story bear Egyptian names and are members of the priestly Levites. Did these people bring their deity and their own story of national liberation into this confederation? Both biblical and external texts indicate that the Israelite national god, Yahveh, originated near the Sinai Peninsula. All of this is speculative, to be sure, but such a reconstruction is a better match for the archeological data.

In any case, the biblical legend of the exodus was not a historical event. Moreover, for Humanistic Jews, its account features numerous disturbing elements. Nevertheless, Passover’s emphasis on freedom is a humanistic concern. Many times throughout their history, Jews have struggled for freedom or have sought escape from persecution. The twentieth-century exodus of thousands of Jews from Europe and other countries to America and Israel was the latest chapter in that long saga.

Secular Humanistic Jews celebrate Passover in their homes and communities with a Seder (a ritual meal), using one of the many *haggadot* that have been written from a humanistic perspective. It offers a celebration of the universal human quest for freedom prompted by the legend and augmented by reflections on this timeless theme.

What began as a celebration of spring, of renewal, and of rebirth took on a story of freedom that continues to inspire our celebration of human dignity and of the freedom that makes dignity possible.

(For additional reading, see *Humanistic Judaism Passover*, 12:4, Winter 1984, reprinted as *A Passover Manual*; Sherwin T. Wine, *Celebration*, New York: Prometheus Books, 1988; Sherwin T. Wine, *Judaism Beyond God*, Michigan: Society for Humanistic Judaism, 1985. For reading about a modern exodus, see *Secular Humanistic Judaism — The Challenge of Soviet Jewry*, 3, November 1991.)

“We now know that the story is fiction. No archeological evidence has ever been uncovered that substantiates a mass migration from Egypt to ancient Canaan. Moreover, what evidence we actually do possess contradicts major elements of the tale.”

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In Loving Memory of Deborah Frisch
From Miriam Jerris & Stephen Stawicki

To Alana Shindler

for all she does for Kol Hadash,
especially in creating the unique Rosh
Hashanah and Yom Kippur services, and
the Passover Haggadah
From Rita Wilson

To Loren & Vivian Kramer

From Andrew & Susie Kramer

To Richard & Carol Logan

Mazel tov on the birth of your
granddaughter, Zadie
From Miriam Jerris & Stephen Stawicki

To Susan & Bruce Jerris and family

In memory of beloved husband and
father, Norman S. Wauldron
From Miriam Jerris & Stephen Stawicki

To Jeanette Katzman

In memory of Barney Katzman
From Gary M. Vandeputte

To Susan Boston

In memory of Joseph Boston
From Paul Golin and Rabbi Miriam Jerris

In Loving Memory of my mother, Doree Samuels

From Gary Samuels

In memory of Dr. David Laband,

Jewish physician, Singapore, WWII
From Richard Logan

In honor of my heritage

Max, Hoppe, Ernestine Lichtenstein
and Liddy Hertel
From Christian Whittemore

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