



HUMANISTIC JUDAISM

Volume XLIV
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Meeting Life's Challenges

Adam Chalom

Richard Logan

Ruth Duskin Feldman z"l

Tamar Schwartz

Susan Averbach

Jeremy Kridel

Rosalie Gottfried

Wisdom from Wine:

Rejecting Despair

A Rabbi's Journey to Humanistic Judaism
In Defense of Cultural Judaism

and more

Humanistic Judaism is a voice for Jews who value their Jewish identity and who seek an alternative to conventional Judaism.

Humanistic Judaism affirms the right of individuals to shape their own lives independent of supernatural authority.

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FOCUS

Part of what distinguishes Humanistic Judaism—and humanism generally—is how life’s challenges are confronted. Recognizing that there is no guarantee to any life but this one, and recognizing no divine authority, Humanistic Jews accept that dealing with difficulties in life is left entirely to our own efforts.

In this, our first issue after the death of our long-time creative editor, Ruth Duskin Feldman *z”l*, we look at the ability of individuals to cope with personal tragedy, to survive in extreme situations, to address their own and their loved ones’ health problems, and to make meaning and live authentically in a challenging world.

Also in this issue, we feature a defense of cultural Judaism from Rabbi Denise Handlarski, a personal voyage to Humanistic Judaism from Rabbi Peter Schweitzer, explore Jewish history with Bennett Muraskin, and a book review from Rabbi Edward J. Klein, introduce our new editors, and much more.

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

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

TEN REASONS WHY BDS IS MORAL AND ADVANCES THE HOPE FOR PEACE

by David Finkel

[An essay by Alan Dershowitz, “Ten Reasons Why BDS is Immoral and Hinders Peace,” appeared in HAARETZ (February 12, 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-1.573880>). A version was published in the journal *Humanistic Judaism*, Volume XLIII, 2015, Number 1. The following is a counterpoint opinion on the ten points.]

1. The BDS movement is moral because it responds to an appeal from Palestinian civil society. In July 2005, a year after the International Court of Justice had found Israel’s apartheid-annexation Wall to be illegal, after all the promises of Madrid and Oslo had turned to ashes, and with the 38-year occupation of Palestinian territories following 1967 becoming all but permanent, a wide grouping of Palestinian organizations issued a call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israeli institutions and global corporations profiting from the Occupation (read the call at <http://www.bdsmovement.net/call>).

The BDS call and movement raises three principled demands: an end to the post-1967 Occupation, full equality of rights for Palestinian citizens of Israel living under all kinds of *de jure* and *de facto* discrimination, and the Right of Return for the Palestinians expelled in the 1947-49 war and their descendants. Why? Very simply, the BDS movement refuses to accept the fragmentation of the Palestinian people into separated components. It is indecent, for example, to posit some kind of comforting “solution” that ignores the horrors facing Palestinian refugees in the Yarmouk refugee camp, stateless people caught in the horrors of the Syrian catastrophe.

The demands of the BDS movement amount to calling for the state of Israel to *meet its obligations under principles of human rights and international law*, which the so-called “international community,” and the United States in particular, have enabled it to ignore. To be sure, BDS *by itself* will achieve none of these goals, any more than boycotts and sanctions by themselves ended South African apartheid or any other oppressive system. But BDS, more than any other initiative, has presented the moral issues of the Palestinian tragedy to international and U.S. public

opinion—and it has received a positive response on U.S. campuses, in church denominations, among Jewish young people, and in many communities. That’s why its enemies, like Alan Dershowitz, are freaking out about it (more on this below).

It’s particularly interesting that BDS, as a grassroots, non-governmental and Palestinian-led international movement, has already had a greater impact than the historic official Arab states’ “boycott” of Israel, which was ineffectual, hypocritical and routinely violated by cynical backchannel dealings.

2. The BDS movement is moral because it emboldens Palestinian grassroots nonviolent resistance, the best and perhaps last hope for opening a potential solution to an ongoing tragedy. For many years now, nonviolent resistance has been a staple of Palestinian activism—in West Bank villages like Bil’in against the Wall and the heroic tax refusal in Beit Sahour, in Bedouin camps resisting destruction in the Negev, in farmers harvesting their olives in the face of Israeli settler brutality, and so many other well-documented cases. But as the example of the U.S. civil rights struggle shows (as seen so clearly in *Selma*), nonviolent tactics are effective only when the world pays attention. Nothing is more infuriating than Israel’s apologists asking “where is the Palestinian Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela?” when there are actually hundreds and thousands of such people, many of them imprisoned or martyred. BDS, along with other acts of international solidarity, encourages Palestinians that *sumud*—steadfastness in the face of oppression and humiliation—will not be ignored.

3. The BDS movement is moral because it is based on bedrock human rights principles, not on empty illusions and rhetorical posturing about “two-state” or “one-state” solutions. Supporters of

Letter to the Editor continued on page 44

David Finkel is an editor of the journal, *Against the Current*, published in Detroit, and a member of the Detroit chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace. This piece is a personal opinion.

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HJ FORUM: Meeting Life's Challenges

My Strength Is in Me, and in You by Rabbi Adam Chalom

If our humanism and our Judaism are meaningful to us, then they should help us through difficult times. When life is going well it is easy to believe we are in charge of it or that our cultural inheritance has given us the emotional and intellectual tools to succeed. But health challenges, death, pain, or trauma make us ask whether or not what we are doing is working, or even worth it when the rubber hits the road.

In my own family, in the span of eighteen months, my father (in his early 80s) dealt with surgery and chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer, my half-brother died very suddenly at 49, and my wife continued her ongoing struggle with epilepsy and the side effects of its treatment. I found myself reflecting on how my Humanistic Judaism can provide perspective, insight, even comfort. What solace can I derive from facing the reality of the natural world and human mortality?

Our humanistic approach to life can be challenging—there are no guarantees of happy endings, no special cosmic attention, no automatic rules to define what to do and what not to do in every circumstance—from getting dressed and eating, to matters of life and death. One can imagine the comforts of a future life or the power of supernatural intervention, even as placebos or anesthetics, to mask our pain and anxiety. Yet there is also tremendous strength to be found in meeting these challenges with courage and conviction.

I was reminded of this truth during a two-week period when three congregational families faced personal loss. Each loved one who died was at least 80 (one was 102!), though none of the losses was particularly easy. Each had faced an extended illness during the last weeks and months, but the families had strong recent memories of the deceased being intellectually active and vital until relatively recently. What I noticed most was how our approach to life affects our approach to death. Because we face reality, we know that death is inevitable. Because we make choices based on human needs, we can accept when the pain and suffering of prolonging life is not worth it. Because we focus on people, our memorials are a celebration of life and love, a space for remembering our loved ones with old stories and new insights. Even in the face of tragedy, we must deal with the absolute reality that, as far as we can know, they are lost to us for the rest of our lives. The sooner we face that grief, the sooner we can begin to learn how to live without them. As a funeral director once told me, “You don’t get over a loss; you get used to it.” We are experts at adjusting to the human condition, as exhilarating and painful as that sometimes may be.

Rabbi Adam Chalom, Ph.D., dean of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism for North America, is rabbi of Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation in Lincolnshire, Illinois. He holds a doctorate from the University of Michigan and sits on the editorial board of this journal. This piece previously appeared as two articles in the *Shofar* newsletter of Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation in Lincolnshire, Illinois, and as blog posts on “Shalom from Rabbi Chalom” at <http://hjrabbi.wordpress.com>

Our needs are deeper than simply problem solving. Yes, science and reason and human experience are much more reliable tools to address disease and illness than faithful prayer or traditional rituals. (Anyone for a good bleeding to balance the bodily humors?) But facing sudden tragedy or ongoing illness is not just a question of making sure paperwork is in order or that steps are being taken to fix the problem. We need emotional support as well, both for improved outcomes and for our peace of mind while working through the problem, especially if the problem does not simply require a quick fix, but rather, presents a new, more difficult reality to which we must adjust.

Getting perspective on the challenge can help our emotional state, as can redirecting our time and energy to what is most important. Learning from a traumatic experience—to do better next time or to be more present with our surviving family—can provide restorative comfort; it doesn't fix the tragic loss, but it helps us to feel that we are making something good result from something sad.

Perhaps the Jewish tendency to complain is an example of Jewish skepticism: if everything was truly a gift of divine providence, why would there be so much *kvetching* (complaining)? As Woody Allen quipped, “If it turns out that there is a God . . . he’s an underachiever.” It can be reassuring to know that we are not alone in our questioning within our family tradition.

Most importantly, we can find comfort in being with other people. The writers of Genesis reminded us that “It is not good for humanity

to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). Shiva visits and family bonding around a death do not change the reality of loss, but they do provide a wider, loving context for working through grief. Even without talking, comfort can be found: “the merit of visiting a mourner’s house is in the silence” (*Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 6b*). Sharing challenges and losses with one’s family, friends, and community is one way of using human power to improve human life.

In Rabbi Sherwin Wine’s *Staying Sane in a Crazy World*, he describes the strength to be derived from living a life of courage:

The life of courage is hard. But it is, ultimately, rewarding. It makes us pay attention to our own experience. It makes it easy for us to admit the truth. It notices our strength. It protects our dignity. It enables us to assume responsibility for our own lives. It celebrates our own power. It makes us sane in the face of a crazy world.

It even makes us pay attention to the opportunities, as well as the dangers, of the real world. Pleasure is real. Happiness is real. Usefulness is real. Loving and supportive relationships are real. But, if they happen, they are not gifts of destiny. They are human achievements—sometimes against overwhelming odds (p. 265).

We cannot do everything, and there is much we cannot change. But we can face reality with courage and compassion, and with one another. Remember, as Sherwin taught us, “my strength is in me, and in you.”

Our Strength Is in Us

by Dr. Richard D. Logan

Survival stories are a popular genre, perhaps partly because of our culture's belief in self-reliance. We love stories where individuals succeed against the odds. Some of the most moving and inspiring work I have done in my career as an academic psychologist has been studying solitary ordeals. I had the great privilege to meet extraordinary people: Holocaust survivors, former POWs, adventurers, explorers, mountaineers, astronauts, survivors of long abandonment at sea or in the jungle. The ability of people to cope with extremes, either alone or in groups, can be remarkable.

I hit on this line of research because I happened to be reading Piers Paul Read's *Alive*, the story of the Andes plane crash survivors, when I was asked to teach a course on coping with stress to young inmates of a local correctional institution. The textbooks were far too boring to interest incarcerated young men, but I realized that actual survival stories might grab their interest, especially considering their life circumstances. And I was right! The course was extremely successful, and the students devoured stories of people who had survived the worst. I think that the class helped them cope and inspired them to work positively for themselves while in prison.

Later, I read hundreds of first-person survival accounts. I came to appreciate just how rich the psychological insights of survivors often were, and saw how little had been written on the psychology of ordeals by sharing survivors' own narratives as the central text. Through my research of survivors' stories, I learned just how resilient people can be. They often find that they are far more resourceful than they might have realized. One feature of that resourcefulness is the ingenuity of people in finding ways to cope with extreme situations.

Certainly there are people in such ordeals who are sustained by religious faith. But

my extensive research shows that not every atheist in a foxhole becomes a believer. In fact, it is remarkable how often and how far people "dig deep" into their own resources. For example, author Marya Hornbacher recalls how she found the strength within herself to recover from addiction, without the recourse to religious faith, which twelve-step programs typically involve.

Yet many who have undergone prolonged solitary ordeals relate that they had a profound spiritual experience during their trials, much like "near-death" experiences when people claim to have met a robed figure or heard a voice saying, "come into the light." Many people in prolonged isolation become convinced that they are not alone, that some presence is nearby; in many cases the feeling is vague and the "presence" ephemeral. Others perceive another person or hear a guiding voice that seems to give them instructions or urge them on. On occasion, they may even have conversations with an "other," and often they listen to the guiding voice. The first solo sailor around the world, Joshua Slocum, reportedly saw the pilot of Columbus's ship the *Pinta* at the helm of his boat one stormy night after months at sea. The pilot identified himself and assured Slocum that he would guide his ship that night. When Slocum awoke the pilot was gone, but his ship was safe and on course. Similar "hallucinations" are common.

Some claim that these individuals encountered God or Jesus. But after careful study, a more reasonable conclusion is that the guiding voice is simply the detached sense of one's own talk-

Dr. Logan is a retired professor of Human Development. He has written extensively on the psychology of survival, particularly that of extreme and prolonged solitary ordeals. One of his books, an account of the survival ordeal of 11-year-old Terry Jo Duperrault drifting alone at sea after her family was murdered on board a sailing yacht (*ALONE*, Titledown Publishing, 2010), was briefly a bestseller and has been optioned to be a major feature film. Dr. Logan is the Vice-President of the board of the Society for Humanistic Judaism.

ing to oneself. Even during the mundane stress of solving a math problem in an exam, the stress can wear us down, our own voice can sound more distant and alien. The sense of the presence of an “other” may simply be the more direct experience of one’s own unconscious, or a reflection of the wish not to be all alone and helpless.

Looking at how individuals turn to their inner resources when faced with prolonged solitary ordeals, a researcher may find herself or himself squarely in the heart of Humanistic Psychology’s understanding of human nature. Humanistic Psychology starts with the presumption that the person is a “self” and has a mind and a will. As people live their lives, they take for granted that they have minds and wills, so they simply have this understanding of themselves from their own points of view. From this starting point, humanistic psychology stresses that rather than the person being a blank slate on which the world writes, life and the world are the blank slate on which *the person* writes. This is true in every setting; one always has some freedom to affect and control one’s situation if one remains open to the possibilities in even the most brutal and confined situations, in his book, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl put it this way: “Everything can be taken away but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances.”

The Will to Live

Many of us understand that at the very root of how people cope in survival situations is the “will to live,” arguably found in every creature with a central nervous system. All sentient animals will struggle mightily to survive, and faith in a supreme being has little to do with this impulse across the broad animal kingdom. When it comes to the human will, one of the most moving features of survival stories is how strong some people’s wills are; it is astonishing, and inspiring, how deep some people will dig to survive. Some seem to have a stronger will than others. Lennard Bickel’s *Mawson’s Will*, is one of the most powerful, inspiring, and moving survival stories ever—another book where religious faith does not come up. Douglas Mawson, his two explorer companions

already dead, continues to trek on alone, nearly without food, dragging his sled for weeks across Antarctic ice in a titanic act of will to get back to his base. Mawson falls into a crevasse, yet somehow he marshals the strength to slowly pull himself out. A verse from Robert Service, the “Bard of the Yukon” and Mawson’s favorite poet, inspires him not to give in: “Just one more try—it’s dead easy to die/ It’s the keeping-on-living that’s hard.” Mawson later discovers that the skin on the soles of his feet had separated from the underlying tissue and bone. He tapes the skin back on and keeps slogging. So debilitated is Mawson by his monstrous ordeal that when he does, impossibly, stagger back into camp, one of his colleagues stares into his gaunt, skeletal, aged face and says, “My God! Which one *are* you?!”

One of my personal survival heroes, Edith Bone, then a woman in her sixties, spent seven years in solitary confinement in Hungary in the 1950s. Her book, *Seven Years of Solitary*, is an exceptional account of coping. In 1949, Bone—a dedicated Marxist—was a freelance journalist in Budapest, for the *London Daily Worker*. She was accused of spying for Britain by the Hungarian Communist government. She was arrested by the government when attempting to leave Hungary and kept in solitary confinement without trial in a windowless cell for seven years.

Bone survived by filling her days and years in solitary confinement by living *as a humanist*—and as a scientist. She relied entirely on her own resources, not the least of which were her remarkable intellect and prodigious literary knowledge. One of the first tasks she set herself was to fashion an abacus, using hefty broom straws for wires and the dense, viscous dough of her ration of under-baked, inedible black bread, for beads. With her jury-rigged abacus to keep count, she began an inventory of her vocabulary in the six languages she knew (She counted that she knew 27,369 English words). Bone went on to inventory the names of birds, trees, flowers, makes of cars, breeds of dogs, U.S. states (she was English), English publishers, names of wines, and even characters in the stories of Dickens (400!), Balzac, Tolstoy, Stendahl, Dostoevski, Thackeray, and many others.

After all of this, Bone fashioned 4,000 letters out of the same glutinous, black bread dough which she had used for her abacus. By continually rearranging these on a frame she made, Bone recreated hundreds of poems and provided herself with tangible literature. Even locked in solitary confinement, Bone managed to fill her time and provide herself with both intellectual stimulation and fulfilling activities, and kept her mind sharp.

Perhaps Bone's most all-engrossing task, however, was a "scientific" one. After some months within four windowless walls, she undertook an engineering project to create a window to the outside world. Her cell door was made from old, dense, two-inch-thick oak. She had noticed that near the floor, the head of a large nail protruded from the wood by less than an inch. She was determined to somehow pull that nail out and use it to drill a peephole in the door. She first braided a strong cord from threads stolen a couple at a time from the coarse towels given to her, and eventually managed to get hold of the head of the nail with the cord. Then she began to pull the nail loose. It took Bone weeks of hard pulling before she got even the first barely perceptible hint of wobble. With dogged persistence over additional weeks, she slowly increased that wobble enough to get the deeply embedded nail out. Bone then sharpened the nail on the concrete floor, and spent many more days slowly and surreptitiously drilling a pinhole in the iron-hard door with it. Bone then fashioned a plug for this hole using that same dense, malleable black bread, so that the light from her cell would not shine out through the hole and give her away. This tiny pinhole gave Bone a window to the outside that opened her world immensely—relatively speaking of course—so that she no longer felt confined within four dark walls. She could look down the hall and observe the routines of her guards, movements of prisoners, etc. She occupied many long hours observing the world outside of her cell.

Bone's many weeks of dogged work on one small task stands for thousands of similar examples by other prisoners in similar situations. It also shows that many survivors of

ordeals become observers as a way of detaching themselves from the fact of their victimization—a fact to which I'll return later.

Bone was released during the last days of the revolutionary Nagy Government in 1956. A student group had seized control of the Budapest political prison where Bone was being held, and released her. She came out remarkably well adjusted. When asked how she coped with seven years alone, she said simply that she kept herself so busy that she never had time to feel alone. She calmly stated that she had led a full and rich life in prison. Indeed.

Perhaps the truly archetypal instance of a Humanistic approach to survival, though, is Frankl and his compelling and influential *Man's Search for Meaning*. Imprisoned naked in filth, degradation, and starvation by the Nazis, and deprived of food, his physical freedom, and all of the external trappings of dignity, this is Frankl's astonishing conclusion: "Take away every external source of and support for identity, meaning and comfort and *I am still free*. Even living naked in my own excrement can't take away my spirit, or my thoughts, or my aspirations." This is one of the truly legendary statements in the annals of humanistic psychology.

Making Meaning for Oneself

In the view of Humanistic Psychology and philosophy, and by extension of Humanistic Judaism: "My strength is in me." Our own power to create meaning, and the need to do so whatever the circumstances, is a cornerstone of human nature. This power is thrown into higher relief when one is imprisoned, alone at sea, lost in a jungle, or marooned on a mountain. Whether "free" or imprisoned, we make our own worlds; we find our own way. Or, at least, survivors tell us that we *can*. And it is indeed fitting that Holocaust survivors like Viktor Frankl both speak to and exemplify this so eloquently.

The existentialists, those philosophers of modernity whose insights are also important to Humanistic Psychology, begin from the same starting point as Frankl, stressing that life and living in the normal course of things

is a matter of creating meaning for oneself. This meaning-making is necessary because we modern persons are existentially solitary, alienated from nature, the land, history, the products of our labor, extended family, and traditional organic community. If we do not seek to act authentically—i.e., make meaning for ourselves—in the world, we will live in the prison of our own alienation.

The person in a solitary ordeal faces the same challenge, though again in higher relief. The solitary ordeal is all about oneself. No one else is there to help. If you make it, you will have done it by yourself. But the paradox is that in order to survive, one must not dwell on oneself. Doing so would mean no escape from the overwhelming fact of victimization. A striking finding from my work on solitary ordeals is that many who survive cope, partly, by creating activities in which they can get caught up: fashioning tools like an abacus, making fishing spears from the bones of birds in order to fish from a life raft, studying one's own mental library of knowledge, engaging in systematic scientific observation of insect behavior in one's cell (as many prisoners have done), mentally building one's dream house, solving ever more difficult math problems, composing poetry—the list is endless. Survivors seek to create activities so they may engross themselves in those activities and escape into them—but also so they can continue to feel essentially human and keep their minds sharp. This is precisely what Edith Bone and many other survivors did.

People as diverse as mountaineer Joe Simpson; solo sailor Francis Chichester, sailing for months alone around the world; psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim in a concentration camp; and Englishman Christopher Burney, held in solitary confinement for nearly two years—they all spoke about literally taking refuge in the role of a detached observer of one's situation.

Holocaust survivor Alfred Kantor stated, "By taking on the role of an 'observer' I could, at least for a few moments, detach myself from what was going on in Auschwitz and was therefore better able to hold together the threads of

sanity." This powerful statement says in effect, "rely on scientific observation and reason as refuges from your surroundings." This may be somewhat like the modern academic or social scientist who copes with the uncertainties of modernity, not by being immersed in them, but by standing apart and analyzing, commenting, critiquing. As the legendary French prisoner Papillon said, after engaging in the engrossing mental activity of calculating that he was doomed to spend 17,520 hours in solitary confinement, imprisoned on the infamous Devil's Island, "What matters is that *I furnish these days, hours and minutes with something, all by myself, alone.*"

There is another facet to all this: one must make a difference in one's situation by finding a way to be proactive. A survivor must direct efforts toward having positive effects on her or his circumstances, to enrich a confined world, to fashion useful tools, to make a peephole, etc. One must find ways of getting caught up in things outside of oneself to create the richness and variety necessary to keep one's sanity, all while not being too reflective about one's situation.

But there is another paradoxical feature of solitary ordeal: increased self-understanding. Christiane Ritter, isolated for many weeks alone in the far Arctic, speaks of the "strange illumination of one's own self" that happens when one is utterly alone for a long time. People learn a lot about themselves, the extent of their skills, how much they know, how much they can take, etc. They refine their personal philosophy and vow "not to sweat the small stuff," but instead to revel in life's simple pleasures. In fact, many adventurers deliberately seek hardship precisely so that they can learn more about themselves.

This is part of the philosophy behind programs like Outward Bound, which takes troubled young people on weeks-long treks into the wilderness so that they face and learn how to overcome concrete external challenges. Outward Bound is an alternative to the far more introspective therapy that is sometimes prescribed for such young persons. These wilderness survival experiences seem to build confidence in one's ability to cope. Interestingly,

these wilderness adventures typically include a three-day solo experience where the participant is left with only matches and a knife and must cope all by her- or himself. Indeed, even some writers will deliberately seek prolonged isolation so that the only devices they can rely on to be productive are those within themselves.

Making Meaning in Community, and Life Itself

George Washington Burnap, a nineteenth-century Unitarian clergyman, provided some guidance on what was required to live a good life, and I think that guidance applies as well to survivors going through long and lone ordeals. One needs:

Something to do: A great deal of what I wrote above has illustrated this.

Someone to love: People are sustained by knowing that they have loved ones waiting for them, and they vow to survive in order to get back to them.

Something to look forward to: Getting back to one's life, to loved ones, or in the case of the Holocaust, vowing to survive to tell their story.

I would add a fourth that is just as critical: *Something to believe in.* In some ways, this is the central thesis of this article. Humanists are sustained by believing in themselves and their own resources. They are also sustained by believing in their own essential humanity and in humanity generally, and by the inspiring example of those who sacrifice themselves for others.

The great Holocaust researcher, Terrence des Pres adds a powerful element to taking the role of observer when dealing with the unspeakable in the Holocaust. He observes about a typical prisoner's very first reaction to being in a concentration camp: "With the return to consciousness [after an initial dreamlike unreality from the shock at the very beginning] came a feeling of intense decision." In *Night of the Mist*, survivor Eugene Heimler observed: "Of their dead, burnt, bodies *I would be the voice.*"

Thus, it is not only remaining engaged that is essential to surviving; one must also have a

purpose. Survivors were sustained by "the will to bear witness," as Des Pres calls it. Having been an observer, a powerful motive to survive is to live to tell the story of what one had seen. It is also remarkable that people often come out of ordeals with a more refined moral compass. We can see this realized in Holocaust survivors such as Elie Wiesel, or even in the life of young Terry Jo Duperrault, who found life-supporting strength not only in telling the truth about the horror of killing she had witnessed, but in *knowing* that she had told the truth. She rebuilt her life partly on this cornerstone of integrity. Many survivors vow to be better people, and they also manage to find a place that is beyond revenge, despite the criminal inhumanity they might have seen and experienced.

Finally, there is something important and intangible here, but it should not be troubling to humanists. It has to do with the essence of being human. Krystyna Zywulska, a survivor of the Majdanek concentration camp, wrote in her book, *I Came Back*: "... I felt under orders to live... And if I did die in Auschwitz, it would be as a human being. I would hold on to my dignity. I was not going to become the contemptible, disgusting brute my enemy wished me to be." But Zywulska adds: "I have read more or less everything that has been written about this subject. But somehow no one appears to have understood: it wasn't ruthlessness that enabled an individual to survive—it was an intangible quality, not particular to educated or sophisticated individuals. Anyone might have it. It is perhaps best described as an *overriding thirst—perhaps, too, a talent for life, and a faith in life.*"

It is our very humanity that is at the core of coping. As Roger Ebert said, it is *Life Itself*. Or as we say in Humanistic Judaism, "My light/strength/hope is in me... and in you." The phrase "and in you" should remind us of another important point: surviving is also about community—both the community of one's fellow sufferers, but also whatever larger community one belongs to.

Zywulska wrote, "Lone wolves, just as in 'real life,' didn't make it. The inmates instinc-

tively formed alliances, communities, friendships. They exchanged gifts—a piece of string, a bite of potato. They found creative ways to circumvent the system.”¹

In his foreword to Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Gordon Allport writes something that speaks to much written above, and what he says is worth pondering: “To live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering. If there is a purpose in life at all, there must be a purpose in suffering and dying. But no man can tell another what this purpose is. Each must find out for himself, and must accept the responsibility

that his answer prescribes. If he succeeds he will continue to grow in spite of all indignities. Frankl is fond of quoting Nietzsche, ‘He who has a *why* to live can bear with almost any *how*.’”

There are many why’s to live. Survivors show us that there are a great many how’s, and that our strength truly is in us.

NOTES

¹ Having focused my work on solitary ordeals, I don’t agree that solitary people don’t make it, but I will admit that it might be the more exceptional ones like Edith Bone who do. And it is certainly true that people have helped each other make it through ordeals.



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My Search for Reality

by Ruth Duskin Feldman z”l

One of the bedrock principles of Humanistic Judaism is that facing reality can be a source of inner strength. But what if we suddenly lose the ability to distinguish what is real from what is not? That was the situation in which I found myself six years ago, when I experienced an outbreak of liver disease accompanied by a steep cognitive decline.

I have had hepatitis C for many years as a result of a blood transfusion during surgery before screening for the virus began. For three decades, the disease progressed slowly, as it often does, and I showed no symptoms. Then, in early 2009, a severe jaundice attack left me a bedridden invalid. For months I lay on a rented hospital bed in our living room, unable to climb the stairs to the bedroom or even walk to the bathroom. My husband, Gil, slept on the couch to keep me company.

My illness subsided slowly with the help of a full-time caregiver, a visiting nurse, and a physical therapist who came three days a week—an arrangement my social worker sister had made for me. But mentally, I was far from my normal self. I did not read and forgot how to use email. I barely spoke to visitors. I could no longer write the college-level developmental psychology textbooks that had been my chief career focus for some twenty years, nor officiate at weddings, which, as a madrikha, I had contracted to perform. Bonnie Cousens and Miriam Jerris took over my responsibilities as creative editor of this journal.

Still, I was aware of an inner life. In part, it revolved around music. I “heard” familiar

songs in my head and tried to piece together the lyrics. Gil and I enjoyed our musician son’s piano performances on audiotapes he sent regularly.

My main conscious activity was an effort to understand the truth about my condition. My illness seemed to me to be a charade enacted by those around me. I imagined that my three visiting helpers were not real, and I continually looked for evidence to support or refute that idea. Above all—in contrast to my husband’s fear that my condition was permanent—I cherished the belief that I would recover. This was not a naive hope but a firm conviction based on a sure sense of my inner reality.

Some might say I should consider myself fortunate in having being able to return from that cognitive abyss and regain my intellectual powers, and no doubt I was. But, looking back, I believe the humanistic values that have shaped much of my adult life contributed to that good fortune. Persistence, determination, and the will to take charge of my life were powerful forces in restoring the person I knew myself to be, as was the caring support of family and friends, for which I will ever be grateful.

This experience also infused me with a strong dose of humility. We never know what life will bring our way, what awaits us around the next corner. The best we can do is to summon all the tools we possess to cope with whatever comes.

The late **Ruth Duskin Feldman z”l**, was a madrikha, and the creative editor of this journal. She was a member of Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation in Lincolnshire, Illinois.

Visible Person, Invisible Problem

by Tamar Schwartz

I went to bed one night in September of 2011, and woke up in the middle of the night to a spinning world. If I didn't move *at all* I was fine. I managed to communicate to my husband, Ron and daughters, Leena and Cara, that I was sick, and went back to bed.

Ten months later, I finally got my diagnosis of Migraine Associated Vertigo (MAV), but there was still so much I wanted to know. What could I do to manage and improve my condition? What would my life be like from now on? The following spring, I was diagnosed with a vision disorder, Convergence Insufficiency (CI) with Exophoria (with an impaired vestibular-ocular reflex), an undiagnosed childhood problem dramatically affected by my vertigo.

Unlike many, I am fortunate that I live in an area where the medical care I need is available to me and that I have health insurance and financial support to cover all the expenses. I truly feel for those who struggle with these two pieces. Knowing what you need, but not having access to care or not being able to cover the costs is terrible.

Because I have access to the care I need, since May 2012, shortly before my MAV diagnosis, I have practiced Feldenkrais therapy (FT), which helps with some of the balance problems caused by vertigo. Often, optometrists and ophthalmologists do not have training in recognizing, diagnosing, and treating CI. In fact, it was my Feldenkrais therapist who suggested I might have a vision disorder, and helped me find a doctor who could help diagnose my CI. When my CI was diagnosed, I began vision therapy.

I'm constantly learning how to cope with my disorders. I still can't completely explain on a neuromuscular level what my Feldenkrais practitioner does for me, but I finally under-

stand some of the basic principles. And it is helping my body relearn functions.

No one can tell I have a vision problem by looking at my eyes, but using glasses is now visually challenging for me. Even if glasses have NO prescription, lenses still change the way light and images come into my eyes, so wearing even low-level reading glasses is a vision exercise for me. Tracking, eye gaze switching, dealing with movement—mine or someone else's—are all important, and none of these is specifically a vestibular or vision issue. Those systems are interconnected, and one issue affects another.

I was relieved to finally know the other element of my condition, but I had a lot of questions. What could I expect? What goals could I accomplish, and what would my limitations be?

I had played flute since the fourth grade, and I gave private flute lessons until I had to stop in December of 2010, when I developed hand problems. When I started FT, I really wanted to be able to play again. I refuse to give up playing my flute, but I will no longer tolerate physical pain or injury. It took me about a year, and the first thing I did was to simply feel the weight of the flute in my hands and arms. Then I finally began to make music. For a long time, I just played random notes. Then I began to string them together, into what I still call "free form." I've seen articles about what music can do for the brain, and I'm convinced that playing my flute helps me.

In addition to playing music, I've always loved to write. During the first couple of years of my illness, I used a voice recognition program called *Dragon NaturallySpeaking* to

Tamar Schwartz is a member of Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation in Highland Park, Illinois. She writes her blog, "Visible Person, Invisible Problem," at <http://visiblepersoninvisibleproblem.blogspot.com>.

dictate into my computer. This allowed me to compose emails and do a bit of writing, mainly about music. After a year of slowly improving through vision therapy, I was able to use my keyboard again and write in more depth about my experiences, including things that have nothing to do with my medical situation. My writing, I hope, reflects snapshots of my life, and is about more than just the challenges of living with my invisible disorders.

I began posting my writing on Facebook, and eventually was invited to become an Ambassador Board Member for VEDA, the Vestibular Disorders Association. VEDA works to educate the public and raise awareness about vestibular disorders like MAV. When I write, I strive to be honest and realistic, and ultimately convey hope and a sense of possibility.

I don't believe a positive attitude causes miraculous healing, but I *do* believe a hopeful attitude helps. Feeling hopeful, even optimistic, helps me cope. The trick is not to hold on to or get really stuck in those hard, painful stretches. Sometimes it takes a conscious effort, but once I let go, I can think more clearly, and see where I am and if there is something positive to hold on to. My psychologist says that baseball players never have perfect batting averages, and if the rest of us could adopt those same expectations, we'd be a lot better off. Otherwise, when I don't feel well or I'm frustrated, I tend to jump to worst-case scenario conclusions way too easily, as I think a lot of people do. This tends to lead me down a road of worry and anxiety. As I often remind my daughters, life is not black and white, one extreme or the other. But there is a middle ground of things I can do.

Here is part of my "I can do it" list:

My body recovers now from working really hard—a definite result of doing rehab.

I am physically able to do basic cooking, which adds so much to my wellbeing and that of my family.

I can write my blog; this is a very significant and hard-won accomplishment for me.

I can listen to articles online, even if I need to use Google Translate.

I'm able to listen to more audiobooks than I used to.

I can read some of the Sunday comics, and the headlines and small bits of articles from part of our local paper so I know some of what's going on in my community.

I'm able to play my flute and listen to music.

I can walk our dog with a family member, and I am able to hold the leash as needed.

I can watch a movie on our smaller screen TV, with an intermission.

I'm able to do some basic housework in addition to cooking.

I mentally hold onto my list of what I can do, and keep it close at hand.

My family members are an important part of my support system and my life. I know my daughters have learned from my journey. Cara and Leena were both a huge help in getting my blog up and running, including design and editorial help. I'm grateful I was also able to celebrate Chanukah with my family, singing two short songs with them and not having trouble with the sound of my own singing voice in my head.

It's still easy, very easy, for me to dwell on my limitations, what I still need to work on. Maybe it's human nature to notice what we're not happy with, what needs to be improved upon. In our incredibly fast-paced world, in which change seems to happen at warp speed, it's hard not to compare myself and my life to others and their lives. People like me, who are working to regain our health in some way, have to be careful about not comparing ourselves to others. I didn't know what limitations I would end up with—none of us ever knows that. Success can be measured in so many ways. I remind myself that it's about the effort and progress I make.

The real issue to me is figuring out when, or if, a limitation really is a stop sign. When

does a limitation require a work around, or acknowledging that something can't be done, and when does it not? More importantly, when does a limitation push you to challenge yourself, to say "OK, what tools can I use to move through this"?

It would be easy for me to get caught up in frustrations about how things have changed for me. The reality is that change is a part of life; I had changes I wasn't expecting, but I think that happens more than we admit. I also took things for granted before, things that I never even thought about. I think being more thoughtful, more aware, and more outspoken about invisible disorders is good. An even larger goal is for

some things to become more second nature for me again. I'm grateful that more is being discovered about the brain, how it works and how to retrain it. I gain more confidence as I continue my journey, putting more pieces together.

Feeling supported is vital to being able to continue that journey. Like many people with invisible disorders, being connected with others online is important. Because of my limitations, a large chunk of my social life is online. My blog gets posted on the VEDA Facebook page, which has given me several connections. What is important to me, rather than a belief in a supernatural power, is a sense of community and connection.

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Meditation and Chronic Pain

by Rabbi Susan Averbach

I recently spent an entire Shabbat in a daylong retreat at a local mindfulness meditation center. The day consisted of alternately gathering with a group of people and silently sitting for forty-five minutes. Then we slowly walked with awareness of exactly where our feet were being placed, first one foot, then the other, as we walked, also for forty-five minutes. Sit / walk / sit / walk / silently eat lunch / sit / walk / sit / walk / sit, from 8:30 am until 4:15 pm. Then we listened to a talk for forty-five minutes. After the talk I went home, considerably more relaxed and mindful than I was at the beginning of the day.

Why talk about a day of sitting at a meditation center when I've been asked to write about a humanist response to trauma? Because I believe that we are all traumatized at one time or another and could benefit from regular meditation. Some of us have had traumatic childhoods. Some of us have lost loved ones to cancer or suicide or heart disease. Some of us have chronic physical pain. Some of us have chronic emotional pain or general restlessness or depression. Meditation practice does not require a belief in the supernatural and is quite fitting for those of us who are Humanistic Jews. Why? Because we Humanists are ideologically committed to meeting our challenges head on, without relying on prayer or magical thinking. We creatively and courageously carry on in whatever circumstances we find ourselves.

For some of us, the circumstances may be quite challenging. Let me share my experience with you.

On April 18, 2002, I was hit by a fast-moving car as I walked in a crosswalk. Both of my legs were badly broken at the knee and I had to face surgery and a long, painful rehabilitation process. I share here some of my journal entries from this period to bet-

ter explain what the experience was like, and to share a few lessons I learned from my experience.

1. Life is unpredictable.

From my journal:

I wake up around 7:20 am. I put on my favorite stretch blue jeans and light blue, V-neck, long-sleeve soft cotton shirt. The week at work has been quite productive. I'm writing out notes to prepare for the Hellenistic Judaism seminar in Detroit. Al and I are so excited about these two weeks of pure bliss—studying what we love to read and talk about, that period of history out of which rabbinic Judaism and Christianity developed. Our airline tickets are bought; our hotel accommodations are arranged. Soon we'll be leaving for Detroit. I pack my lunch in my backpack, put on my long heavy black coat—it does seem a little chilly this morning. I'll walk ahead to the train, since Al walks so much faster than I do. I get to the corner of Judson and Genessee, look carefully to see if any cars are coming, see the car stopped at the curb at the stop sign, step off the curb and start across the street, walking down the middle of the crosswalk. Suddenly I see a fast-moving car that seems as though it has come from nowhere. I have no time to get out of the way. Instantly, I'm hit in the legs, fly up to the windshield and am thrown to the ground. I am screaming, screaming loudly with anguish. My legs hurt indescribably. I keep screaming—I know that as long as I scream I am alive, I am conscious. I instinctively know that screaming will be a good thing for now. I am also aware that I can feel my legs. This is good. If I didn't feel my legs that would mean that I was paralyzed; and if I'm conscious and screaming, I'm not dead. This, too, is good.

Rabbi Susan Averbach is a member of the Society for Humanistic Judaism. She blogs at <http://rabbijubu.com>

There are many people around during the accident: students going to class, people cutting through City College to get to work, people waiting for the bus. 911 is called multiple times. I keep screaming. The ambulance comes. They ask questions—how old am I? can I feel my legs? etc. I am told to slow down my breathing. By this time my hands are tingling. Clearly, my screaming and fast breathing are causing me to hyperventilate. I ask the ambulance attendant how I should breathe and he just says to breathe slower. I try and succeed somewhat. Al is there with me. I'm happy he is there. Later I find out that he heard the thud of the accident and knew that I had been hit. The ambulance has trouble getting to San Francisco General Hospital quickly. There is too much traffic. The ride is slow, but finally we get there. The ER scene is classic—everyone is prodding and poking me and trying to determine the extent of my injuries. There are x-rays done of my legs, CT done of my whole body; it is finally determined that my legs are broken and nothing else.

2. People are extraordinarily generous and loving.

After being hit by the car, I was surrounded by people who helped me and my family deal with this crisis. I was especially amazed by the people who helped right after the accident. Again, from my journal:

Throughout all of this, I keep thinking “How do these people do their work with people in anguish?” I ask each person, the ambulance attendant, the doctors, the nurses, the orderlies, the x-ray technicians, “How do you do this? How do you work, day after day, with people who are in so much pain?” I express my gratitude constantly. I am in total awe of each person who attends me.

From the first day of my new world of pain, surgery, and rehabilitation, my friends and family were there for me. My husband, my children, my Jewish Humanist community (Kol Hadash in Berkeley, California), and my work community were generous with their time and loving words. We are often too busy to realize

how special people are. We, who do not believe in or rely on any supernatural powers, know that our support comes from within ourselves and from other people.

3. Cultivating assertiveness is a good idea.

Not all of the staff at the hospital was helpful. Hospitals are staffed less and less these days. Our healthcare system is not always as good as it could be. Again, from my journal:

The day after surgery, the physical therapist and her assistant came in to transfer me to a wheelchair. The transfer is excruciating. I wish there was a stronger word to use than excruciating. I wish that I could describe the pain. I know what pain is. I had two natural childbirths—no medication whatsoever for each birth, and the pain of my legs right now is much greater than the pain that I experienced during either of my natural childbirths. The pain service person comes in later in the day to see how the pain can be managed the next time the PT people were to come. They suggest that I take Toredol (a strong aspirin-like drug given intravenously) a half hour before the PT people come.

I now begin to use every ounce of my assertiveness. At this point I must be my own advocate. The communication between the pain service, the PT staff, and the nursing staff could be better. I have to say, more than once, that the PT staff should *not* come in until a half hour after I am given Toredol. I repeat myself as many times as it is necessary and they comply with the pain service's request. After the first day, they automatically arrange this and I am grateful, though I have to fight my resentment that I have to put forth so much effort to get them to do this in the first place.

4. Graciously accept help from people.

As Humanists we need to understand what it is like to be disabled and in need of care 24/7. Here is a dose of reality from my journal after my accident:

I haven't enumerated exactly how my life differs from an ordinary life. I cannot sleep in more than one position. I have to lie on my back and put one of my legs into the continuous motion machine for three hours and then switch in the middle of the night to the other leg. Ordinarily, I sleep on my side. I've never been able to sleep on my back, but now, if I want to get any sleep, I have to sleep on my back. I have not had one full straight eight hours of sleep since the accident. I get up between three to five times or so per night.

I cannot walk or stand, or cross my legs, or sit in one position for more than a minute or two without pushing up with my arms on the wheelchair wheels to relieve my aching back, or move my legs up or down to relieve my legs and/or my back. I am always uncomfortable, always.

I cannot shower; I cannot bathe; I cannot wash my own hair. My neighbor, Charlesie, has been kind enough to wash my hair for me once a week—in my bed. Al helps me give myself sponge baths. He has to get two large bowls of warm water and the wash rag and soap and the towel—and set this all up on chairs with plenty of newspaper to protect the chairs and the floor.

I cannot cook. I depend on Al to bring me my meals. I can wheel myself into the kitchen, but it's pretty difficult to reach things. The amount of effort that it takes to even get into the kitchen makes it impractical for me to get my own meals. Also, by afternoon I'm too tired to maneuver myself well enough to do much of anything other than read or listen to music or watch television.

My feet hurt all the time. It's almost as though they hurt because they are not being used the way they are accustomed to being used—no circulation—build-up of fluid (swelling?). It's hard to know why.

I can't get my own clothes. Al has to gather them for me. I can't dress myself. Al has to help me get into pants, because I can't reach down far enough to get my feet into the pants legs (or

pajama legs). I depend on Al for everything. No wonder he's tired. This is an ordeal.

5. Meditation lessens suffering.

There is not enough space here for me to relate the entire experience of my trauma. I was completely disabled and reliant on others for care. I experienced chronic, unrelenting pain, and my legs' range of motion was too small for normal activities, even after I was able to attempt walking. Luckily for me, this was mostly temporary (I felt relatively normal after five years), but I could not have gotten through this experience without the meditation skills that I had developed before the accident. I knew from meditation that a sensation was a sensation and nothing more than that. I knew that a circumstance was a circumstance, and most of the time I didn't add thoughts that the circumstance or sensation would never end or was intolerable or should not have happened. Meditation helped me to sit with a reality that I could not change. (For more on meditation, read "When Courage isn't Enough" in *Humanistic Judaism*, Volume XXXVIII, Number II-III Spring/Summer 2010.)

Aftermath

I recently gave a talk to one of our communities and shared Buddhist writings about pain and suffering. Before my accident, I thought it would be presumptuous to make these sorts of statements, especially statements about pain being inevitable and suffering being optional. After all, before the accident I had never experienced chronic pain, and it's easy to talk about ideas in the abstract. After the accident, I felt confident about sharing these suggestions about meditation practice.

However, even thirteen years since the accident, I was reminded about how to deal with pain. Shortly after the talk, I went on the daylong retreat which I described earlier. While there, I had the unfortunate experience of getting a migraine right in the middle of the daylong retreat. I get migraines so rarely that I had no medication with me. I get ocular migraines that begin with partial blindness before

turning into a severe headache and nausea. I had to meditate and observe these sensations for five more hours. I sat and observed and simply noted the experience. The sensations were not pleasant, but I didn't add any angst to the experience by thinking that the pain was intolerable. I just meditated and observed the sensations. I was reminded that we have to practice all the time in order to know how to deal with adversity.

Whether you are experiencing a major trauma or an everyday migraine, you are well served to know how to meditate through the experience and not add thoughts that cause you more suffering. This pragmatic, humanist approach served me well through my major ordeal after the accident and at other times as well. Let's bring meditation into our communities—and suffer less!

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Humanism and Raising an Autistic Child

by Jeremy Kridel

Our son, “S,” is autistic. Ten years old as I write this, S was never typical. He started reading words when he was two. He could use a computer when he was three. He was easy-going about change, and was relatively at ease in large groups of people.

He also repeated kindergarten. During the second go-around, he spent nearly half the year back in a developmental preschool so he could learn how to walk in a line and wait at a door.

S wasn’t the stereotypical autistic child—not that there is such a thing. Nor is there any particularly proper or characteristic response to an autism diagnosis for one’s child. S has been receiving therapeutic services since he was two years old, so we didn’t much worry about the diagnosis of “severely autistic” when he was four, but it can be catastrophic for other families.

Our catastrophe came later.

S spent kindergarten through third grade in public school. That setting—the large numbers of students, the noise, and the inflexible environment—was increasingly difficult for S. There were numerous disruptions in S’s attendance, and he spent more and more time outside the mainstream classroom. My wife left a job with our local Jewish Federation because of calls to pick up S from school early. During third grade, S’s agitation increased, with regular tantrums while going to or from school. He could only hold himself together so long before falling to pieces. We lived in fear of the phone ringing during the school day.

When he was one month shy of his tenth birthday—after brief periods of behavioral therapy, two years of medication adjustments,

four tries with various ADHD medications, an ever-present anti-anxiety medication, an anti-psychotic medication, and a stint on a drug study—S became violent. He became increasingly angry, and spent almost an entire day in a state of constant aggression, except when we gave him a medication that helped him sleep. We hoped sleep would allow him to “reboot” his system.

The first thing S did when he woke up? He gave a blood-curdling screech, and then kicked me. Then he kicked, hit, and scratched himself and us for two hours.

We took him to the ER (the autism specialist’s office made it quite clear there were no emergency appointments, but we could come in September) and waited for hours as he scratched, kicked, punched, smacked, and pulled hair. He attacked himself, my wife, my sister, the medical staff, and me. It took eight nurses, my sister, nitrous oxide, and me to hold him in place for blood tests. He was diagnosed as psychotic.

I never dreamed I would be afraid of a nine year-old.

There is a first time for everything.

II

S was admitted to a “pediatric stress center.” That’s a euphemism for a suicide and drug-overdose monitoring and counseling

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unit for teenagers. No shoelaces. No belts. No drawstrings in waistbands.

S was nine. The next youngest child was thirteen. S's screams the first night shook kids in other rooms out of their beds.

During May 2014, S would spend more than two weeks in these kinds of facilities. The first stay seemed to help; anti-psychotic and ADHD medications were changed, and he was calmer. But he regressed. He never returned to his third grade class: we didn't want to risk him harming other children. And, of course, we couldn't find a doctor.

Within a week of his release, S was violent again. We went to a different ER, one at a dedicated children's hospital. That hospital no longer had any inpatient psychiatric facilities.

S was turfed to a private facility. Though they knew on admission he lacked basic self-care skills, they didn't change his clothing or bathe him, wouldn't work with his behavioral therapist, couldn't figure out how to give him his medications, and wouldn't let us much past the lobby to help with any of this.

That's where S turned ten.

The day before S was scheduled to be released, while we were visiting him during the not-quite-daily visiting hour—hour, not hours—he threw a handful of metal bangles my wife had been wearing.

They landed squarely behind my ear. I couldn't see or hear right for about a minute.

The facility nevertheless released him the following day, because throwing metal at your father's head isn't "acute" behavior. But as luck would have it, the staff's inability to give S medication actually did help: he stopped getting the heaviest of the medications he was taking. It turned out that they were doing more harm than good.

We changed S's physician for his autism care and, since his tenth birthday, he has taken

only one medication at a time—an anti-anxiety medication. He's doing much better. But mental health hospitalization left its mark. S refuses to leave home most weekends if we talk about it in advance. If we drive by a hospital, he objects loudly that he is "all better now." Every time he emits even the smallest shriek, I worry we'll be headed back to the ER.

And, of course, there's the guilt of having institutionalized your kid for his tenth birthday. Dad-of-the-year award-winning material, that. (I'm still waiting for my plaque.)

III

So, as Humanists, what do we do in this situation?

We don't obsess over *why* S is autistic. There is no clear cause of autism. Obsessing over *why* is unhelpful with the *how* of the present, and pathologizing S doesn't help us love him as he is.

And no, vaccines did not cause S's autism.

I can't tell you what you should do in this situation. I can tell you what we did. It could probably have been done better, but I'm not in the business of turning back clocks.

We refused chaplaincy services everywhere we went. We turned to friends and family with varying degrees of success.

We took each day as it came; we did what we needed to do. We met with school officials and healthcare providers to develop a new plan. We went to work when we weren't in meetings or visiting S. We tried to care for ourselves as best we could. We spent extra time together, ate a lot of comfort food, and tried to accept help whenever it was offered. The last of those is important, and in retrospect we would have benefitted from asking for and accepting more help from more people.

Over time, with a change from an individualized program in our local public school to about forty hours per week of health insurance-

paid therapy, S has gotten better. He's gained the ability to express himself, he can manage some of his anxiety, and he's learned some functional skills in the world.

Our parenting has become a much more short-term affair since S's hospitalizations. The planning horizon shortened after May 2014. It's not, "I wonder if/where he'll go to college?" It's instead, "where will he go if insurance stops paying?"

So in part, we do what we've always done. We embrace S's difference. It's what makes him who he is: he's clever, he's funny. He's affectionate. I know, it sounds like he's not, but this is also a kid who randomly walks up to us, says he loves us, and gives us hugs and kisses. S was like that before his hospitalizations, and sometimes he's like that again now.

Embracing S's difference is not about extending him all the leeway he demands. He has a bedtime. He has meal times, and he has to eat at the table. He has to clean up his messes. He has to take a bath and brush his teeth. But it takes longer for him to develop those skills, which means we do more than other parents of children who are the same age to bridge skill gaps.

We also try to make sure he has the therapies he needs to develop skills to navigate his world. For S, this means Applied Behavior Analysis ("ABA"), which focuses on incentivizing desired behaviors. There's dispute over whether and to what degree ABA is the best possible therapy, but often there aren't other choices.

In its earliest forms, ABA did some bizarrely coercive things like attempting to enforce eye contact. S's therapists don't do that. He's learned to buy items in a store, sweep a floor, brush his teeth, tie his shoes, button his pants, zip his coat, use a washer and dryer, and fold shirts and towels, and has improved his use of commonly accepted means to express himself. It's hard to argue with success, and S tells us he enjoys his therapy time.

Embracing S's difference, it turns out, is an evidence-based affair. It is rational for us to do it, because his difference won't change. It is about seeing his unique value, his personhood, and finding ways to allow him to reach as much of his potential as he can. It is a fundamentally humanist thing, because to be a humanist is, essentially, to accept and work within the world as it is for a world we want to see, while finding the inherent value and dignity in each person.

IV

Rabbi Sherwin Wine wrote, "Courage is not an introspective victory. It is an act of will." (*Staying Sane in a Crazy World*). Courage is accepting the facts and choosing from the options that are real. It is getting up day after day and trying to move forward, knowing that the only things that will happen are the ones you and the others in your life can work up to accomplishing.

For our family, courage is not about being unafraid. Courage is about persevering when the hard times come and we want to hide in bed or beg off the day and wallow in our tears. Courage is about remembering that we have an obligation built from love to take care of another person who needs us more than his peers need their parents. Courage is about planning.

Our courage is not optional. Fortunately, most days, we have no trouble finding it.

But then there are days like the one after I started to write this article. A day when S gave me five hours' sleep and then was very much inside himself most of the day, chattering endlessly and nervously about *Bob the Builder* and *Sesame Street* and *Angry Birds Seasons* and the change of seasons and the end of November and the beginning of December and going home and not going home and eating cake and not eating lunch.

It was a day when S was asked to play a game of team tag at the park and I had to decline for him, because I knew he would be unable to quickly learn the rules; he suddenly tagged one of the kids, only to run off and never return

to the group again. It was a day when he was afraid to walk across a bridge he usually runs across at the playground. A day when every dog he saw sent him cowering (he's desperately afraid of all animals except fish). A day when S displayed fewer social capabilities at ten than the two year-olds playing on the toddlers' playset alongside him.

A day, in short, when I thought I was a laughable fraud for trying to write this article.

Those are the days when courage is simply not crying in public—not because I'm sorry for myself, but because, as the co-owner of S's therapy center has said, "cute at four, weird at fourteen, criminal at twenty four." What happens when my wife and I are gone? I don't care about someone remembering me; I care about someone remembering that S needs care, because there is dignity simply in being a person.

Sometimes, courage is remembering to update your estate plan. Or gritting your teeth

and filing an appeal when insurance benefits are denied. Or taking your kid to the park when you're not quite sure how that's going to go that day, because his head is in a place that has you worried and he's given his hands names and says they're going to hit people, but his favorite thing in the world is to swing, and he can't do it by himself.

Courage is figuring out what needs to be done, picking a piece you can do, and starting there. It's calling for help when you can't do it yourself. Sometimes help is family or friends, or just going to work on Monday hoping you don't get a call from school. Sometimes it's a therapist. And, candidly, sometimes help is an anti-depressant.

Individual courage is not always enough. Sometimes making it through the day is its own achievement; sometimes, even that takes help from others. On those days, courage is getting up and continuing on.

It's everyday courage; but it's not courage every day.



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Death Is Not a Dirty Word

by Rosalie Gottfried

Art and I married forty-two years ago. For the first thirty-seven years, we had an intense relationship. Then things began to change. He became very critical, forgetful, nasty even. He went to see his doctor every two weeks, forgetting that he had just been there two weeks earlier. He found fault with everything and everyone. He was unpleasant to be with. We suspected dementia.

By the spring of 2008, Art was leaving stores and not telling me, getting into his car and having accidents, and more. Searching for caregiver support groups on the Internet, I came upon a Health Assessment Program for Seniors (HAPS) offered by a local university. I arranged an appointment. Five doctors interviewed and examined Art, as well as a psychologist. The doctor who headed the neuropsychiatric unit rendered the diagnosis: progressive supranuclear palsy, or PSP. "It doesn't kill," we were told, "but it is progressive. He seems to be into it about two years, and it could last ten years or more." Art's primary care doctor was less optimistic: Art would last to the end of the year, he predicted.

By May, Art was no longer able to walk unassisted. I hired a part-time caregiver to help him dress, shower, and do other simple chores that Art was no longer able to do by himself. I tried to continue as normal a life as possible under the circumstances, but found it increasingly hard to maintain my schedule while accommodating his. Hardest of all were my attempts to cope with Art's anger and hostility, his unceasing insults and curses. I called 911 in desperation when he became too difficult, but it was soon clear that I would no longer be able to handle him. His falls during the night, his "accidents" on the floor were too much for me. We went together to several assisted living facilities—we needed one that would take his dog, Ralphie, as well—and he settled on one that he liked.

Art was moved into the facility in July. At first he seemed to like it. He had a roommate, and the room they shared was bright and pleasant. The meals were good, or so it seemed, and our children were able to visit. But within weeks, I began to hear the complaints: the service was poor, people were taking things, his roommate was abusive. By October, Art was losing his ability to distinguish day from night, was hallucinating, and was no longer coming to the dining room for meals, which now had to be brought to him. His vision had deteriorated. When Art got lost trying to find the television room, I bought him a set for his room. I got him DVDs of his favorite shows, but within days he was no longer able to operate the equipment. He could hardly walk any longer. And he was now wetting the bed and falling constantly.

I took him again to his doctor, who was shocked at Art's deterioration. "He needs hospice," the doctor said.

Again, I sought help through the Internet. An ad popped up and caught my attention: "A Place for Mom." I filled out the questionnaire and received an answer within twenty-four hours. There were six places for me to check out within the distance I had stipulated, as I knew I would be visiting Art there four or five times a week. I checked out the first two and didn't care for the look (dark) or the smell (sour), but the third place was a surprise. The attendants were caring, the facility was small enough for individual attention, and the residents were clean and well groomed. I met the owner, a woman named Hunn Phan, and she

Rosalie Gottfried trained as a madrikha and blossomed under the tutelage of Rabbi Sherwin Wine. Secular Humanistic Judaism has been an important part of her life, first with the Huntington Beach chapter and for many years, with the Orange County Laguna Woods group. Now in her 80th year, Gottfried continues to produce a monthly newsletter, conducts monthly Onegs, leads holiday celebrations, officiates at commemorations, continues her role as leader along with their Board, of the Laguna Woods Secular Jews of Orange County.

asked whether she could go and visit with Art. I agreed.

The following day she called me. “He hates it where he is and wants to get out,” she told me. “Don’t you worry about a thing. I’ll take care of it all.” By the 11th of November, Art was moved into Rainbow Cottage at Mission Viejo, along with his beloved Ralphie. Hunn visited every other day and personally saw to Art’s care. The facility was spotless, the caregivers gave him daily showers, and the food was tasty and attractively prepared.

But Art was spiraling down. Day by day he was failing. One day he would shout at me, “Get the hell out!” and the next day he would ask why I had let the doctor cut off my head. By the last week of November, he had full-time, round-the-clock hospice nurses in attendance.

On December 11, Rainbow Cottage had a Christmas party and Art was dressed and brought out to sit in the balmy temperatures of the yard with several dozen other residents and their families. He was able to enjoy the holiday fare and live entertainment, even singing “Jingle Bells” along with other participants. I sat with him, unable to contain the tears as I saw his deterioration.

Two nights later, Hunn called me. “Art is not doing well,” she said. I ran out of the house and called my daughter, Gayle, as I drove, unseeing, the interminable distance on the freeway from Dana Point to Mission Viejo. “You had better come this weekend,” I told her, “to say goodbye to Art.” She arrived Sunday morning and found him in bed. In an effort to calm his anxiety, and aggression, he had been given too much medication. I gave instructions that he was not to be given Ativan or morphine without first checking with me.

Several days later, he no longer needed either, as he was beyond the point of anxiety. Mostly he lay in bed, sipping water. I called my son, Barry, asking him how to get nourishment into Art, as he could no longer eat regular food. “Get pureed food—baby food—try that,”

he advised me. I ran to the market and bought jars of baby food. But two days later Art could no longer swallow even the baby food and no longer expressed hunger. By December 19, Art’s breathing had become labored. I stood by his bed, crying, as I watched him sink further and further. He opened his eyes, made an attempt to smile, and said, “I love you, Rosie.” “I know,” I said. “Will you marry me?” he asked. “We’re already married,” I told him. “We just had our forty-second anniversary on Monday.”

With tears streaming down my face, I bought a casket for Art. We had purchased cemetery plots five years earlier. I went to the local mortuary to make arrangements, as I knew the end was near. I was functioning in a dreamlike state, as if I was doing all this for someone else—not for my husband.

By Sunday, December 21, Art was no longer communicating. He couldn’t even blink his eyes so I had to lower and raise them for him, wiping away tears that appeared at the corners. I held Art’s hand, stroked his forehead, and told him it was okay to go. My son and his wife came in and said their goodbyes. Art’s breathing was labored, as he had mucus in his windpipe, which he couldn’t cough up. We asked his nurse, John, to aspirate him, but he said that the mucus was very deep down and the aspirating technique would be too difficult. So we waited, hearing Art’s rasping breath and feeling the cold sweat on his face and head. Finally, my daughter, a veterinary surgeon, asked John to check for a gag reflex. There was none. Gayle then realized that Art was upper brain-dead, and John was able to suction out the phlegm, allowing Art to breathe more easily. Gayle climbed into the bed and held Art’s head against her chest, stroking and caressing him as she gave him permission to go. His breathing became shallower and shallower, quieter and quieter, until it stopped. He was gone.

The staff at the funeral home were very cooperative. They took care of the Social Security, the Veterans Bureau, and the ordering of the death certificates. Hunn gave me the name of a rabbi who would understand

our secular sensibilities, who assured me he could deliver a service without bringing in the supernatural. I asked several longtime friends to deliver eulogies, and at the funeral service I was able to read mine without too much crying. Gayle prepared bulletin boards with pictures of Art throughout the years. She spoke about his contribution to the show horse industry over the years. She extolled his creativity and inventiveness, mentioning things he had innovated that are now considered usual and ordinary. There were tears but also laughter. At the cemetery, in the wind and chill of late December, we laid Art to rest amongst a multitude of ethnicities—we didn't want him to be in a Jewish cemetery where "Jewish" meant "religious." My daughter-in-law, a secular Muslim, prepared a wonderful *shiva* for the people who came back after the services.

And then I came home—home to an emptiness that was quite different from the emptiness of the previous months. Now there was an extra sense of aloneness. I kept seeing Art's last smile as he said, "I love you, Rosie. Will you marry me?" In order to stem the flow of grief, I kept harkening back to the "stupid bitch" I had been called a week earlier. But the man to whom I had been married was not that angry, hostile, nasty person. He was the kind, generous, smiling, loving person with whom I had spent so many years.

How could I deal with the next few weeks? I read the material on death and dying in the issue of *Humanistic Judaism* devoted to that subject. I read Rabbi Sherwin Wine's words in the *Guide to Humanistic Judaism*. The Sunday following the funeral, I devoted the Bible class I conduct for our local community to talking about dying and grief. Everyone had a chance to speak about his or her own experience with

death—a mate's or a parent's or a child's. Many tears flowed, but it was a cleansing experience.

I have spent a great deal of time thinking about this final phase of the life cycle. I don't believe there is another life beyond, and I don't believe there is a soul that is recycled. I do believe that one must maximize one's days on Earth and enjoy them and experience them to the best of one's ability. Dying without pain is a blessing, and Art died without pain. I hope I will, as well. As the last of my generation in our family, the specter of death hangs very near. And, although I'm healthy, I'm in my 70s; I have no illusions of decades left.

Before the funeral, I had his nurse and the attendant dress Art in his best suit with a beautiful shirt and his very good shoes. I didn't want him laid to rest in a shroud. He lived all his life as a lover of fine clothes, and that's the way I wanted him to be buried. So my last memories of him are in fine clothes. His dog, Ralphie, is with me now. My friend Steve loves him and takes good care of him. And I have beautiful Judaic art, which Art painted for me, that adorns the walls of my new cottage (I moved), and which I will leave to the Birmingham Temple when I depart this Earth.

Yes, there is an empty place in my heart that will remain empty for the rest of my life. But I'm determined to live out my days with a happy feeling, and I know that as I work at it, it will happen. I can't pretend about death, but I can't obsess about it, either. It is a fact of life. I'm glad to have had the chance to live a full, exciting life. I hope this story offers comfort to others who have experienced a death in the family. Know that we have the same pain, the same grief, the same sadness, but also the same hope for a sunnier, happier day.

WISDOM from WINE

In each issue of Humanistic Judaism, we reprint a selection from the writings of Rabbi Sherwin Wine. This selection was from “Rejecting Despair” in Staying Sane in a Crazy World.

Rejecting Despair by Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine

Fifteen years ago I encountered one of the more extraordinary people to pass through my life.... [H]e was Vietnamese. He told me that he had fled Saigon in 1975, making his way to Bangkok and then to Los Angeles. He was Catholic, a graduate of the University of Paris. He had been a French teacher in Saigon for twelve years. Although he told me he was forty, he looked much older. He was either ill or had undergone some intense suffering. Suffering was the answer. His parents, who were wealthy landowners, had been arrested by the Vietnamese, and killed. His two brothers were sent to harsh re-education camps where they were savagely beaten. One died, the other was so brutalized that he was unable to speak and even now is confined to some hellish mental institution. He seemed reluctant to tell me his story, as though all this bad news was somehow in bad taste. But I could see that he really wanted to talk and that something far more terrible was waiting to be revealed. Tears filled his eyes as he went on with his story. He had come to America from Bangkok with his young wife. Speaking some English, he had become a French tutor for the children of a wealthy family in Beverly Hills. Six months before our encounter, he took his family on their first vacation in America. He borrowed a friend's car and was driving north on the coastal highway to San Francisco when disaster struck. A speeding car failed to stay in its lane while rounding a curve and rammed his engine. His son was killed instantly. His wife lingered for four days, unconscious in the hospital, before she died.

He sustained fractures over his entire body and was now flying to New York to see a bone specialist about a femur that was not healing. As the man spoke, I could feel his pain. But I, strangely enough, did not sense despair.

Eager to console him, I said to him, “It is hard for me to imagine all the pain you must be experiencing. You have lost almost everything that you have loved. But I assume that your religious faith has sustained you through these terrible times.”

The man smiled, hesitated, and then, with no apology, said, “Whatever faith I had is gone. The people I loved died before their time and with agonies they did not deserve. I no longer believe that there is a God I wish to talk to.” “How then, are you coping with all this tragedy?” I asked. “You don't look defeated.” He spoke without pausing to collect his thoughts. “I still want to live. I still want to have a family. I still want to be happy. No matter what has happened to me, I still want to go on.” And, then, he reflected for a moment, and said, “I do not have any unrealistic

Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine (1928-2007) was the intellectual framer of Humanistic Judaism, founding rabbi of the Society for Humanistic Judaism, and founder of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism, as well as a prolific writer, speaker, and public figure. He served as rabbi of the Birmingham Temple in Farmington Hills, Michigan, for more than forty years. In addition to innumerable periodical articles, including the lead article in almost every issue of this journal, he was the author of *Judaism Beyond God, Celebration: A Ceremonial Guide for Humanists and Humanistic Jews, A Provocative People, and Staying Sane in a Crazy World* (all available from the Society for Humanistic Judaism, www.shj.org/store).

hopes. I do not imagine that I can forget all the terrible things that have happened to me. I do not believe that the impossible pain in my heart will go away. I do not expect that whatever God is out there will console me and make everything all right. The world out there is no longer a place where I find any meaning. But I want to live and that gives meaning to my life.”

I wanted to stay and listen to him but a loud voice announced my flight. I wished him well and said goodbye—and never forgot what he said to me.

The man had summed up what I had always felt and believed. The universe we live in is, indeed, meaningless. For all its infinite complexity and vast dogmas, it has no agenda. It does not want to live or die. It does not want to love or hate. It does not want to help or harm. It has no desires. It just happens. There is force and motion. But there is no passion. Electrons and protons and neutrons stick together—not because they love each other—but because there is some dumb unconscious universal “glue” that holds them tight. Viruses invade cells and turn them cancerous—not because of malice—but because they have this dumb unconscious compulsion to duplicate themselves. The world is there; but it does not care whether it is there or not there.

But human beings do care. We want to live. We have desire. And desire breeds passion. We may be the universe’s first audience. We turn the world into a drama of good and evil by what we want and need. Through our eyes we give the universe grandeur. Through our ears we transform motion into sound and music. Through our struggle to live we divide the world into the useful and the useless, the beautiful and the ugly, the wonderful and the terrible. The universe does not give meaning to human existence. It is human desire that gives meaning to the universe. We may be a microscopic audience in a microscopic auditorium. But without our applause, there is no play.

The world has no primary meaning. But the human will to live does. Even though we are part of the universe and have our root in

the mindless atoms and molecules that move without wanting to move, our brains give us desire and purpose. More basic than Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am” is the more passionate declaration “I want, therefore I live.” The purpose of human life comes from human need.

The world is neither our friend nor our foe. It is what we bump into on our way to satisfying our needs. It is what other creatures bump into on the way to satisfying their needs. There are no guarantees that we will get what we want. And there is no other stage on which we can play out the drama of our life. The theater may be less than what we want. There may be no grand director to insure our success. We may feel the stage crowded with other people doing their show and sharing the props. We may stumble and fall. We may mumble and grumble. We may wail and protest. But the show goes on because we are never quite sure how it will end.

Rejecting despair is no grand act of existential defiance. We do not need the anger of resentment. “The world does not give a damn whether I live or I die. But I do give a damn. Therefore, I will not surrender. I will not give the world the satisfaction of dying. I will do what it refuses to do. I will affirm life. I will fight for life, even though my struggle may be hopeless.”

This dramatic defiance always seems to view the universe as some kind of conscious adversary who desires our extinction. But there is no one to stick your tongue out at. “I’ll show you” is no more rational than “I worship you.” Both presuppose a king that can respond to either adoration or repudiation. Telling God off makes no more sense than telling Him that He is wonderful. It is like kicking the door. It does not make any difference to the door.

The universe is neither our friend nor our enemy. Sometimes it is warm and cuddly. Sometimes it is cold and hard. It is just there, for us to use or not use, to touch or to avoid, to embrace or to flee from. If it were all cold and all hard, the drama of life would not be worth playing. Human life has meaning, first of all, because we want to live and be happy. But if there is no chance for happiness, if there is

only the promise of pain and suffering, then there is not enough meaning to persist in the struggle. If life is only a cruel joke, where we want what we can never have, then suicide is more rational than survival.

Realists are romantic. But they never over-romanticize. They never turn the world into this [Pollyanna] paradise of lovey-dovey where

even the lions and the lambs are kissing each other and everything turns out for the best. Nor do they dramatize life as a vale of tears filled with pain, agony and betrayal, where love is a cruel deception and hope is the stuff of fantasy. Both extremes are illusions. Despair is often as unjustified as childlike faith. It is a poetic posture, charming in the young, but without any real substance.

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Living Authentic Lives

by Rabbi Miriam Jerris

When someone asks me what has contributed to the endurance of the Jewish people, I typically answer, “Our adaptability!” Jewish continuity relies on Judaism’s ability to change to fit the needs of Jews in their time.

Humanistic Judaism is well positioned to be an important influence on Jewish life today and tomorrow. As Humanistic Jews, we value and appreciate Jewish culture and identity, and believe that we live our lives independent of a personal, intervening supernatural presence. We insist on saying what we believe and believing what we say. There are other reasons to be a Humanistic Jew, but for me being able to live authentically—a life of integrity—is the most compelling reason. Authenticity encompasses honesty, truth, intellectual consistency, self-responsibility, and a vibrant connection to one’s Jewish identity.

Although Humanistic Judaism provides a framework for an authentic life, it only hints at how to achieve one of the most difficult of human quests: to discover what brings meaning to our lives. If we stop, take a deep breath, and allow ourselves to be fully present in the moment—if we free ourselves from the noise in our heads and open ourselves up to what we truly want in life, what would we say?

As Humanistic Jews, we know that the answer is to be found in the human condition, in this world, and that we are responsible for creating meaning and providing purpose. We do so through our human relationships and connections—authentic connections with our families, friends, and community.

Toward the latter part of his career, Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine, the founder of Humanistic Judaism, often spoke about a “life of courage.” The life of courage includes these concepts: 1. Facing the reality of living in an uncaring universe. 2. Creating a purposeful life of con-

nection and accepting responsibility in this world. 3. Discovering truth by using the power of reason and scientific inquiry. 4. Relying on empirical methodology, and 5. Considering the consequences of our actions as the path to ethical behavior. One of the most significant lessons Sherwin taught was that “we are our behavior.” He spoke about consistency of beliefs, words, and behavior as central to the life of courage. According to Wine, the reward for following this path is dignity.

Although Rabbi Wine considered passion and emotional expression to be essential to the life of courage, I do not believe that Humanistic Judaism has effectively integrated those aspects of human experience into its philosophy and practice. How do we move from intellectual integrity to emotional authenticity and connection? I am convinced that our inability to do so is one of the main factors holding back the growth of the movement, the missing link in our approach. It was the missing link for me until I heard Professor Brené Brown speak.

Driving to Chicago for Mother’s Day, I was listening to “TED Talks” on National Public Radio, when suddenly Brown was talking and I was captivated. Still driving, I reached frantically into my purse, pulled out a pen and a piece of paper (my husband’s Mother’s Day card to me) and started writing. Even as I wrote, I realized this woman was speaking to *me*, saying out loud everything I believe to be true, psychologically and emotionally. According to Brown, “Connection is why we are here. We are hardwired to connect with others; it’s what gives purpose and meaning to our lives, and without it there is suffering.”

Rabbi Miriam Jerris, Ph.D. is the rabbi of the Society for Humanistic Judaism and formerly served as its first executive director. She is ordained as a Humanist celebrant by the Humanist Society. She holds master’s degrees in Near Eastern studies and clinical and Humanistic Psychology and a doctorate in Jewish studies. She sits on the editorial board of this journal.

Brown addressed the emotions of vulnerability and shame, and how grappling with those feelings can lead the way to creativity, innovation, change, and connection. A research professor at the University of Houston's Graduate College of Social Work, she has spent the past decade studying vulnerability, courage, worthiness, and shame, and has written a number of books, including *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way we Live, Love and Lead*. Brown's "TED Talk" received more than ten million hits—yes, ten million. Apparently she is speaking to more people than just me. After introducing her ideas through her TED Talk, she was flooded with lecture invitations. Everyone wanted to hear her thoughts on creativity, innovation, change, and connection, but she was repeatedly asked to do so without speaking about vulnerability and shame.

Yet, as you may have surmised, they are inextricably linked. Connection requires vulnerability. As Brown puts it, "there is no 'get out of vulnerability free' card." There is no way to avoid uncertainty, risk, emotional exposure, and the fear and anxiety that accompany them. And once we can internalize that reality, we face the next difficult lesson—that achieving vulnerability is no easy task, and it is consistently hijacked by shame.

Brown's definition of shame is the belief that we are not enough, that we are not worthy of love and belonging. Shame is the "fear of disconnection," "the intensely painful feeling of believing that we are flawed, and therefore unworthy of love and belonging." It is the thought that not only am I "stupid," but my "stupidity" renders me unworthy.

According to Brown, shame is universal. The only people who do not experience shame lack the capacity for human connection. So our choice is to embrace our shame or admit that we are sociopaths. Still, no one likes to talk about shame; and the less we talk about it, the more control it has over our lives. So what do we do? We develop shame resilience. We do this by recognizing shame and understanding its triggers, by practicing critical awareness,

by reaching out or becoming vulnerable, and by speaking about shame. Shame resilience is the ability to be authentic when we are experiencing shame, without sacrificing our values, and to emerge from the shame experience with more courage, compassion, and empathy.

As I listened to Brown, I began to formulate a question: How can Humanistic Judaism help us to create authentically meaningful lives?

In my roles as rabbi of the Society for Humanistic Judaism and as faculty for the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism's Rabbinic Seminary, I have acquired some interesting notions about individuals and groups and the relationship between them. The relationship is mirrored in biology. Organisms in nature are part of an overall system. Organisms naturally seek the freedom to be self-determined and unique, while at the same time they seek out others for connection. This is also true of humans. The interplay between individual needs and the desire for connection contain an inherent paradox that ultimately leads to moments of conflict when the needs of the individual and the needs of the group do not coincide. We are part of a system in which our individual needs inevitably conflict with the often different needs of the groups to which we belong. Understanding that reality can help us bridge the gap between intellectual integrity and emotional authenticity, a gap that can lead to disconnection.

Brown's research turned up individuals who were more shame resilient than others and had a stronger belief in their worthiness. Brown calls these people "wholehearted." On the basis of these findings, she developed ten guideposts for wholehearted living [which she explained in her book *The Gifts of Imperfection*]. They are:

Cultivating authenticity: Letting go of what people think

Cultivating self-compassion: Letting go of perfectionism

Cultivating a resilient spirit: Letting go of numbing and powerlessness

Cultivating gratitude and joy: Letting go of scarcity and fear

Cultivating intuition and trusting faith: Letting go of the need for certainty

Cultivating creativity: Letting go of comparison

Cultivating play and rest: Letting go of exhaustion as a status symbol and productivity as self-worth

Cultivating calm and stillness: Letting go of anxiety as a lifestyle

Cultivating meaningful work: Letting go of self-doubt and “supposed to.”

Cultivating laughter, song, and dance: Letting go of being cool and “always in control.”

I am convinced that this approach can transform Humanistic Judaism by focusing on emotional aspects that are significantly lacking. If Sherwin Wine’s “life of courage” is expanded to include “wholehearted living,” we will attract people who have not been drawn to us and retain those who have not felt compelled to stay with us. I cannot think of a more profoundly meaningful and purposeful way to live out my life. And it will be especially meaningful to have others join me in this very human quest of the spirit.

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A Rabbi's Journey to Humanistic Judaism

by Rabbi Peter H. Schweitzer

I have often speculated that, had I learned Hebrew as a child and then become bar mitzvah, I probably would not have undertaken an exploration of my Jewish roots in college (majoring in Judaic studies and becoming a student leader at Hillel), visited Israel to work on an archeological dig, and finally gone on to become a rabbi. Instead, like most of my peers, I would have checked out at age thirteen, or at sixteen after Confirmation. And, like most of my peers today, I would probably check in only a few times a year or, perhaps, give up affiliation altogether with organized Judaism.

Do I Believe the Words I'm Praying?

As a child, I learned the familiar prayers and songs used in services: the *Shema* and the *Barkhu*, *Hinay Ma Tov*, and *Ayn Kelohaynu*. But I never paid attention to the words. In fact, even after I entered the rabbinate, I was concerned more with the choreography of the service than with the content. Only later did I wonder who this God was to whom I was praying, or question the core beliefs of traditional Judaism, which I had simply accepted on the authority of inherited doctrine.

It was while conducting funeral services as a rabbi that I first began to find inconsistencies between my own beliefs and the prayers. The liturgy struck me as naive and dishonest. It offered little comfort with its stiff-upper-lip denial of suffering. In the face of death and tragedy, and certainly after the Holocaust and nuclear devastation, I could not accept God as a shepherd whose rod and staff were supposed to comfort me.

In fact, I came to discover that the biblical deity is not always so charitable and comforting. Portrayed as a kind despot ("Our Father, Our King"), God is often bossy, arrogant, and

vindictive—not exactly one's idea of a beneficent caretaker. Postmodernists redefine God as a force or spirit of the universe, but this attempt at theological sleight of hand cannot hide the truth: Yahweh, the Jewish God, is no metaphorical abstraction. Rather, he is a very male god, oftentimes macho, and perfectly appropriate to a patriarchal society invested in mythology, but not to an egalitarian culture like our own that is committed to reason, scientific knowledge, and human ingenuity.

Life is often unfair, and it takes human courage, rather than divine blessings, to endure pain. If comfort is to be found, it comes from within oneself—from self-reliance—or from the support of family and friends. It also comes from the members of a community who support one another, sharing their joys, and accepting the diversity of cultural backgrounds.

Comfort Comes From Intellectual Integrity

Comfort comes also from intellectual integrity. My liturgical language must be clear and honest, as well as evocative and uplifting. I need to use words that I can recite unequivocally. I cannot use language for which I must apologize. When I develop new liturgy for my congregation, I borrow and modify forms and notions from the past that speak to our modern sensibilities. Traditional melodies, kept as tributes to our memories, are laid over with new lyrics that are true to our beliefs. New meditations and songs reflect our creativity. We affirm our identification with the Jewish people and the Jewish experience while we also affirm our right and responsibility to ques-

Rabbi Peter Schweitzer is rabbi of the City Congregation for Humanistic Judaism in New York. A different version of this article appeared in the June 2000 issue of *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Ideas*. Rabbi Schweitzer is a member of the editorial board of this journal.

tion, reject, modify, adapt, and create celebrations and liturgy anew. As it has throughout history, Judaism continues to evolve.

I was raised to believe that the Torah was sacrosanct and unsurpassed in its wisdom. I have since learned that the Torah does not contain all truth, but is a fallible human document written over a vast period by many authors whose views do not necessarily agree. The Torah addresses the needs and realities of a particular epoch and place far different and remote from our own. We live in a postmodern, Internet world, and our horizons encompass an entire universe far beyond the ancient desert. While Humanistic Jews preserve time-honored lessons of Torah and Talmud, we also obtain equally important and compelling teachings from modern literature and science

that address contemporary situations and challenges. We draw lessons from the collective experiences of the Jewish people, and of people universally. We also draw lessons from the experiences of our own families and personal lives.

My journey has been one of exploration and growth. As a child, I lovingly embraced the songs and stories of my people. As an adolescent, I discovered philosophy and rational inquiry. As an adult, I reclaimed my Jewish roots, but also discovered that I could do so with integrity and authenticity as a Secular Humanistic Jew. My participation in the Jewish people is no less strong or passionate than it was in my youth. But now it is an affiliation I embrace, not just with my heart, but with my head as well—and, as before, with all my might.

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It Ain't Necessarily So

by Bennett Muraskin

How much of the Bible is historically accurate? Some people take literally the stories of Adam and Eve or of Noah. Far more will insist that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were real, though with no firmer historical basis. In fact, there is virtually no historical basis for the entire Torah, nor for at least the following two books of the Bible, Joshua and Judges.

The biblical patriarchs and matriarchs, Joseph and his brothers are legendary figures—unless you truly believe that Sarah had a child in her 90s, or that Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt when she looked back at what God did to Sodom and Gomorrah. Furthermore, the patriarchs' conduct is often highly objectionable. For example, in Genesis 34, a non-Jewish tribal leader rapes Dinah, the only sister of the twelve sons of Jacob. The tribal leader falls in love with Dinah and is willing to make amends by taking her as his wife. The brothers agree, but only on the condition that these non-Jews circumcise themselves first. They do, but while they are recovering from what would have been very painful surgery, Levi and Simeon swoop down and massacre them, while their brothers join in looting their city and seizing their women and children. Before Jacob dies, he curses Levi and Simeon for their conduct, but Levi's descendants are nevertheless granted the exclusive right to serve as priests. Simeon's descendants are destined to be few in number. The other brothers suffer no consequences. Not a very edifying story. But don't worry, it never happened.

The seven books of the Bible that follow the Torah, Joshua, Judges, the two books of Samuel and the two books of Kings, which relate the supposed conquest of Canaan, the creation of the first Jewish kingdom, and the emergence and reign of the Davidic dynasty, are also full of violence, intrigue, and betrayals. Once again, most of it cannot be historically verified. The Bible does contain some edifying books that Secular Humanistic Jews can

appreciate—for example, Ruth, Song of Songs, Jonah, Job, and Ecclesiastes—but they are also not historical.

The first historical evidence for the existence of a Semitic people known as “Israel” is the Merneptah Stele, a victory monument from 1208 B.C.E. celebrating the Egyptian conquest of Canaan with the phrase, “Israel is wasted, bare of seed.” Of course, the people of Israel were not destroyed, but neither did they emerge from Egyptian slavery to conquer Canaan.

There is no written or archeological record of any mass migration through the Sinai desert to what became the land of Israel. Had there been an Exodus, it would have occurred in the mid-thirteenth century B.C.E. But the first written reference to that story is dated to around 1000 B.C.E, and it relates to the drowning of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea. Of course, such an occurrence would have been impossible. Could high tides engulf an entire army? And how would Pharaoh's generals not know the time of high tide in their own country? Other aspects of the Exodus story are equally unbelievable. Could Moses have repeatedly marched in and out of Pharaoh's palace, making demands, without being arrested or executed on the spot? Would a mother wanting to save her infant's life place him in a basket and send him downstream? Would a princess bathe in the Nile, which was undoubtedly used for sewage? Could anyone be lost for forty years in the Sinai desert, even if led by men who refused to ask for directions?

We should be glad that the Exodus story is fictional, because the plagues supposedly inflicted on the Egyptians are horrific—in-

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cluding the death of every firstborn Egyptian son—and the Israelite conquest of Canaan as depicted in the Book of Joshua was a genocide! Fortunately, the latest scholarship reveals that the Israelites were in fact dissident/disenfranchised Canaanites. Far from wanting to invade Canaan, the Israelites wanted to get out. These Canaanites were among the poorer segments of society who felt oppressed living in city-states ruled by wealthy elites. They voted with their feet, migrating eastward to the hill country to establish more egalitarian communities based on small-scale farming and raising livestock. Desert nomads apparently joined them and, later, so did a small group of Canaanites who once had been slaves in Egypt.

Passing through Midian, the liberated former slaves had adopted the Midianite god, Yahu, and created a story of their divine deliverance from Egyptian slavery. They found their way to the hill country, where they encountered the tribes who had fled the tyranny of the Canaanite city-states. *Yahu*—considered to be a god of freedom—and the story of divine deliverance were then adopted by the entire Canaanite community. This message was so powerful that it brought people together and gave them a new identity. A group emerged with a god called Yahweh, who, they claimed, had brought the entire people out of Egypt. These became the Israelites—a combination of disenfranchised Canaanites and runaway slaves from Egypt, perhaps not the “mixed multitude” described in the Book of Exodus, but a new people created out of diverse streams.

As the established Canaanite city-states declined, weakened by internal decay and civil strife, the Israelites gradually took control of the entire territory. Joshua did not fight the battle of Jericho, and the walls did not tumble down. To prove their superiority over their old adversaries, biblical writers claimed that the Israelites had invaded, conquered, and destroyed Canaan with the help of a god who had promised the land to them.

Real Jewish history begins with David. But did David rise from a shepherd boy to a king? Did he slay Goliath? Did he send Uriah the

Hittite to die in battle so he could take Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba, for his consort? Did he have a son, Absalom, who rebelled against his father and was killed by one of David’s generals when found hanging from the branches of a tree by his hair? Your guess is as good as mine.

A monument in northern Israel, known as the Tel Dan Stele, celebrates a victory by the King of Damascus over the house of David. It is dated between 850 and 800 B.C.E. Archeologists and historians have inferred from this that a dynasty founded by a King David existed, beginning around 1000 B.C.E. It was not the large kingdom depicted in the two Books of Samuel, but a modestly sized kingdom with little influence in the region. The fact that they were not written until hundreds of years later makes it impossible to verify any of the details.

It is likewise impossible to verify when Jerusalem was founded; it may have existed in David’s time as a small town. When the first Temple was built is in dispute because its ruins have never been found. Construction may have started by David’s son Solomon, as stated in the Bible, or by the Israelite Kings, Omri and Ahab in the second half of the ninth century C.E. (885-850). These kings receive very bad press in the Bible because they worshipped pagan gods. If they did not build the Temple, they likely expanded it to impressive proportions.

It is unclear whether there was ever a united kingdom of Israel that split after Solomon’s death into a northern kingdom of Israel and a southern kingdom of Judah. We do know that the northern kingdom was larger in area and population, more highly developed, and more cosmopolitan than its southern neighbor (the glorification of David and Solomon as great and powerful kings was the product of later propaganda, probably meant to enhance the prestige of their successors). We also know that the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C.E., leaving the smaller kingdom of Judah, whose inhabitants became known as Jews.

By the reign of King Josiah of Judah (640-610 B.C.E.), we can say that Jewish history

has begun in earnest, because from that time onward we have multiple sources and solid archaeological evidence to go on. Josiah began the effort to purge Judaism of all pagan influences in favor of strict worship of Yahweh, centralized in the Jerusalem Temple. *Deuteronomy*, the last book of the Torah (traditionally misattributed to Moses) was written during Josiah's reign. The most monotheistic book of the Torah, it is thought to have originated from the same tradition of writers who produced Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings.

In 586 B.C.E., the Babylonian empire conquered Judah, destroying the Temple and carrying the kingdom's leaders into exile. Ironically, it was during the Babylonian exile that many Jewish religious practices and beliefs took shape: the Sabbath as a day of rest, the regimen of daily prayer, the rite of circumcision, the concept of the messiah, and belief in life after death, among others. And it was in Babylon that the Torah was edited, enshrining the authority of the priesthood, and establishing universal monotheism as the exclusive Jewish belief system. Before that, monotheism was hotly contested by rival religions and was tribal in nature; Yahweh was considered the exclusive Jewish god, not the universal god.

In 539 B.C.E., the Persian emperor, Cyrus, who had conquered Mesopotamia, gave the Jews permission to return to Judah, but it was not for another two decades that permission was granted to rebuild the Temple. With the return from Babylon of an organized and disciplined elite supported by the teachings of the prophet Jeremiah, Yahweh became the only God—the universal God—and all others were condemned as idols. Some Jews remained in Babylonia and some had migrated to Egypt, marking the beginning of the Diaspora and the emergence of the Jews as an international people. The Bible, it is said, became our “portable homeland.”

Among those who returned from exile was a fanatical priest named Ezra, who arrived in Judah with some five hundred other priests, some time, between 458 B.C.E. and 397 B.C.E. They considered those Jews who were never exiled and remained in Judah, or who moved

south from what used to be the kingdom of Israel (known as Samaritans), to be semi-pagans. Perhaps backed by the authority of the Persian-appointed Jewish governor, Nehemiah (because if Ezra came in 397 B.C.E., he would never have met Nehemiah!), Ezra refused to allow the Samaritans to join in the rebuilding of the Temple, and forced Jewish men to divorce their Samaritan wives and send them away, along with their children. While still in Babylon, Ezra edited something that was probably close to the Torah as we know it today; after arriving in Judah, he declared that book to be the law of the land and ordered that it be read to the multitudes on a weekly basis. And the book that bears Ezra's name is one of the last historical books of the Bible.

George and Ira Gershwin got it right: “The things that you're liable to read in the Bible, it ain't necessarily so.” And much of what is so, isn't so nice.

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IN THE PRESS

“In Defense of Cultural Judaism”

by Rabbi Denise Handlarski

Many people were surprised that a 2013 Pew report found that a growing number of Jews are without any particular religious attachments and that most perceive Jewish identity as a matter of culture or ancestry. I'm surprised by their surprise. These are trends we've been seeing for decades.

Change makes people nervous, and it is with true empathy and respect that I acknowledge the fears of those who make claims that cultural Judaism is “not enough.” It is difficult for people for whom religious devotion, prayer, and synagogue life have been crucial to their Judaism to understand how rich and meaningful cultural Judaism can be, especially in the context of congregation and community.

Their fears come from a longing for Jewish continuity, which is a longing I share. But the worrying tones, and the admonitions and accusations that cultural Jews hear all the time—that their beliefs and practices are shallow and meaningless—do not encourage them to participate more actively in Jewish life.

There are two dominant, yet competing narratives in contemporary Jewish discourse. On the one hand are the deep concerns for Jewish continuity, and on the other are the politics of exclusion that suggest to cultural Jews, intermarried Jews, and Jews who do not fit a particular set of expectations and practices that they aren't welcome, aren't doing it right, or, worst of all, aren't Jewish at all.

I am a rabbi at Toronto's Oraynu Congregation for Humanistic Judaism. We provide a congregational context for what many call cultural Judaism. The movement of Humanistic Judaism, which is fifty years old, offers rich and

meaningful holiday celebrations, educational programs, and congregations wherein cultural Jews can connect with Jewish tradition and community. Humanistic Judaism offers the best of secular humanism and the best, in our view, of Judaism. We offer a school, which has a deep focus on Jewish history, culture, and *tikkun olam*. We have dynamic adult education programs where art, Jewish thinkers, and text are studied and debated. Our holiday programs offer music, poetry, reflections, and adaptations of traditional Jewish texts. Our life-cycle celebrations and commemorations from birth to death feature Jewish tradition and human-centered language that truly celebrates the person or people at the heart of the ceremony. We are, in short, very proud of how deep, meaningful, and rich our expression of Judaism is. Those who claim that cultural Judaism is shallow have never seen us in action. In fact, the experience of attending synagogue and saying prayers that one does not believe feels far more shallow—I know, because I was one of those Jews, wandering and wondering, until I found Humanistic Judaism.

There is no question our movement is not for everyone. Neither is Orthodoxy. We exist on a spectrum of beliefs and practices. My concern is not that people disagree with my ideas about theology, or who the Jews have been, are, or should be. My concern is that we have so much in common along the Jewish spectrum, but the politics of exclusion mean that we often cannot dialogue, share experiences, and learn from one another.

Rabbi Denise Handlarski is rabbi of Oraynu Congregation for Humanistic Judaism in Toronto. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the Society for Humanistic Judaism. This article was originally published in the August 29, 2014 edition of the *Canadian Jewish News*.

Humanistic Judaism is not a movement defined by what we do not believe, but rather by what we do believe. We believe that Judaism should be welcoming of all who wish to be part of our family—those who are born into it, choose to be part of it, or marry into it. We need not all be the same to recognize our shared heritage and/or connection. We believe that equality and egalitarianism should be

an inherent and important part of our Judaism. We believe that Jewish history grounds us and gives us roots. We believe that Jewish creativity and human ingenuity give us branches. We believe that tradition gets a vote but not a veto. Most importantly, we believe in the power of ourselves and one another to affect meaningful and positive change in the world.

Humanistic Judaism

strengthening our connection to our Jewish heritage,
celebrating Jewish holidays with meaning and relevance in our time,
providing a community for us, continuity for our children,
enhancing pluralism in the Jewish community

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IN REVIEW

“And You Shall Teach Them to Your Children” ***The Veterans of History: A Young Person’s History of the Jews*** **by Mitchell Silver** **reviewed by Rabbi Edward J. Klein**

For many centuries after the destruction of the Second Temple, Jewish history was viewed through a theological and literary lens, rather than in political or economic terms. The traditional view could be summed up thus: “because of our sins we were exiled from our land.” It was only in the nineteenth century that scholars like Heinrich Graetz started to seriously apply secular approaches to understanding Jewish history. The first such major treatment of Jewish history was Graetz’s multi-volume *History of the Jews*. Since then, many scholars have written on Jewish history, including Simon Dubnow (who called the Jews “the veterans of history”), Salo Baron, Solomon Grayzel, and Paul Johnson. Today, Jewish history is taught from a secular perspective at many colleges and universities. And in recent years, we in the secular Jewish world have had the good fortune of having two Jewish history books to add to the collection: Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine’s *A Provocative People: A Secular History of the Jews* (Farmington Hills: International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism, 2012), and Mitchell Silver’s *The Veterans of History* (Boston: Boston Workmen’s Circle Center of Jewish Culture and Social Justice, 2014).

Having recently read Rabbi Wine’s *A Provocative People*, I cannot help but make some comparisons. Rabbi Wine never completed his book, and it took what must have been a monumental effort by Rabbi Adam Chalom to assemble and edit the book from the unfinished material left by Rabbi Wine. *A Provocative People* is a mature and comprehensive book directed toward an educated adult audience.

The *Veterans of History* is Silver’s third book that I have read, reviewed, and enjoyed. (*Respecting the Wicked Child* articulates a philosophy of secular Jewish identity and education. *A Plausible God* sets out secular reflections on liberal Jewish theology.) Silver’s latest work is a Jewish history book for young people, *bnai mitzvah* candidates, and other teenagers and young adults, although it is an easy and enjoyable read for people of any age.

Unlike Silver’s prior books, *The Veterans of History* is not a scholarly work at the college level, and lacks an index and footnotes, but it has a remarkably detailed and useful table of contents. The chapters are short and clearly written, with a storytelling style that makes the book fun and easy to read. Silver clearly lays out what is myth or legend, and what is real history. His approach is clearly secular humanist, cultural, progressive, and liberal, with extensive coverage of non-religious Jews. In the back of the book, there are questions to consider for each chapter; these make *The Veterans of History* an eye-opening, excellent textbook for young adults. It also contains over fifty figures, which are useful additions to the text.

There are brief references to the Workmen’s Circle, Reconstructionism, and Humanistic Judaism. Although these portions could benefit from some elaboration, the discussions on socialism and capitalism, socialist parties, the Lower East Side, labor unions, fraternal

Rabbi Edward Klein is the leader of the Queens, New York, Community for Secular Humanistic Jews.

organizations, the Yiddish press, and Yiddish cultural life are particularly interesting.

The chapter on Israel takes an approach that I found informative, interesting, and refreshing. Silver writes: "Israel's continuing occupation of the West Bank makes Israeli democracy truly impossible, for it is impossible to be a democracy and control generations of Palestinians who are not allowed either their own country or citizenship in Israel." Silver refers briefly to anti-Zionists who believe that Israel is a strong and established country, and

that there is no need for a movement to return to Zion. One of the provocative questions that the Israel chapter poses is, "Was Zionism a good idea?" Despite his efforts at evenhandedness, I wish Silver had included a discussion of post-Zionism and its belief in the need for a secular democracy in Israel.

The Veterans of History would be a marvelously useful textbook for *b'nai mitzvah* students, and is a book I wish I had as a youngster for my own *bar mitzvah* preparation. I am glad to have read it as an adult.

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ARTS/LITERATURE

Bread and Benediction by Laurence Levine

In my mother's house
she baked breads
swollen with breaths
of yeast,
and she lit candles,
saying benedictions
through lips that flickered
like the light she blessed,
saying sounds
that talked in steps,
sewn like stitches in a cloth.

She gave me her needle,
whose swift slender shaft
went straight to my heart,
where it has lodged
all these years
like a restive splinter
waiting for the flicker
of the ancient lights
to flash again
above the benedictions
told over bread
in dreams of innocence.

Laurence Levine is professor emeritus of Wayne State University Biology Department, where he taught and did research for 36 years. He was a long-time member of the Birmingham Temple Congregation for Humanistic Judaism in Michigan. After his retirement, he enrolled as a graduate student in creative writing in the English Department at Wayne State University. Until his untimely death in 1994, he published his poems, won the John Claire Prize for poetry, and participated in a number of public readings.

Ilse
by Louis Altman

*(who, as a child, survived the Holocaust, was adopted,
graduated from college, and then committed suicide)*

Sweet daughter of a dark time,
whose mother gave her up to save her;

To whom even the angels dispensed
food and tuition without love.

I held her hand at the university,
yet I did not save her,

nor learn the lesson she taught,
and now regret the impossible.

When the summer of life is over
we do not go back to school.

Autumn Drive
by Louis Altman

(written on the drive to the fall Society for Humanistic Judaism Board meeting)

The road from Chicago to Detroit
passes a million lives
laughing, working, loving.

But from the car I see only trees
with red and gold leaves.
Another year gone,
laughing, working, loving.

Doctor Sam
by Louis Altman

*(a member of the Sarasota Congregation for Humanistic Judaism
who helped rescue Shanghai Jews at the end of World War II)*

Healed the sick.
Defended the Jews.

Told me he was dying,
With no tears.

Taught us how to live,
And how to die.

A Father Speaks **by Louis Altman**

The papers on the far left corner of my desk
should be moved to the right
or maybe to the front,
but on the other hand...I'm not sure.
Our youngest went off to college yesterday.

My wife went shopping, bought a dress, redecorated the living room . . .
Our youngest went off to college yesterday.

Epitaph for Ruth Duskin Feldman z"l, **My Favorite Quiz Kid** **by Louis Altman**

So much to be proud of
(but she was humble)

So far ahead of us
(but just one of us)

Famous child
Innocent of fame

The ghost writer for writers;
Meeting publishers' deadlines while raising the three smartest kids in town.

When there was no consensus,
she found a way to say it.

The task was impossible.
That's why we assigned it to Ruth.

Louis Altman, a patent and trademark attorney, is a past president of the Society for Humanistic Judaism and the 2012 recipient of the Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine Lifetime Achievement Award. He is a member of Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation, Lincolnshire, Illinois, and the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism, Sarasota, Florida.

Letter to the Editor *continued from page 2*

BDS have all kinds of views about what political shape a peaceful and just outcome what might look like—which, in any case, can only be decided by the peoples of Israel and Palestine when conditions make a solution possible. (It is this writer’s personal opinion that the “two state versus one state” argument has become a debate between two fantasies.) BDS is one component, though not the only one, for creating such conditions. This is why BDS is supported in whole or part by a wide range of people and organizations, including Zionists, non-Zionists, anti-Zionists—and many more who are agnostic on these philosophical issues. (See for example Mark LeVine, “Is BDS the Only pro-Israel Option Left?” <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/6/is-bds-the-only-pro-israel-option-left.html>.)

4. The BDS movement is moral because it is absolutely necessary, in view of the massive United States subsidy of Israel’s military occupation and Washington’s consistent blockage of Palestinian or international initiatives toward a “two-state solution” or any other solution—even any condemnation of Israeli settlements that U.S. policy itself regards as illegal and destructive. Well-meaning liberals need to face the facts. While a two-state solution emerged as the program of the Palestinian national movement in the mid-1970s and soon became an international consensus position—blocked by United States and Israeli rejectionism—since Oslo it has become an empty slogan to continue the fraudulent pretense of an endless “peace process” that never produces peace. To put it bluntly, BDS cuts through the crap.

5. The BDS movement is moral because it hits the right targets. Indeed, the most effective BDS campaigns in churches and on campuses are those demanding *divestment from U.S. and global corporations profiting from the worst brutalities of the Occupation*—the likes of Caterpillar, Veolia, Hewlett-Packard and Motorola Solutions. (See most recently the resolution of the United Church of Christ synod, <http://www.uccpalestineisraelnetwork.org/Our-Resolution-.html>.)

Other aspects of BDS, such as calling on performers to cancel performances in Israel (“cultural boycott”) or for Israel to be expelled from international soccer over its harassment and acts of violence against the Palestinian national soccer team—are useful although largely symbolic. Naturally, enemies of BDS proclaim that it will “hurt the wrong

people”—Palestinian workers in particular—word for word the same arguments that we heard against sanctions on apartheid South Africa, coming from those who never protest the super-exploitation and humiliation of Palestinian workers in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

6. The BDS movement is moral because it puts some restraints (albeit limited) on Israel’s ongoing aggression against the Palestinian people, and because it shows the possibility for global solidarity rather than hopeless rounds of armed conflicts between states that solve nothing. Progress is occurring in European countries where products of the settlements are not allowed to be labeled “made in Israel.” And while it’s not easy to prove, it’s quite possible that the specter of global BDS has helped restrain the infamous “Praver Plan” for ethnically cleansing Bedouin villages in the Negev and relocating them into miserable slum “development towns,” and slowed down the noxious Knesset legislation elevating Jewish ethno-religious supremacy over Israeli democracy.

7. The BDS movement is moral because it focuses the world’s attention on the daily humiliation, impoverishment, dispossession, settler and military violence, and discrimination imposed on the Palestinian people both within Israel and the Occupied Territories. This is what matters most, because our tax dollars subsidize these brutalities and because they are the bedrock obstacles to peace and justice. Waving away the issue by trying to change the subject to genocides, occupations and humanitarian catastrophes in other places solves nothing, in any of these disasters.

8. The BDS movement is moral because it explicitly repudiates anti-semitism and all other forms of racism, distinguishes the actions of the Israeli state from the Jewish people, and demands that the Israeli state receive no special dispensation for its arrogant demand to be designated “the nation-state of the Jewish people” at the expense of its non-Jewish citizens and those whom it has displaced and dispossessed. For one eloquent example among many, see <http://uspcn.org/2012/03/13/granting-no-quarter-a-call-for-the-disavowal-of-the-racism-and-antisemitism-of-gilad-atzmon/>.

9. The BDS movement reflects and encourages ethical consistency regarding human rights. That is precisely why it is effective. The beauty of BDS cam-

paigns is that they don't put ultimatic demands on anyone. Rather, they make this appeal to every organization, every institution, every individual, Jewish or not, religious or secular or whatever else: "Please *apply your own principles of social justice*, whatever they may be, to this issue as you would to others." Whether that means boycotting settlement products, corporate divestment, cultural or academic boycott, etc., *be true to what you say you believe in*. That is not too much for the Palestinian people to ask.

10. The BDS movement is moral because it has all the right enemies. Any movement that is criminalized by the government of Binyamin Netanyahu, demonized by Sheldon Adelson, denounced by Alan Dershowitz on spurious "moral" grounds, and reviled by the same members of the U.S. Congress who jumped up and down like so many trained chimpanzees when Netanyahu called for launching a war with Iran, is clearly doing something right. It should not surprise anyone that the billionaire Adelson has appointed, to head his new anti-BDS

"Maccabees" outfit, David Brog, the executive director of Christians United for Israel. CUFI, the largest Christian Zionist organization in America, is known for its theologically-driven support for the settler movement and Jewish control of the entire "Holy Land." So who's blocking the two-state solution now?

[For further reading: "Five Reasons Why BDS is Actually Succeeding," by Yousef Munayyer, <http://www.thenation.com/article/5-reasons-bds-is-actually-succeeding/>. News and statements from Jewish Voice for Peace are at www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org. Omar Barghouti, the leading organizer of the global BDS movement, wrote the important book *Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights* (Haymarket Books, 2011). On the record of Alan Dershowitz, as well as the peace process, read the book that professor Dershowitz denied he attempted to suppress: *Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History*, by Norman G. Finkelstein, published by the University of California Press in August 2005.]

Coming in our next issue:

HJ Forum:

Change, Fear, and Hope in the 21st Century

In what forms do ethnic and racial discrimination appear in our world today, and what should Humanistic Jews do in response?

Commemorating Fiction

A review of *At Home in Exile*

... and more

Introducing the Journal's New Editors

Last May, Ruth Duskin Feldman *z"l*, the creative editor of the journal, died after dedicating more than 30 years to a high quality publication. Humanistic Judaism has appointed two new co-editors, Jeremy Kridel and Susan Warrow.

Jeremy Kridel is a member of the Society for Humanistic Judaism and is a candidate for ordination in the Rabbinical Program of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism. He holds bachelor and master of arts degrees in Religion from Florida State University, where he focused his studies on Jewish history and biblical interpretation. Jeremy also holds a juris doctor degree from the Indiana University Maurer School of Law,

and serves on the staff of one of Indiana's appellate courts.

Susan Warrow is studying at the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism to become a *madrikha* (Leader/Ceremonialist). Susan and her family are members of The Birmingham Temple Congregation for Humanistic Judaism and she has been connected with the secular Humanistic Jewish community for 15 years. Susan has taught high school English and Social Studies since 1998, including Composition and Holocaust Literature courses. She has a masters degree in Curriculum and Teaching, and a bachelors degree in History, both from Michigan State University.



The Society for Humanistic Judaism was established in 1969 to provide a humanistic alternative in Jewish life. The Society for Humanistic Judaism mobilizes people to celebrate Jewish identity and culture consistent with a humanistic philosophy of life, independent of supernatural authority.

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