



# Humanistic Judaism

*Magazine*

**Science as a Value Within  
Humanistic Judaism**  
*by Marc Swetlitz*

**Climate-Change Denial**  
*by Paul Golin*

**Community News**  
*and much more*



**Interview:  
Sasha Sagan**

*with Rabbi Jeremy Kridel*

**Plus:**

**An Excerpt From Her New Book  
“For Small Creatures Such As We”**

**Fall 2019**

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# From the Editor

Welcome to the Fall 2019 issue of *Humanistic Judaism* magazine. Our focus this time is on science and Humanistic Judaism, and we have several exciting features to share.

Particularly exciting are an interview with Sasha Sagan and an excerpt from her forthcoming new book, *For Small Creatures Such as We*. In the event you are wondering—yes, Sasha Sagan is the daughter of Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan. Sagan's book is not a work of science *per se*. It is instead a book for secular people, Humanist and otherwise. It encourages ritual in everyday life and in major life events, and has as one of its key insights that rituals and ceremonies in almost every culture are really celebrations of the wonder of scientific phenomena.



We continue to benefit from the sessions offered at the SHJ@50 celebration. This issue, we share an article by Marc Swetlitz, who presented on the results of a survey he conducted on the views of Humanistic Jews on the role of science in their lives and in their involvement in Humanistic Judaism. The results of Swetlitz's survey provides interesting insights on how many Humanistic Jews view the role of science in their lives and beliefs, and suggests that there may be considerable common ground between Humanistic Jews and members of other secular communities.

Writing for SHJ's Jews for a Secular Democracy initiative, SHJ Executive Director Paul Golin explores the church-state and secularism dimensions of climate change and environmental policy. Saul Haffner, *zekher livrakha*, contributed an article about his journey to and in Humanistic Judaism, which we run in this issue as part of our occasional series, "Voice of Experience." And we mourn the recent death of Lorraine Pivnick, a longtime leader in our movement.

We have a broad range of community news items from throughout our movement. And in this issue, there are a couple of kids' pages that have activities related to science.

As always, thank you for reading *Humanistic Judaism* magazine! 🔥

**J. M. K.**

# Sasha Sagan Interview with Rabbi Jeremy Kridel

*Within Humanistic Judaism, there's a commitment to gender equality, even though it's still an area where we have work to do. Something that many of your readers may not have known or appreciated before coming to the book is how important your mother's contributions were to so many of the works that people often associate exclusively with your father. Could you tell our readers more about your mother's role in bringing Cosmos and so many other important works to fruition?*



Growing up I saw them working together always, on everything. They had an amazing partnership. Because my dad was the one on camera, people associated much of their work with his name and face. But they collaborated on everything, wrote *Cosmos* together, and mom writes/produces and sometimes directs new ones.

I think a lot of what is associated with my dad was a partnership between both my parents, and some of that lack of recognition is probably because of the way society sees the genders differently.

My mother is not a scientist. She would say her area of interest is the history of science. Together, the combination of their skill sets and areas of expertise helped make their collective message accessible. They made a lot of difficult concepts understandable to lay people. That was a huge part of their strengths.

*Many of our readers and members came to Secular Humanistic Jewish life through their encounters with your parents' work—often especially Cosmos and The Demon-Haunted World. Your book seems to have almost seamlessly incorporated some of the ideas in these works. What lessons from the life and work of both your parents would you say have been the most valuable to you? What might be the most valuable for secular and humanistic people today to live lives of personal integrity?*

I love that that comes through! What was most valuable? Two things. The first, and it's very difficult sometimes for people to do (myself included!), is to work to try to tolerate ambiguity. There are some things that are black and white and some things that we don't know answer to but we may have an answer to—whether huge philosophical questions of death and the universe or the day-to-day minutiae like waiting to hear about the results of a meeting, the idea that in small and large things sometimes we have to tolerate ambiguity.

And second, the idea that belief requires evidence—we must try to withhold belief in something without evidence for it.

And I'll add a third: reality is almost always more stunning and stirring and breathtaking than the stories we humans have made up for ourselves about it, and the way that “facts” get presented as dry and cold robs us of the stirring grandeur that is in the universe. And our understanding of life on earth as revealed by science can provide us that sense, if we look at it and harness some of the emotion that has historically been associated with great myths into the way we incorporate ourselves into the universe.

*Developing ritual is a tough task, and one that a lot of people view with some trepidation. As you mention in your book, sometimes new rituals seem contrived and don't get repeated. But some of the rituals you mention from your own life—like the dining society—avoided that trap. What kinds of approaches would you suggest as ways to avoid the feeling of something being contrived?*

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# Book Excerpt

*From For Small Creatures Such As We: Rituals for Finding Meaning in Our Unlikely World by Sasha Sagan, to be published October 22nd by G. P. Putnam's Sons, an imprint of Penguin Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House, LLC. Copyright © 2019 by The Great Unlikelihood LLC.*

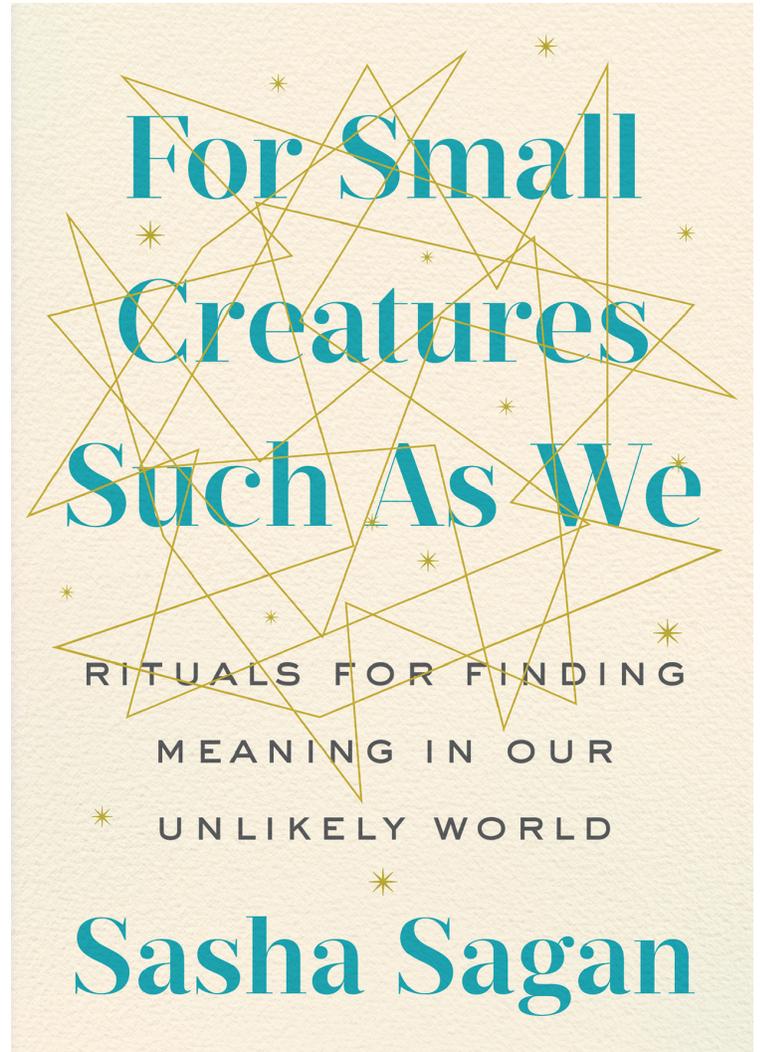
After our daughter was born, Jon and I said to each other a thousand times a day, “I can’t believe she’s here!” “I can’t believe we have a kid!” “I can’t believe we made a person!” Every day for months and months we said it out loud as if we were just discovering how reproduction worked. We struggled to wrap our minds around it. I actually don’t suppose I’ll ever truly get over this idea. My mother never has. She sometimes still joyfully says to my brother Sam and me, “You don’t understand, you didn’t exist, and then we made you! And now you’re here!” We roll our eyes and say, “Yes, Mom, that’s how it works.” Which is true, but no less astonishing, beautiful, thrilling, or worthy of celebration. Being born at all is amazing. It’s easy to lose sight of this. But when a baby comes into the world, when a new human appears from inside of another, in the accompanying rush of emotion, we experience a little bit of the immense brazen beauty of life.

Rituals are, among other things, tools that help us process change. There is so much change in this universe. So many entrances and exits, and ways to mark them, each one astonishing in its own way. Even if we don’t see birth or life as a miracle in the theological sense, it’s still breathtakingly worthy of celebration.

Typing these words, I am, like you, experiencing the brief moment between birth and death. It’s brief compared to what’s on either side. For all we know, there was, arguably, an infinite amount of time before you or I was born. Our current understanding is that the big bang gave birth to the universe as we know it about 13.8 billion years ago. But the big bang may or may not be the beginning of everything. What came before, if anything, remains an unsolved mystery to our species. As we humans learn, create better technology, and produce more brilliant people, we might discover that which we currently think happened is wrong. But somehow, something started us off a very long time ago.

In the other direction there will, theoretically, be an infinite amount of time after we’re dead. Not infinite for our planet or our species, but maybe for the universe. Maybe not. We don’t know much about what that will entail except that the star we orbit will eventually burn out. Between those two enormous mysteries, if we’re lucky, we get eighty or one hundred years. The blink of an eye, really, in the grand scheme of things. And yet here we are. Right now.

It’s easy to forget how amazing this is. Days and weeks go by and the regularity of existing eclipses the miraculousness of it. But there are certain moments when we manage to be viscerally aware of being alive. Sometimes those are very scary moments, like narrowly avoiding a car accident. Sometimes they are beautiful, like holding your newborn in your arms. And then there are the quiet moments in between, when all the joy and sorrow seem profound only to you. 🔥



# Science as a Value Within Humanistic Judaism

Marc Swetlitz

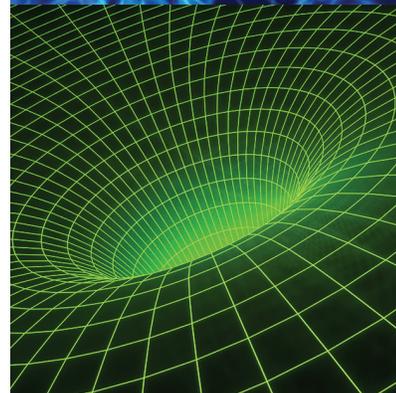
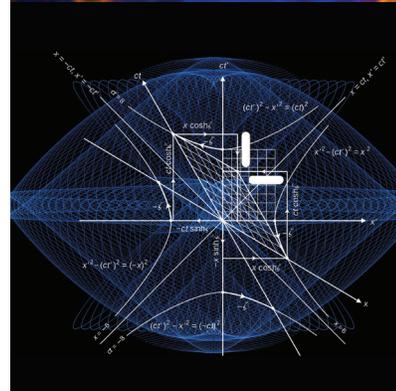
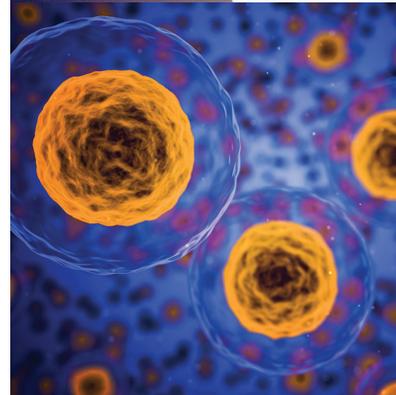
Science or sex? I visited Birmingham Temple about a year ago to do some research on science and Humanistic Judaism. On Friday evening, Rabbi Falick talked about *Sex at Dawn*, a book about polygyny in early human history. Anthropology, genetics, primatology, and psychology informed all that was written in the book, and the talk drew heavily on these findings to show that polygyny and non-procreative sex were common in early human history. This was the first of two talks Rabbi Falick delivered about human sexuality. The second talk examined the recently-released statement of the Association of Humanistic Rabbis on sexual ethics, “A Statement on Sexual Ethics for the 21st Century,” which alluded to the results of scientific studies of early human history: “We acknowledge the reality that human sexuality is the result of an evolutionary process that shaped it for both procreational and non-procreational purposes and recognize that the vast majority of expressions of human sexuality are non-procreational.” After the first talk, I introduced myself to Rabbi Falick, explained why I was visiting, and said how I thought it a wonderful coincidence, his giving a science talk at the time of my visit. “A science talk?,” he replied. “I thought it was talk about sex!”

## How Important is Science?

This experience strengthened the view I had been forming, that science is so integral to Humanistic Judaism that it is just taken for granted. It may impress the new person, but not the seasoned member. I have been an independent member of SHJ for two years. I joined largely because I felt that my interest in and commitment to science would be shared by SHJ members, and my hunch has been confirmed. In a survey I conducted of SHJ members about science and Humanistic Judaism, 80% of those who came to Humanistic Judaism as adults said science was important or very important. Sixty percent of all respondents indicated that science is important for their understanding of Humanistic Judaism.<sup>1</sup>

One caveat about the survey: it was not conducted using a rigorous, scientific protocol, since I did not send the survey to a random and representative sample of SHJ members. Instead, the survey was sent to all SHJ members. The response to the survey was well beyond our expectations: 302 fully completed surveys, and 78 partially completed surveys. This is about 15% of our total membership! Yet, the results of the survey need to be taken with a grain of salt, and cannot viewed as fully representative.

Apart from the survey, we have several other indicators of the high value placed on science in Humanistic Judaism. Over the years, *Humanistic Judaism* magazine and its predecessor journal published articles about popular science topics, or book reviews of popular science books. Such items are generally not found in flagship magazines or journals from other Jewish movements. Humanistic



Judaism was way ahead of the other movements in talking about and accepting archaeological and textual scholarship showing that the traditional story of the Exodus from Egypt did not occur, and incorporating that into their Passover *Haggadot*. Beginning in 2005, six of fourteen SHJ role models have been scientists. And not just Sherwin Wine, but other leaders in American Humanistic Judaism—Jeffrey Silberman, Zev Katz, Robert Barr, Adam Chalom, and David Oler—emphasized the importance of science (Silberman, “Contributions of Psychology to Humanistic Judaism,” 10:2 (Summer 1982), 42-49; Katz, “Humanistic Judaism and God,” 11:4 (Winter 1983), 17-23; Barr, “Sukkot and Ecology,” 18:2 (Spring 1990), 21-23; Chalom, “The Ethics of Evolution,” 28:3 (Summer 2000), 20-21; Oler, “Securing the Future of Humanistic Judaism,” 29:4 (Autumn 2001), 5-10).

### Is Humanistic Judaism Unique?

How unique is Humanistic Judaism today in this regard? With this question in mind, I included a question in the survey that was similar to one included in a national, scientific (really!) survey on the topic of science and religion. The survey was conducted in 2013–14 by Elaine Howard Ecklund and her team at Rice University and the results published in *Religion vs. Science: What Religious People Really Think* (2017). The original question was, “science and religion can best be described as a relationship of...,” and four answer options were provided: Conflict—on the side of religion; Conflict—on the side of science; Independence—they refer to different aspects of reality; and Collaboration—each can be used to help support the other. In Ecklund’s survey, “Jews” selected Independence the most (42%), with Collaboration coming in second (35%). In the group labelled “Atheists, Agnostics, and Unaffiliated,” most selected Conflict—on the side of science (52%), with Independence coming in second (35%). In our survey, Humanistic Jews overwhelmingly chose Collaboration (76%), with Independence a distant second (20%), differentiating ourselves from both Jews in general and from atheists and agnostics in general!

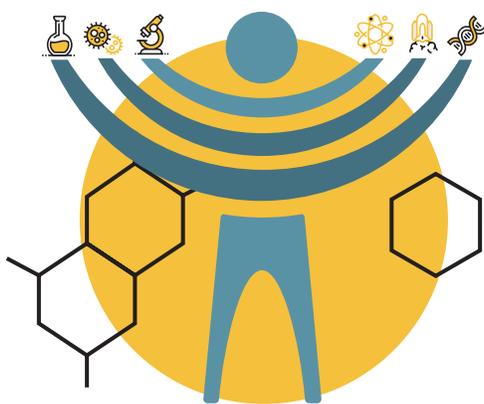
Since our survey was not scientific, it may be that a more representative sample would yield a percentage lower than 80% for Collaboration. However, when I shared these results at the SHJ@50 Celebration and Summit, attendees replied, “Of course, that makes sense!” Science and Jewish culture influence and reinforce each other. Science helps to shape Humanistic Jewish beliefs, values, liturgies, and (to some extent) practices,

more so than other forms of Judaism. Individuals differ as to the nature and extent of the shaping influence of science, but most give science a significant role. As for the influence of Jewish culture on science, it is limited but important. Few Humanistic Jews think that Jewish culture influences the content or the truth claims of science. However, many see Jewish culture as embodying values (such as integrity) and approaches to life (such as empiricism) that are part and parcel of modern science, and so adopting and living a Humanistic Jewish life reinforces and supports the life of science. Moreover, the commitment to science as the primary source of truth about our world, leads to strong support for public funding of science, turning to science in public policy decisions, and teaching science in public schools.

On the suggestion of an attendee at the SHJ@50 Celebration and Summit, I created a short survey on this topic, intended for members of Ethical Culture and Unitarian Universalist communities (those with a humanist bent). Might they, too, choose Collaboration to characterize the relationship of science to their religion or culture? I have small number of responses (26) from members of the Washington Ethical Society, which has members from both Ethical Culture and Unitarian Universalism, and their responses are very similar! Eighty-five percent selected Collaboration and 12% selected Independence. This, too, makes sense, in that Humanistic Jews and those involved with Ethical Culture share a commitment to science and to a culture or religion, and to a set of practices that are both influenced by and reinforce our scientific commitments.

### Too Much Emphasis on Science?

At the same time, some survey respondents cautioned about putting too much emphasis on science. In response to the question, “How much of a contribution does science make to Humanistic Judaism,” only 35% selected “very much,” while 54% selected “somewhat” and 10% selected “not very much.” In *Humanistic Judaism* (1978) Sherwin Wine formulated a set of core values for Humanistic Judaism, of which science/reason was only one; others included community, religion, self-respect, and autonomy. Later, in *Celebration* (1988), science was one entry among 39 Humanistic themes that Wine suggested as options for reflection during holidays and life-cycle rituals. And several survey respondents said that while they had an active interest in science, they joined and participate in their Humanistic Jewish community to learn about their Jewish heritage, to celebrate Jewish traditions, to be a



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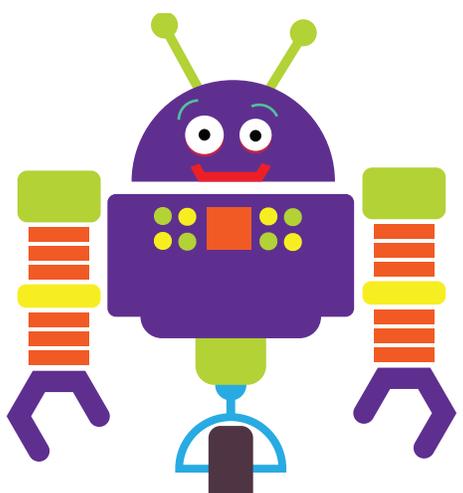
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| ATOM      | GEOLOGY    | PHYSICS   |
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# Climate-Change Denial is a Church-State Separation Issue

Paul Golin

Few existential crises loom larger for our species than global warming. Climate scientists overwhelmingly agree that human activity has contributed to climate change, and that the growing threat to life on earth is real and significant.

This “inconvenient truth” about the environment should have galvanized our country into action long ago. Our current US administration, however, not only lacks a policy addressing climate change, it is actively working to roll back existing protections. For example, our greenhouse gas emissions rose last year, likely thanks to reduced regulations on the coal and oil industries (Worland 2019).

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# Voice of Experience

by Saul Haffner z”l

## My Jewish Journey

My father came to America in 1927, my mother in 1929. I arrived a year later although my trip did not involve an ocean voyage. My parents lived an Orthodox Jewish life; i.e. my mother kept a kosher home, they observed the major holidays, and my father went to “shul” on Friday nights and Saturday mornings. My own journey from this inherited Orthodox background to Humanistic Judaism is one I owe to the courage of others who went beyond my own questioning to finding answers and acting upon them.

As a youngster, I would ask my mother the usual childish questions—“Why is this?” or “Why is that?” To these questions, my mother had one answer. “Y,” she said, “is a crooked letter.”

As a six-year-old, I was enrolled in Hebrew school, a *cheidar*. Here, I learned the basics of the Hebrew language. Our text was the Torah and it was drummed into our young heads. To this day, I can still quote its opening: “B’raysheet borah, etc. etc.” But my education did not go smoothly. On one occasion, I dared question the young rabbi who was our teacher about the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib. I pointed out that earlier the text had said “man and woman created He them.” To which the rabbi replied: “No more questions. Here we learn!” When I complained to my mother, she said “a rabbi you don’t ask questions.” Furthermore, she said that I would have to go to Hebrew school until I was bar mitzvahed. After that I could ask all the questions I wanted.

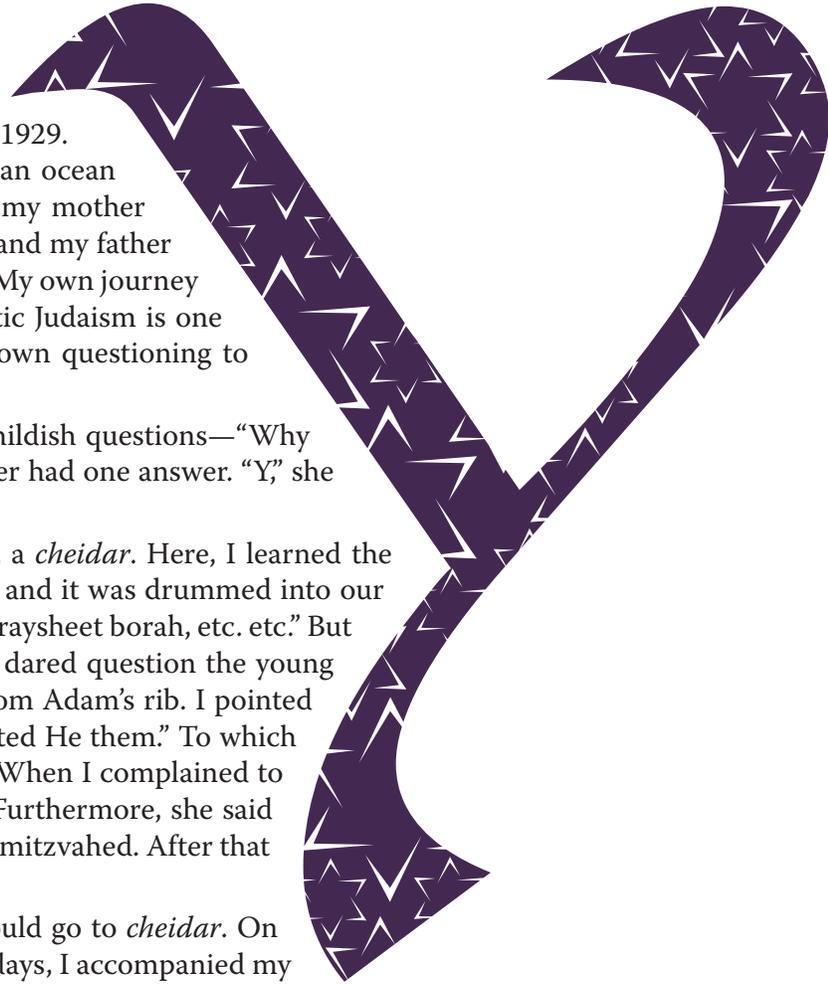
Every Monday through Thursday, after school, I would go to *cheidar*. On Friday evenings and Saturday mornings and Jewish holidays, I accompanied my father to shul. At age 13, I was bar mitzvahed. That was followed by a lavish party that my parents could ill afford. But true to their word, I no longer went to *cheidar*.

My “career” as a schoolyard baseball player began. The only obstacle was convincing my father that playing baseball on Saturday was not work, but play. I pointed out that nowhere in the Torah is there a prohibition of baseball on Shabbat. My father didn’t buy that. “The sin is on you,” he said, meaning that now I was of age so adhering to the Jewish law was my problem. Although my belief in God had waned, I have to admit that on more than one occasion, I prayed that I would get a hit.

High school proved to be my Orthodox downfall. It began innocently with lunch. Yes, I had my first ham sandwich. “Corn beef,” I told my mother when she asked what I had eaten. Even though the sin was on me, nothing happened. No punishment for eating or lying about it. The seeds of doubt were planted.

My high school years were tumultuous for the world and also for my family. When my parents emigrated from Europe, they left behind siblings and other relatives. During the early years of the war, there was a trickle of correspondence between them. But in 1944, it stopped.

When the war ended, the truth began to seep out. What my parents thought to be “work camps” proved to be death camps. Six million! And that was “just” the Jews. Another seven or eight million others also perished. Human beings all! And where was God during the Holocaust? They didn’t ask. And neither did I, at least not out loud.





A few years later I was commuting to the Polytechnic Institute in downtown Brooklyn on a New York State scholarship. “Denks God for that,” my mother said. I had my doubts.

I graduated with a major in physics, married, and had a family. Moving to New Jersey, Maryland, Long Island, and Connecticut, I always joined one of the local Reform temples. At these synagogues, I recited the prayers I had learned in my childhood. My mother’s admonishment—*Y* is a crooked letter—was ingrained. Question the rabbi? Challenge Jewish tradition? That had been suppressed years ago.

By good luck, I found the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism in 1976 and only then was I able to practice a Judaism where the words I said in the service were the words I believed. What a relief!

Sherwin Wine was the founder of Humanistic Judaism. The older I get, the more I appreciate what a revolutionary and *courageous* thing he did when he dared to challenge the Jewish hierarchy. His background was similar to mine—we were of the same generation and his parents were immigrants who kept a kosher home. But Sherwin majored in philosophy, not physics, and pursued a religious—not a business—path, attending Hebrew Union College where he was ordained. He served as a traditional Reform rabbi in Detroit for several years before starting a new congregation with only eight families and creating a new liturgy that reflected the members’ beliefs.

A corollary of the group’s commitment to integrity

was the elimination of “God” from Humanistic Judaism philosophy. Sherwin coined the term “agnostic” to describe his views, meaning that there was no evidence to either prove or disprove the existence of God. He dared to question the basic tenets of Reform Judaism and was unfazed by the condemnation of his fellow Jewish clergy. Along with a celebration of Jewish history and culture, Humanistic Judaism honors the power of human beings to think for themselves. Sherwin dared to take that knowledge to the next level, eliminating from the liturgy everything that demeaned that view.

I am encouraged that questioning *authority* has become commonplace in America today. Americans have short memories, but not so short that we can ignore the lessons of recent history: Iraq did not have WMD (weapons of mass destruction). US intelligence is *not* infallible. And a majority of Americans evidently were *not* persuaded by the government’s version of events in Syria—at least not enough to support a unilateral military attack.

We should also question the pronouncements of drug companies, tobacco companies, medical testers, financial regulators—really, any entity that has more to gain by dissembling than by telling the whole truth.

In conclusion, I remember a time when Sherwin Wine visited here. I asked him if he thought that Humanistic Judaism would become as mainstream as the older forms of Judaism.

“That’s a good question,” he said. 🔥

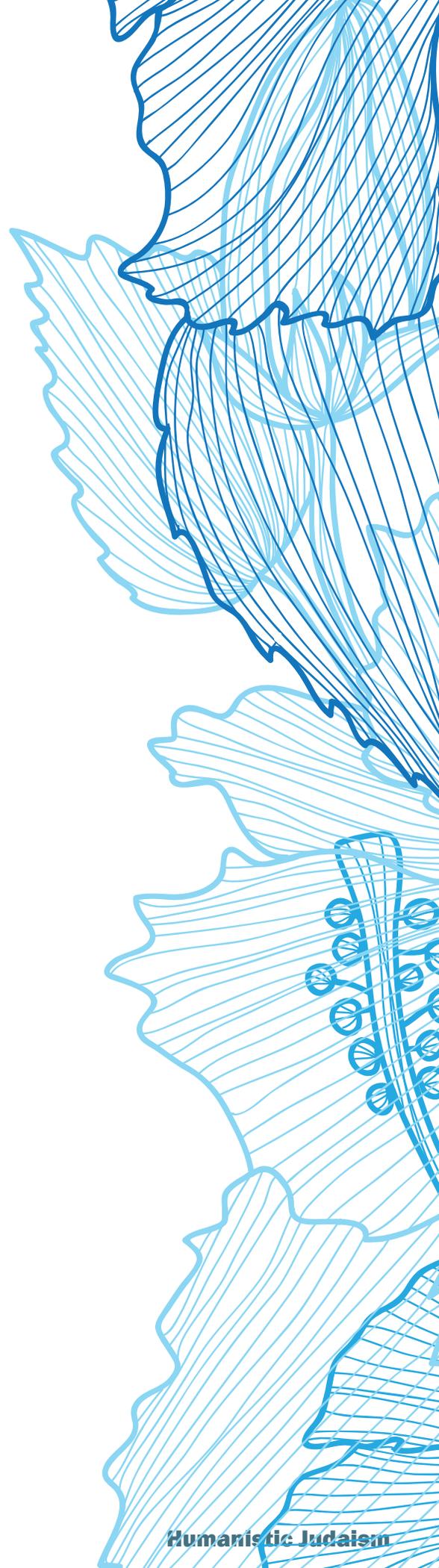
# Remembering Lorraine Pivnick



Lorraine Pivnick died peacefully in Princeton, NJ, on Sunday, August 5, 2019, after an extended illness. Lorraine and her husband Ben Pivnick were founding members of the Birmingham Temple, the Society for Humanistic Judaism (SHJ), and the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism. Together, they were awarded the SHJ's Sherwin T. Wine Lifetime Achievement Award and they supported multiple projects foundational to the future of the Humanistic Judaism movement. The Pivnicks initiated a challenge grant that resulted in the completion of the Ben and Lorraine Pivnick Center for Humanistic Judaism, which houses The Birmingham Temple School, the Society for Humanistic Judaism, and the Institute's Milan Library. They also established the Pivnick Community Development Fund at the SHJ.

Lorraine was the brother of Rabbi Sherwin Wine, founder of Humanistic Judaism; daughter of William and Tillie Wine.

Lorraine is survived by daughters Billie (Jay Cohen) and Elyse, grandsons Isaac Cohen and Noah Cohen, granddaughters Katy Rose Glickman (Josh Ellis) and Madeline Glickman, and great grandson Bentley Harrison Cohen. 



# CommunityNews

- **Machar, The Washington Congregation for Secular Humanistic Judaism**—Washington, D.C.
- **Birmingham Temple**—Farmington Hills, MI
- **Beth Ami**—Boulder, CO

- **Pacific Community of Cultural Jews**—Orange County, CA
- **Congregation of Humanistic Judaism**—Fairfield County, CT
- **Kol Hadash**—Lincolnshire, IL
- **Kahal B'raira**—Boston, MA



## Mary Perica Recalls Machar's Early Days

This past May, my wife Katie and I traveled in Israel for the first time in 20 years. Thanks to the generosity of spirit of my cousin and her husband, with whom we were staying, we were able to visit our good friend and one of Machar's founders, Mary Perica. Mary lives in kibbutz Samar in the Negev, not far from Eilat. Samar is one of the few kibbutzim to hew to the original collective principles of the kibbutz movement. Mary went to live at Samar 12 years ago to be closer to her children and grandchildren, most of whom had gravitated to Israel. We had a great visit with Mary. She and her daughter-in-law made sleeping arrangements for the four of us. Mary was happy to see us, and we were delighted to see that she is thriving and happy in her surroundings. As usual, Mary radiates calm and contentment. Visiting with her at Samar was a highlight of our trip.

Because of the important role Mary played in getting our congregation started, I asked her to send us a brief history:

*Sometime late in 1979, we and another couple rented a space at the JCC in suburban Maryland, and Sherwin Wine came and gave a talk. As was his custom then, he gave the hyper-religious attendees time to tell us all how awful we were for being there, and how all of us were going to come to very bad ends. When they were gone, Sherwin stood up and said something like, "I don't think you're bad people. I find I really like you all," and then talked for maybe 40 minutes and answered lots of questions. One older man stood up and said, "I've been waiting for you all my life." We had asked people to sign up for a mailing list, and that was the beginning of Beth Chai-Machar.*

*Not long after, we were joined by several others.*

*We met that summer at a little community center in Arlington. Around that time, we decided to send a mailing, so we needed funds for postage (nice and cheap then). We elected officers and decided on dues of something like \$2 a month per person. For a very long time, the bank account hovered at about \$6!*

*At an early meeting, one woman pointed out that the language in the Birmingham Temple's Service Book was very male-centric, and we said we'd write our own services with more inclusive language, using Sherwin as a kind of guide. That's when we lost our first members. "Nothing must be changed! Word for word orthodoxy." He threatened to tell Sherwin on us. The next day our president called to talk to Sherwin about the conversation. Sherwin laughed and said, "Don't worry, Jules. We don't have the machinery for excommunication."*

*There was a little schism about eight years later (very Jewish). Some of the newer members wanted to start adding traditional prayers, so the original group decided to withdraw and form Machar. That was when we drew up the four principles that appear here and there in our literature. No more confusion. Helping launch Machar was one of the most satisfying things I ever took part in, and my Machar friends are among the most treasured.*

*Be well and happy, and thank you again for coming to see me.....Mary*

So now you know a little bit about our dear friend, and also about the humble beginnings of Machar. 

**David Wittenberg**

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# Community News

## Birmingham Temple Offers Leadership During Immigration Crisis

In January 2017, dozens of Birmingham Temple members showed up at Detroit's airport to protest the just-declared Muslim ban. Since that day, BT's Social Justice Committee and other members have been at the fore of the modern-day American human rights struggle for immigrants and refugees: joining sanctuary networks; adopting a Syrian-war refugee family; supporting the work of Detroit's Freedom House (where Rabbi Jeffrey Falick also sits on the board); and showing up at more than a dozen protests supporting the Latinx, Syrian, and Chaldean (Iraqi Christian) communities.

With the nation's eyes turning toward the inhumane conditions at the border, BT has now joined with other congregations throughout Detroit to demand that the government #CloseTheCamps. In late July, Rabbi Falick participated in a community-wide teach-in that

featured—perhaps for the first time in Jewish history—rabbis of every single movement from Humanistic to Orthodox, all calling for the reversal of family separation policies and the closing of detention camps.

To make known the congregation's support for human rights—and to highlight the plight of the children—BT members also erected a display on the Temple's front lawn "for the thousands of separated immigrant children." The display consists of a forest of stakes, with toys at the top of each one. It stood at two local churches before arriving at BT, attracting the attention of the local Jewish and wider media. Over 150 people attended the July 26 Shabbat at BT to inaugurate the display and hear Rabbi Falick speak about "Children in Cages: America's Moral Failure" (<https://vimeo.com/350798038>). 🔥



**Ann-Marie Fisher**



## Beth Ami Eats Lunch

For our continuing series of International Lunch/Dinners Out, Beth Ami, Colorado Congregation for Humanistic Judaism, visited a new and welcoming space outside Denver called Mango House. This old office building now houses an international food court; youth, medical and social services for immigrants; small shops selling clothing and foods from various countries, small meeting rooms for classes in English and other languages (we chatted with the Arabic instructor); and a large meeting space for secular and spiritual gatherings.

We enjoyed a multi-age Shabbat social gathering; ate food from Burma, Syria, Nepal, Somalia, and Japan; interacted with and patronized the food vendors from those countries; and wondered about ways to keep in touch.

Maybe more welcome blankets? 🔥

**Sheila Malcolm**



**Humanistic Judaism**

## Celebrating Sukkot with a Humanistic Perspective

Last September, as we do every year, we gathered at the home of members Lee and Zena Jacobi to celebrate Sukkot. Their backyard patio, covered by a wooden trellis, is perfectly suited for us to come together to remember our ancestors and to acknowledge the contributions of farmers and field workers. Traditionally, Sukkot took place at the culmination of the fall harvest. The whole community pitched in to pick fruit and reap grain. The bounty of food and earnings was then spread through the community.

Most modern Jews in America are no longer farmers who have to toil in the fields, but we still need to feel that we are part of a supportive community who would help each other in times of need.

In keeping with the harvest theme of the holiday we sang several “fruit,” “grain,” or “farming”-themed songs, such as “Don’t Sit under the Apple Tree,” “Lemon Tree,” and “Oats, Peas, Beans, and Barley-O.” We touched upon the social justice theme with “Pastures of Plenty” and “The Farmer is the Man Who Feeds Us All.” We shared food that was home-cooked. We decorated the sukkah-trellis with “locally sourced” palm fronds (that grow abundantly next to the highway) as well as with fruits and vines.

Every year we look forward to this annual tradition to gather with our friends in the Pacific Community of Cultural Jews, Orange County, CA, to remember our ancestors at harvest time and to be thankful for all the blessings we now share as Humanistic American Jews. 

**Nancy Okamoto and Lee Jacobi**



Photo courtesy of Leslie Zwick, Vice President of Pacific Community of Cultural Jewish. Caption: Deborah Holland Penley, Nancy Stern Okamoto, Zena Jacobi, Deborah Jacobowitz, Cheryl Cohen, Barbara Bogorad, and guest.

## Celebrating David and Ellie Shafer



Every now and then, a congregation gets lucky and has people join who become so valued and significant that they clearly deserve special recognition. Such is the case with Ellie and David Shafer. Members of the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism of Fairfield County, CT (CHJ), for more than 40 years, Ellie and David will be this year’s recipients of the CHJ *Menschlichkeit* Award at a gala luncheon on September 8. This is only the third time the award has been presented in CHJ’s 51-year history, and the first time it is going to a couple.

For our congregation, this award is particularly special. The *Menschlichkeit* Award is given to those individuals who display the following characteristics or attributes: integrity, honor, fortitude, and firmness of purpose. These are people we can admire and emulate. They are people who have a sense of right and wrong—people of noble character. People you can depend on. They are individuals you can look to for advice and guidance. People you can look up to. In short, these are what make one a mensch.

Ellie and David have embodied all these qualities and more in many roles over the years. Ellie has been president of CHJ; she and David have been the mentors for B Mitzvah students; Ellie has served as ceremonial leader at numerous B Mitzvah ceremonies; the Shafers have served as coordinators/organizers at annual retreats; and Ellie has prepared mountains of delicious *charoses*, matzo ball soup, and yummy desserts for Seders and other occasions. David continues to provide illuminating and occasionally humorous commentaries on Torah portions during the High Holidays. In addition, he makes significant contributions to adult education on Sunday mornings. Finally, Ellie and David also “step up” when it comes to offering emotional support and comfort to those experiencing difficult times.

Ellie and David are warm and loving role models for us all. They are what it means to be a mensch. 

# Community News

## Kol Hadash Celebrates First LGBTQ Pride Shabbat



Photo courtesy of David Hirsch, member of Kol Hadash. Caption: Gearah Goldstein of GenderCool at Kol Hadash's June Pride Shabbat Service.

Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation, IL, celebrates LGBTQ Pride every month! June affords us extra opportunities for reflection and celebration, but we work all year towards improvement and full inclusion.

We think of Kol Hadash as welcoming and inclusive, but there is always more to learn as our world evolves. With this in mind, we held our first Pride Shabbat service featuring guest speaker Gearah Goldstein, a founder of the GenderCool Project and a diversity and inclusion consultant. GenderCool is an awareness campaign and non-profit organization spotlighting stories of the accomplishments of transgender youth. Gearah provided a thought-provoking presentation, followed by lively discussion.

Rabbi Adam Chalom, Youth Education Director Ilana Shaffer, and B Mitzvah coordinator Leah Sosewitz began working this past year with Keshet, a national organization that works for the

full equality of all LGBTQ Jewish people in Jewish life. Practices, policies, materials, and our website were reviewed to ensure that we reflect our values consistently. Thus far, we have altered some of our published language, adjusted forms, and introduced gender-neutral bathrooms in Sunday School.

Our August Shabbat service featured Rebecca Makkai, author of *The Great Believers*, a finalist for both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, winner of the Stonewall Award, and author of one of the *New York Times*' Ten Best Books of 2018. *The Great Believers* explores 1980s Chicago, the AIDS epidemic, and the power of loss and memory. 🔥

**Victoria RZ Ratnaswamy**

## Kahal B'raira Looks at Our World

At each of our High Holiday services, a KB member offers personal reflections about Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur. The five members who take on this role meet over the summer to support each other as they draft their reflections.

Growing awareness of the climate-change crisis is evident, as this year two of our members' reflections will address just that. One, a KB teen, will draw on what he learned in his recent b mitzvah service project, advocating for a change to clean energy. The second is a recently-retired member who, in conversation with his daughter, found his next big priority—mobilizing people to stop climate change.

In the middle of a Boston winter, Kahal B'raira will celebrate Tu B'Shevat, our Jewish Earth Day. KB member and preservation biologist, Les Kaufman, wrote in our TBS service:

“The key to the preservation of biological diversity everywhere on Earth—in a rain forest, a coral reef, an estuary, a prairie, a city—is that people must stop thinking of all other life as the green blur out the window of a speeding train... There will be hope for other species when we come to regard these communities and all their inhabitants as part of our lives, along with the athletes and soap opera stars. In the modern world, no life form is too unimportant to escape our notice.”

At Kahal B'raira, we think that, like science itself, Judaism continues to adapt and grow as new ideas and new information are gained in the world. Humanistic Judaism is a result of this, and it too grows and adapts as the world evolves. 🔥



Photo courtesy of Stan Eichner. Caption: Zoe Meadow welcomes in the New Year.

**Gladys Maged and Jon Levine**

**Humanistic Judaism**

# Tributes

## To Elyse Pivnick

In loving memory of your mother, Lorraine Pivnick  
From Miriam Jerris & Steve Stawicki  
From Paul Golin Executive Director, Rabbi Miriam Jerris,  
SHJ staff, & members of SHJ

## To Billie Pivnick

In loving memory of your mother, Lorraine Pivnick  
From Miriam Jerris & Steve Stawicki  
From Paul Golin Executive Director, Rabbi Miriam Jerris,  
SHJ staff, & members of SHJ

## To Rabbi Jodi Kornfeld

Mazel Tov on the marriage of your daughter, Emma  
With love from Miriam Jerris & Stephen Stawicki

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