Humanistic Judaism Magazine

Facing Change

Interview:
Tiffany Shlain
PLUS: An Excerpt from Her Book

Amos Oz
2019–2020 Humanistic Jewish Role Model

High Holiday Liturgy

Community News
and much more

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Change. New Times. Uncertainty. They are always part of life, but sometimes they are especially present. COVID. Black Lives Matter. Zoom. Closed businesses. Online schools. One year ago as Rosh Hashanah neared, did any of us imagine the extent to which our world would change over this past year? Of course not.

Yet life is not only about what happens to us, it is also about what we make happen. In this issue of Humanistic Judaism magazine, we celebrate the ability of the human spirit to navigate—even to grow—amidst change, and offer powerful examples of secular Jews doing just that.

We begin with the life and ideas of the great Israeli writer and peace advocate Amos Oz (1939–2018), posthumously honored as the 2019–2020 Humanistic Judaism Role Model. Born in Jerusalem, Oz spent his life in a land undergoing near constant upheavals, including the birth of the State, foreign wars, Israeli-Palestinian tension, and ongoing battles between secular and non-secular (e.g., Orthodox) visions of Israeli society. Rabbi Miriam Jerris and Andrea Friedlander provide a biography of Oz, and Rabbi Jeffrey Falick offers a probing essay (“Atheists of the Book”) assessing one of Oz’s seminal works, Jews and Words, co-authored in his later years with his daughter, historian Fania Oz-Salzberger. We include a sampling of Oz’s peace advocacy from when the Israeli government removed Jewish settlements from the Gaza Strip in 2005. We also share several study questions about Jews and Words, my favorite of which is, “With more and more young people doing most of their reading through social media, do you think this will change the relationship future generations have with Jewish texts and traditions?”

That brings us to another area of ongoing change: technology. How long can we go without checking our phones? In her recent bestseller, 24/6: The Power of Unplugging One Day a Week, fast-paced internet pioneer and renowned filmmaker Tiffany Shlain describes how her family’s practice of turning off technology and taking a “Tech Shabbat” each week for roughly a decade transformed their lives. SHJ Executive Director Paul Golin interviewed Shlain about that transformation, as well as her broader insights on leading a secular Jewish life today.

Community is key to how we adapt to change, and nowhere is this better reflected than in the recent activities of Humanistic Jewish communities: a “Black Lives Matter” banner displayed outside the Birmingham Temple in Farmington Hills, MI; a June Pride service exploring LGBTQ+ and Jewish identity intersectionality at Kol Hadash in Deerfield, IL; summer camp via Zoom at Machar in Washington, D.C.; and a 50th anniversary celebration of Oraynu in Toronto—Mazal tov! I won’t list them all here, but if you want to be inspired by the courage, ingenuity, and commitment of Humanistic Jewish communities, read the “Community News.” The same is true of our youth. In “Bat Mitzvah Bettering the World,” you can read of 12-year-old Ilana Schwartz’s bold advocacy as a volunteer leader of Jews for a Secular Democracy.

In the spirit of facing change, we include as well a section of readings for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In Jewish tradition, the period from the start of Rosh Hashanah through the end of Yom Kippur is called Aseret Yemei Teshuvah—the Ten Days of Repentance. To repent is to change. As we prepare for this season of personal change, I hope that these writings will help us to face ourselves with greater honesty and face our ever-changing world with greater courage.

With wishes for a healthy and sweet New Year, L’shanah tovah,

J.R.C.
Shabbat at Tiffany’s

An Interview with Tiffany Shlain by Paul Golin

Tiffany Shlain is an Emmy-nominated filmmaker, founder of the Webby Awards, and author of the best-selling book about her family’s decade-long practice of turning off screens one day a week for the past decade, 24/6: The Power of Unplugging One Day A Week—excerpted in this issue of Humanistic Judaism Magazine. Earlier this year, the Museum of Modern Art in New York premiered her new live Spoken Cinema performance Dear Human. She lectures and performs worldwide on the relationship between technology and humanity. The Albert Einstein Foundation selected Tiffany for their book and initiative Genius 100 of people who are carrying on Einstein’s legacy. During Covid, Tiffany has been writing weekly newsletters and is hosting a weekly #ZoomChallahBake on Fridays with special guests and people from all over the world. For information on her book, baking, films, lectures, and her quarterly newsletter Breakfast @ Tiffany’s, please visit tiffanyshlain.com and follow her on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. (Social media links following the interview.)

Paul Golin, executive director of the Society for Humanistic Judaism, interviewed her by email in July 2020:

Paul Golin: Your book spoke to me on so many levels. One thing it got me thinking about is the difference between “ritual” versus “practice.” In the Humanistic Judaism movement, we feel pretty confident about our rituals: utilizing meaningful recurrent words and actions to mark occasions. You do describe rituals around your family’s “Tech Shabbat,” such as cooking the same dinner every Friday night and reciting the blessing over the candles. But what your book is advocating for is a Shabbat practice. Turning off our technology for one day a week, every week, takes discipline. It’s a commitment that I imagine would be intimidating for many in our movement. Am I making a fair distinction between ritual and practice? Can you distill down the case you make for why people should take on the Tech Shabbat practice?

Tiffany Shlain: I think of ritual as doing something to give meaning to that moment in your week, the year, or a rite of passage in your life—usually with others. I love that aspect of being Jewish. In fact, while I often have to replace all the God language in my head when I go to High Holiday services, I love knowing that Jews all over the world are doing the same thing at the same time and asking the same
big questions...like, How do we all want to rethink our lives for the coming year? What would death feel like? How can we contribute more to our family and the world?

In terms of Shabbat, I savor the “ritual” of us all sitting down together at the same time as others all over the world, to be present together in an elevated way, to make a special meal, to tear at some sweet fluffy challah. We also ask the big questions around the table pertaining to what has happened in our lives and the world that week. That ritual is beautiful and nourishing and connects me to something larger than just myself.

During quarantine, I’ve started a new ritual: hosting a Friday-morning Zoom challah bake. It literally connects me with people all over the planet, all doing the same thing at the same time. As we mix and knead, we talk about how we’re doing and discuss bigger ideas and everything going on with the pandemic, racial justice, and the upcoming election. Every time, we have a guest baker—past guests have included Roxane Gay, Angela Duckworth, Rabbis Sydney Mintz and Amichai Lau-Lavie, Krista Tippett and many others—to share the wisdom. It’s been fantastic. Would love to have your community join us.

I think of the word “practice,” the noun, as something more individual. Like I practice yoga. I don’t necessarily do it at the same time as others so it’s more personal and specific to me.

Now why should your community try taking a Tech Shabbat? I could give you so many reasons which I go deep and wide on the subject in my book 24/6 but here I will just offer a simple answer. I just turned 50 and it’s simply the best idea/practice/ritual I have ever brought into my life. It’s taking a core idea from Judaism, a day of rest, adapting it without the religious framework, and it’s the most powerful thing you can do each week to reset, recharge, reflect, what other R words can I throw in there? Rejuvenate...and also to radiate the best of yourself to yourself, your family and the world. It is the day where we are most “together,” as a family connecting with each other and even to our own selves. I can hear myself think and listen to that small inner voice that has a lot of important things to tell you, but usually we keep life so noisy so we can’t hear it. When I turn off all the noise and input from the screens, from everything else, I gain a lot of insights and perspective I just don’t have room for when the screens are conduits to everything coming at us all the time.

I think Shabbat, a day of rest. is. the. best. idea. from Judaism.

PG: You’ve been very open about your approach to Judaism being cultural, not religious. You also live and work in community with fellow creative and highly-achieving Jews (and their Jew-adjacent friends and family members). Have you found that secular folks working in film and technology are more receptive to, or more rejecting of, ideas that emerge from religious tradition?

TS: Most of my friends in the creative or scientific fields do not respond well to the religious aspect of Judaism; neither do I. For me personally, as a feminist, I always found the patriarchal language troubling. If we truly want a more equitable society, why do we keep retelling stories that involve patriarchal power structures? It’s self-propagating. That has been a core issue for me in terms of the Jewish liturgy. However, the commitment to tradition and to ritual is something very interesting to me. I remember when I first met a young Orthodox couple who didn’t use any electricity or money on Shabbat, I was fascinated. I asked them so many questions. I loved that they could live with such a clear boundary of work and rest. However, the more I asked, the more the reason landed on God, that this other force was telling them to do this. They were “obeying a commandment from God.”

I never thought a full day of Shabbat was available to me because I am not a religious Jew, but a cultural one. However, even saying, “I’m a cultural Jew,” doesn’t completely work for me because I feel like it doesn’t convey the deep love I have for the rituals and ideas. Words hold a lot of power in them. The word “God” seems to hold so much patriarchal baggage for me. A good friend of mine, Rabbi Amichai Lau-Lavie (who runs Lab/Shul in NYC which is “God optional”), always told me to replace the word God with “universe” or “nature,” something that might speak to me more. I really do try to do that, but it is a lot of mental gymnastics while trying to literally translate the “prayer” book into a more open framework for me to get to the core of the idea. I think of Marshall McLuhan’s maxim, “The medium is the message.” The medium being “prayer”—which, if you don’t believe in that concept, immediately shuts a door to the important ideas in the book.

I would love to wrestle out a book of core Jewish ideas that are shared in temple without the religious
patriarchal language. Someday, I will do that. The ideas are powerful; but the framework that holds them is an old way of thinking to me. Somehow singing the melodies works for me, perhaps because I don’t read Hebrew so it’s more abstract singing for me that is linking me in a powerful way to my ancestors. I know them by heart, not by head. Rabbi Noa Kushner from The Kitchen introduced me to a whole set of very ancient melodies and songs. They spoke to me deeply. It was so profound, how much they moved me and I seemed to sing them so easily. Some kind of ancestral heart memory coming through the song.

I have another very good friend, Rabbi Sydney Mintz (I apparently have a lot of rabbi friends), who told me that as a gay female rabbi, the fact that she stands in front of a large reform community at Congregation Emanu-El (a Reform temple where my family are members) opens up people to the possibility that the word God is open to interpretation. After centuries of old men leading prayers, the reality that people of different colors, genders and sexualities can lead a community has moved from the radical to the norm and given space for Jews in the pews to feel a different kind of connection to themselves, their rabbis, and their Judaism, and their God.

However, for the word God, and much of stories, they are too steeped in a power structure and patriarchal dynamics that do not work for me. I would rather remove the tension that the word holds for me and liberate the ideas of Judaism.

Ironically, secularizing religious language strikes me as a really Jewish thing to do. I once heard a rabbi say that Judaism is a religion of behavior more than belief. You can be a good Jew and not believe in God, unlike in Christianity. If you are a good Christian but don’t believe in God, you aren’t Christian. Jews have “behavioral” rules for us to live a good life. Sometimes we break them, sometimes we bend them, but we are always striving.

I do feel a sense of awe when I look to the sky, think of the universe and the drama of nature. The closest explanation of the way I feel (after years of searching for a way to articulate my ambivalence about the word and ideas around a “God”) was something I read about Einstein. Rabbis had been asking him, “Do you believe in God?” After quite a bit of back and forth, he finally wrote: “In my opinion the idea of a personal God is a childlike one. You may call me an agnostic, but I do not share the crusading spirit of the professional atheist whose fervor is mostly due to a painful act of liberation from the fetters of religious indoctrination received in youth. I prefer an attitude of humility corresponding to the weakness of our intellectual understanding of nature and of our own being.” That pretty much sums it up for me. Thank you, Albert Einstein, for conveying the General Theory of Agnosticism.

Which reminds me of one of my favorite Jewish jokes: A Jewish family moves into a suburb and finds out that the only good school in the area is a Catholic school. While the parents are worried, education is most important to them, so they send their nine-year-old daughter Sarah there. On the first day of school, Sarah comes home excited by everything she has learned. “Mommy and Daddy, today I learned about the Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost!” Her parents, exasperated, look her in the eyes and say, “Remember, we’re Jewish, Jews have only one God...and we don’t believe in it!”

My husband Ken would prefer if I said I was agnostic, because that leaves room for the unknown. He is a scientist so perhaps his whole body of work (science) is trying to discover the unknown....so for them asking a question and not knowing is their own kind of religion.

Now back to the concept of Shabbat. It is usually framed as the fourth commandment: God commanded a day of rest as he had done when he was “creating” the universe. Let’s remove who “commanded” whom to do something. The idea of this one day off is a radical act. Before then, time had no period and life was just a long run-on sentence. A day off is what gave us the week and a time to work and a time to rest. One of the reasons I ultimately called the book 24/6 instead of Tech Shabbat was because I wanted the idea of one day of rest, six days of work to be at the forefront and not the word Shabbat, in case that may turn some people off to the idea because it sounds religious.

If you think of the ten commandments as an ordered list of a good way to live, the fourth commandment is even above “Thou shall not kill.” That seems like a big deal. Perhaps if you take a true day of rest each week, you won’t kill.

This wisdom that you must take a true day away from what your mind focuses on all week is now backed up by so much neuroscience. Your mind needs different modes of being to be its most creative, productive and reflective. The mode we are always in now is on the
screen and mostly reactive. By turning those screens off, you immediately snap into this other mode. I have found the internet puts me in a state of always wanting “more.” More email, more newsletter headlines, more notifications, more things. And it’s designed so you can’t ever get to the bottom of the internet. The business model is to keep your eyes glued to the screen. By turning the screens off, you reclaim your mind and your time and your presence. It’s very powerful.

Once my family and I started drawing a clear boundary from technology and work on our Tech Shabbat, now almost 11 years ago, I understood how profound this boundary of a full day off is for living a good life. It was liberating. Someone once said to me, “You are the most ‘religious’ non-religious person I know,” because we have done this practice so faithfully.

PG: What do you think we can or should be telling such folks about Humanistic Judaism that might be meaningful or exciting to them?

TS: To try a full day of rest. It is the most exciting thing I have ever done. Truly. Most people think of Shabbat as a special dinner or lighting the candles together. That part is social and fantastic but it is just the door or the entrance to the super potent aspect of Shabbat, a full day of rest. Where Shabbat dinner is social and vibrant, Shabbat day is more quiet and inward and reflective. I want to live in a world where more people value and practice reflection and gaining perspective. We are living in 24/7 reactive society. Especially now with the pandemic. My seventeen-year-old daughter Odessa said to me in the heat of the pandemic, that first month of lockdown, that Tech Shabbats were the only day she didn’t feel like we were in lockdown. This comment moved me. Was it that that day still felt the same? Was it the protection from all the stressful news? Was it that we were together and present with each other? Was it that we all feel “liberated” on our Tech Shabbats from being so “on”?

We need to create space to think and be without all the new stimulation and input from the outside world. There is a lot of value of the inner work that comes from taking a full day off the screens, each week.

PG: Is there anything else you’d like to share?

TS: I have been very excited to learn more about Secular Humanistic Judaism. I never gravitated to the word secular because for some reason it felt cold to me (sec, like cut, or divide). Although I do appreciate people who use the word. However, when you reminded me of the word humanistic, it suddenly felt warm and inviting. Ken and I had Saul Perlmutter over for Shabbat after he regaled us with stories of an ever-expanding universe, mostly what I was interested in hearing him talk about was the humanistic temple he grew up in. I loved hearing how they approached Judaism. We both marveled that it hadn’t taken off in the Bay Area. Seems like fertile soil for that kind of Judaism. I longed for it. Then I met you. And learned there are many others...and chapters all around the country. And now I feel less alone. In The Tribe, one section of the film explores how Jews throughout history have felt like outsiders, then we say, “Maybe that’s why we created a bread with only an outside,” as we show a bagel. I have always felt like an outsider at most temple services knowing that many of the words that I am chanting are not in line with my thinking—even though I feel so connected to the melodies and of course love seeing people there...and listening to an amazing sermon linking core Jewish ideas to things we are wrestling with in society. So my final thoughts for you.... finding your community lets you feel less like an outsider amongst the outsiders.
Page 8 cut from this preview edition.

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or subscription information here: https://shj.org/product/subscribe/

Thank you for your interest in Humanistic Judaism!
Amos Oz was born Amos Klausner on May 4, 1939 in Jerusalem. Oz was a novelist, short-story writer and essayist, as well as a professor and a prominent peace advocate.

He was the only child of Fania (Mussman) and Yehuda Arieh Klausner, immigrants to Mandatory Palestine who had met while studying at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. When he was 12, his mother committed suicide. At age 14, he became a Labor Zionist, left home and joined Kibbutz Hulda. He studied at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, earning a degree in Hebrew Literature. After completing his mandatory three-year service in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), he continued as an army reservist in a tank unit which fought in the Sinai Peninsula during the Six-Day War, and in the Golan Heights during the Yom Kippur War. In 1960, he married Nily Zuckerman. They had three children together and continued to live on the Kibbutz until in 1966, the family moved to the Negev for his son’s health.

Amos Oz was best known as a writer. In addition, he taught Hebrew Literature at Ben Gurion University for more than a decade. Oz published 40 books, among them 14 novels, five collections of stories and novellas, two children’s books, and 12 books of articles and essays (as well as eight selections of essays that appeared in various languages), and about 450 articles and essays. His works have been translated into some 45 languages, more than any other Israeli writer. Oz is the recipient of a number of awards and prizes, including the 1986 Bialik Prize and the 1998 Israel Prize for Literature.

Britannica.com articulated his great gift, “Oz’s symbolic, poetic novels reflect the splits and strains in Israeli culture. Locked in conflict are the traditions of intellect and the demands of the flesh, reality and fantasy, rural Zionism and the longing for European urbanity, and the values of the founding settlers and the perceptions of their skeptical offspring. Oz felt himself unable to share the optimistic outlook and ideological certainties of Israel’s founding generation, and his writings present an ironic view of life in Israel.”

Following the Six Day War, Oz joined the Israeli peace movement and was one of the first to advocate for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He was outspoken against Israeli settlements on the West Bank and supported the Oslo accords and direct talks with the PLO. He became well known for his political activism. Amos Oz was not religious and considered himself a secular Jew. He did not attend synagogue nor did he have any use for worship. However, he understood Judaism profoundly. In describing Judaism, Oz once said, “Judaism is not a package deal. It is a heritage. And a heritage is something that you can play with. You can decide which part of the heritage you allocate to your living room, and which part goes to the attic or the basement. This is the legitimate right of every heir.”

Oz is an ideal choice to be the Humanistic Jewish Role Model for 2019–2020. His deep connection to Judaism, albeit a secular one, his commitment to living his humanistic values, and his connection to the Secular Humanistic Jewish movement in Israel make him easily worthy of this honor.
The long history of debating what defines Jews and Judaism has offered up no shortage of proposals. Defining the essence of Judaism and Jewish identity is like a game of "Whack-a-Mole." Every time one good answer pops up, it’s replaced by another. After a while many a conversation about Judaism and Jewishness start sounding a bit like Tevye as he comes to the conclusion that he’s right and he’s right and you’re also right.

The most inclusive modern take was offered in the 1930s by Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, who denoted the entire enterprise of Jewishness a civilization. It was a powerful idea, broad and flexible and sociologically sound. Yet it did not settle matters. At least not for me.

Perhaps this is why I was so excited to read the book Jews and Words by Amos Oz and Fania Oz-Salzberger, where I encountered the most innovative answer since Kaplan’s. It is the idea that Jewishness might best be understood as a "textline." (p. 1)

First a few words about the authors. Amos Oz (1939–2018) was one of the luminaries of modern Hebrew letters. His prodigious output of fiction included the masterpieces My Michael, The Hill of Evil Counsel, and the semi-autobiographical A Tale of Love and Darkness.

Fania Oz-Salzberger is a distinguished historian at the University of Haifa School of Law and Center for German and European Studies.

These two profoundly secular Jews published Jews and Words in 2012, originally in English. Taking the description of Jews as "the people of the book" to new levels, they proposed that the essence of Judaism and Jewishness could be located in our expansive output of literature. "Ours is not a bloodline," they wrote, "but a textline."

The situation of the Jews is unique in some ways. We are an international people. How we look and sound and what we value as Jews all differ depending upon where we have found ourselves. Yet somehow, despite our wildly varying circumstances, we have managed to remain profoundly connected. We share a collective cultural story and identity that crosses time and space. That, they argue, is the result of our textline.

Oz and Oz-Salzberger point out that collective memory— the importance of telling a culture's story— is of universal importance. Jews, however, devised what the authors call a "peculiarity" when it came to transmitting the story:

[H]ere, quite early in the day, storytelling became a text-anchored precept. Teachers taught from books. Oral wisdom transformed into written codex. From ancient times, fathers had access to some script from which to read to their sons. The "generation to generation" formula was literally carved in stone, writ on papyrus, on calfskin, and later on paper. (p. 24)

Much has been written about the literacy rates of Jews over the centuries. We really do not know just...
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literacy was dished out and served. Somehow, we do not believe that they were passed over. (p. 25)

Amos Oz’s idea of the textline is one of his greatest contributions to Jewish thought. That it was articulated in tandem with his own child (and in writing!) is in itself a powerful statement about how Jews pass on our heritage.

Certainly, as long as there are Jews we will continue to argue about the “essence” of Judaism and Jewishness. For me, Amos Oz and Fania Oz-Salzberger have already settled that debate.

Bibliography:

Discussion Questions

1. Do you feel as though your sense of Jewish identity has been built in part through your engagement with Jewish stories and traditions in books?
2. Do you have memories of a parent-to-child, teacher-to-pupil or rabbi-to-pupil relationship in which Jewish stories and traditions were passed along? Are these positive or negative memories?
3. With more and more young people doing most of their reading through social media, do you think this will change the relationship future generations have with Jewish texts and traditions?

Thank you for your interest in Humanistic Judaism!
Editor's Note: In August of 2005, Israel unilaterally removed Jewish settlements from the Gaza Strip, an action opposed by many in Israel’s right wing. Oz strongly supported that action and strongly supported, too, the ideal of a democratic rather than theocratic Israel.

The evacuation of [Israeli] Gaza Strip settlements is not just a struggle over the question of the future of the territories. At the very core, the pullout is the first big battle on the question of religion and state.

They have their own dream. The first stage is the “whole land of Israel,” filled wall-to-wall with Jews-only towns.

True, Palestinians and Thai workers can come in to do the dirty work, but no more.

The second stage is to transform Israel into a halachic state, a country ruled by Jewish religious law. Elections, the Knesset, the government and the courts may continue to function, but settler rabbis will decide just what issues are appropriate for these bodies to decide, and what issues are too “holy” and important to be left to the people and their elected officials.

In their dream world, there is no place for secular Israel: Its culture is not culture, its values are not values, its opinions are not opinions.

In the eyes of the settlers, we are all poor, underprivileged children who never had the chance for a Jewish education.

In their dream, our task is to become religious and to join them, or at least not to stand in the way while they bring the messiah.

We must nullify ourselves, and in return, they will hug us, sweetly, of course, and with lots and lots of brotherly love.

But if we refuse, the brotherly love and the hugs will go out the window, and we will become little more than traitorous leftists or Nazis.

But we non-religious Israelis also have a dream. We want to live in an enlightened, open and just country, not in some messianic, rabbinic monarchy, and not in the whole land of Israel. We came here to be a free people in our own land.

To be a free people means each person is entitled to choose which parts of Jewish tradition are important to him, and which to leave behind. It means to have the freedom to run our country according to our free will, rather than rabbinic dictates.

This article originally ran on ynetnews on August 21, 2005.

https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3130842,00.html.
Renewal

The universe knows no calendar. The Earth has no clock. Humanity does.

There are times when we pause our constant motion, look at the world we have built for ourselves, and wonder: What does it all mean? Is it all worth it? And can I go on? It is those times that our deepest need is renewal.

If people learned anew in every generation, we would never progress. Language, culture, and civilization exist because past generations provided experience and wisdom. Our inheritance lifts us beyond nature, beyond the cycle. Winter never learns from Autumn, and Summer knows nothing of Spring. Yet we have learned from our ancestors, as our children will learn from us.

We are renewed by what is timeless in human experience: family, love, ideas, and community. We renew each other with our love and support.

We renew ourselves with our commitment to core values. We are the meaning of life. We go on.

This Rosh Hashanah, we renew our commitments together.

**Congregation:** We renew our commitments to Justice, to Truth, and to Peace.

_Rabbi Adam Chalom,
Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation_

The Shofar

We have been awakened to the purpose of the New Year. We resolve, with the sound of the Shofar, to renew ourselves, our community and the world.

May the ram’s horn of old, which called our people to attention, declare our intent. We resolve to pay attention to and improve ourselves.

*We awaken now to a life renewed with purpose and hope.*

We have assembled together as individuals to forge a group, to break down barriers between us, to listen and share.

*We awaken now to a community renewed with purpose and hope.*

We have joined hands across the globe that knows no boundaries or borders. We are one people. We must all take responsibility for protecting and preserving the world.

*We awaken now to a world renewed with purpose and hope.*

Dr. Marni Bonnin, then a member of Or Hadash, AL
Adapted by Rabbi Miriam Jerris

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**Sound the Shofar**

T'kee-ah!
Sh'varim!
T'ru-ah!
T’kee-ah g-dolah!
Page 15 cut from this preview edition.

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Thank you for your interest in Humanistic Judaism!
Humanistic Jews, like all Jews, use the High Holidays as an opportunity to reflect upon our own shortcomings and a resolution to make this coming new year better for us than the last. The Al Chet, traditionally, recitation of a laundry-list of sins, can still be a useful reminder that positive change is always available to us if we seek it.

Reader:
By giving in to anger, we have cheated ourselves of peace, joy, and satisfaction with life.

Community:
By giving in to envy, we have cheated ourselves of commitment and gratitude.

Reader:
By giving in to jealousy, we have cheated ourselves of self-worth.

Community:
By giving in to hate, we cheat ourselves of love, health, and strength of spirit.

Reader:
By giving in to fear, we cheat ourselves of adventure and joyful achievement.

Community:
By giving in to impatience, we cheat ourselves of the enjoyment of the fruits of our labors.

Reader:
By giving in to laziness, we do not make full use of the powers we have.

Community:
By giving in to worry, we cheat ourselves of serenity, confidence, and power.

Reader:
By giving in to mistrust, we cheat ourselves of the security that friendships give us.

Community:
By giving in to greed, we fail to appreciate our gifts and blessings.

Reader:
How wonderful it is to realize that the strength, the goodness, the joy, the serenity, and the power over our lives that we seek is already within us!

Rabbi Frank Tamburello,
Westchester Community for Humanistic Judaism

In Memorium

The Yizkor service is a customary part of many Jewish holidays. The word comes from zachor, which means remember.

As Humanistic Jews, we have evolved this important practice into nizkor—let us remember.

Each of us remembers our loved ones in our own way. It is through our memories and this practice that our heritage will be honored and preserved.

Rabbi Miriam Jerris,
Society for Humanistic Judaism
Ilana Schwartz became a Jews for a Secular Democracy (JFASD) Volunteer Leader at age 12 and quickly demonstrated how, at any age, a caring and devoted activist can bring positive change into the world.

A member of the SHJ Massachusetts affiliate Kahal B'raira, Ilana decided to lead an advocacy campaign as her mitzvah project. She initially planned to meet with legislators in support of the Massachusetts Safe Communities Act (https://bit.ly/3gh15i8), legislation to limit local cooperation with federal immigration enforcement and allow immigrant communities to live in safety.

Immigration policies are often tainted by religious discrimination, even those that are not so blatantly labeled “Muslim ban.” Immigration is therefore one of the focuses of the JFASD initiative. As Jews, we know from our own history what it meant for our people to be discriminated against, through “legal” immigration restrictions that prevented many of our own relatives from finding safety on U.S. shores when we needed it most before World War II. We can't stand silently by as it happens to others.

This April, however, as COVID-19 spread, Schwartz was forced to modify her advocacy to an entirely remote campaign, writing lawmakers instead of meeting with them at the statehouse. Likewise, recognizing the financial challenges that the pandemic imposed upon Massachusetts residents, Schwartz shifted her advocacy to include emergency relief legislation in addition to the Safe Communities Act.

Coordinated by Ilana, supporters of Jews for a Secular Democracy in Massachusetts took action to ensure an equitable government response that wouldn't leave vulnerable communities behind. Fifty-nine JFASD supporters joined a letter addressed to Massachusetts House Speaker Robert DeLeo and Senate President Karen Spika expressing support for legislation to put a moratorium on evictions during the pandemic, provide emergency cash assistance, and expand eligibility for unemployment insurance to workers impacted by COVID-19.

As JFASD Community Organizer, I worked with Ilana to develop and implement her advocacy. She is a fantastic volunteer who really embraces the values of JFASD, and it's been my pleasure to work with her. I hope that many more young activists follow in Ilana's footsteps and choose to volunteer with JFASD for their mitzvah projects! To that end, my JFASD colleagues and I are currently working on codifying what we learned working with Ilana into a toolkit so that other B'nai Mitzvah students can emulate her project and bring their own activism into changing their communities.

Thanks in part to Ilana’s advocacy, the JFASD supporters she mobilized, and others, the Massachusetts Legislature passed a moratorium on evictions that Governor Charlie Baker then signed. Other legislation, including the Safe Communities Act, remain under consideration by the Legislature.

Oraynu: Celebrating 50 Years in This Plague Year
Oraynu—Toronto, Ontario

These are not the best or the worst of times. Joyfully, we recently celebrated our 50th anniversary. Sadly, Rabbi Denise Handlarski resigned after seven years with us and we are sorry to see her go. Thankfully, Rabbis Karen Levy and Eva Goldfinger, and dedicated staff and board members, are moving us forward till we hire a new leader/rabbi. We have had larger than usual turnouts at all our programming on Zoom for many months—holidays, adult ed, discussions, and ZOOMZITS.

We have shortened and reorganized our Fall Festival programs and will be presenting them via Zoom Webinar from all readers’, soloists’ and musicians’ homes. Lots of tech rehearsals—but it will be beautiful and meaningful despite separation. We will be open to sharing these with smaller SHJ communities at a very reasonable cost.

As of July, we are adapting our Sunday school (from Toddler through B’nai Mitzvah) to comply with COVID-19 restrictions. In September, we will resume, either as online Zoom classes, in-class as usual, or a hybrid of both and this may change as the year unfolds.

Our Values and History based curriculum was co-authored by Rabbis Eva Goldfinger and Karen Levy. Family education projects are continuously developed by the school principal and faculty, and parents help run some school-wide/community Festival Celebrations. Upon registration, a school handbook is provided to our families with information on the school program, its philosophy, teaching methods, curriculum, family education projects, and policies.

Canadians are standing with those who oppose racism in any form, and we’ll be presenting educational and social action events this coming year, either alone or in partnership with others.

May the coming year be one of “peace, justice and good health” for all.

Rabbi Eva Goldfinger

Birmingham Temple: To Be Silent Is to Be Complicit
Birmingham Temple—Farmington Hills, MI

In these times of social unrest and the fight for racial justice, to do nothing, to be silent, is to be complicit. Despite the pandemic lockdown and social distancing, the Birmingham Temple Congregation for Humanistic Judaism has continued to do many things.

On June 6, BT congregants participated in a Black Lives Matter car caravan protest from Detroit to the suburb of Bloomfield Hills, MI.

BT also put up a two-sided banner in front of the building, visible from the road to vehicles traveling in both directions that states: TIKKUN OLAM MEANS BLACK LIVES MATTER. In conjunction with this, our social justice folks are preparing a “Say Their Names” display on the hill in front of the building. We will paint the names of Black victims of police and civilians on several signs there.

Throughout July, BT made “We Believe ...” lawn signs available for congregants to display at their homes. They emphasize BLM, science, and important Humanistic values.

Rabbi Falick has made it a priority to address social justice issues, including some of the most controversial. During a recent Friday night YouTube service, he interviewed Michigan activist Jessica New on the topic of “What Does It Mean to Defund Police?”

On other fronts, preparations for our High Holiday services are underway. One pre-recorded service for each holiday will be posted on YouTube with live greetings shared on the screen during the initial stream. We are adding professionally recorded and mixed music to readings that are video recorded by our members. On Yom Kippur afternoon, Rabbi Falick will conduct a live “Nizkor—We Remember” service and we will dedicate the names added this year to our Memorial Garden walls.

Arthur Liebhaber
Humanistic Judaism
Amos Oz Inspires Or Emet Book Discussion Via Zoom
Or Emet—Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN

In honor of Amos Oz, the SHJ’s Humanistic Jewish Role Model of the Year, Or Emet held a Zoom discussion on April 5 of several chapters from Oz’s book Dear Zealots. This was Oz’s last book before his death, with several passages critiquing religious fanaticism, which Mr. Oz termed the worst scourge of the 21st century. A New York Times obituary of Oz noted that:

*Israel, born out of a dream, a yearning, and then forced to face, for better or worse, what reality brings, found in Amos Oz a writer who combined both the country’s essential idealism and the ability to see the cracked nature of what had been wrought.*

For our discussion, we scanned several short passages from the book and uploaded them to Google Drive, where our members could read them online or download and print them. On Zoom, we learned that the best thing to do was to take turns reading aloud with the pages shared on the screen. We also used the “small group breakout” feature for our discussions. It’s much easier to discuss in small groups. It was a constructive event, even though we had to do it virtually, and we all enjoyed our collective journey into Oz’s critical thinking.

Scott Chazdon

Self-Study During Stay-Home in a Plague Year
Kol Hadash—Deerfield, IL

Amid widespread responses to systemic racism and discrimination, Kol Hadashians find ourselves looking inward and outward. What should we do? Is it enough? What are our own blind spots? We consider this within the context of a continuing global pandemic and its associated precautions and consequences. As a currently-distanced community, we can still work, listen, and learn together.

Rabbi Adam Chalom held a two-part study session via Zoom in June and July. For the first, members read “The 1619 Project” from the New York Times. Part two focused on The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness by Michelle Alexander. Many other resource suggestions have been shared. We felt it was important to do our homework first instead of again asking, “What can I do?” to those who have answered this question for decades, and have all too often been left feeling unheard.

Our second annual June Pride Shabbat service, held virtually, featured a discussion with Jewish educator and LGBTQ+ activist Stephanie Goldfarb on topics including complex identities of being queer and Jewish. Our very timely and fruitful discussion addressed larger identity politics, intersectionalism, and the gatekeeping that prevents marginalized communities from supporting each other.

At our Zoom annual meeting, I found myself encouraging friends to act on a micro-level and “stand in the gap,” i.e., to speak up in the face of subtly-biased comments or “jokes” that can be easier to ignore, particularly at close range with friends, family, and coworkers. But aspiring allies must be willing to take on some of the discomfort that people of color experience every day if we hope to effect change. We can normalize speaking up, and questioning our own biases. There may be bumps, but avoiding unpleasantness rarely creates fundamental systemic change.

Victoria LZ Ratnaswamy
Summer Fun at Camp Machar
Machar, The Washington Congregation for Secular Humanistic Judaism—Washington, D.C.

Participants of all ages are enjoying the fun and camaraderie of summer camp—virtually—at Camp Machar. Several 2-week sessions through the summer bring together teams of family and friends vying for points through a variety of challenges and games.

Camp Machar was the brainchild of Jewish Cultural School Director Heather Gale, in coordination with Rabbi Jeremy Kridel, to keep Machar members, family, and friends connected and engaged. “Knowing that many families might have fewer activities, camps, and vacation plans going on this summer, we decided to harness the power of social media and give our members another outlet for their creative energies and Jewish interests,” said Heather.

Participants in Camp Machar come up with a team name and compete for points by completing tasks and posting photos or videos to verify completion on a special members-only Facebook page. An extensive list of challenges and games is available for campers to choose from and earn points. All the activities have different themes. Teams may do something creative, such as making up a song, dance, or game. They can do something practical like giving a loved one a haircut or creating a quarantine cookbook. Tikkun Olam activities like donating to a local organization or picking up trash in the neighborhood earn valuable points. Campers are encouraged to take a virtual tour of a museum or park to gain points. And, participating in any of the other Machar Zoom activities is sure to win points.

Camper Tara says, “It has been a lovely way to bring some focus into our days, and the flexibility of the Camp’s structure makes it a fun and seamless way to do so.” She added that some of the favorite activities are creating a puppet show, doing something nice for an essential worker, and signing on to Machar events. “This is a really lovely, positive, and constructive addition to our summer and helps us to feel connected and engaged even when we are removed from physically interacting with others. We love the variety of activities to choose from, that are fun for both kids and adults, and we appreciate the flexibility of how and when we can participate.”

The top three point-winners in each of three sessions win gift cards of various denominations for their hard work.

Darlene Basch

Kahal B’raira Has Been Busy!
Kahal B’raira—Boston, MA

Although brick and mortar Kahal B’raira (Boston, MA) closed down in March, we continued with Sunday School classes, and congregational gatherings through the end of May. Since then we have been active doing what we can to keep our community thriving. Our committee structure has not only served to keep our congregation going since 1975, it has also served to bring us together in common purpose and to socialize. This has remained the case with the aid of Zoom.

We are also planning our Summer Social and adult ed calendar online. We had a virtual Summer Get Together in place of our Summer BBQ. Dancing, game playing and schmoozing were included. Virtually. Later this Summer we will view (in advance) short documentaries and then meet for discussion. Guiding questions will launch our small groups into rich discussion.

We fully expect to be up and running digitally come the High Holidays and the beginning of the school year. Our biggest challenge is how to create meaningful High Holiday events without actually coming

Continued on next page
together. KB holds as many as five major services, with smaller less formal break fasts. We are pleased to offer free access to everyone for our creative, lay led services. Register online at kahalbraira.org. Donations gratefully accepted.

We support the SHJ definition of a Jew, and we are committed to radical hospitality, actively engaging everyone to feel welcomed and to be valued participants. We are searching for ways to be more welcoming and inclusive to all people who identify with the Jewish people and our future. We are hosting a series called Parent Meet-Up: Talking to Your Children About Race.

Meanwhile, we continue to search for a new Managing Director. This is a difficult time to consider changing such a central figure in the life of our congregation. Our current Director, Gladys Maged, says she will remain engaged for support and mentoring as needed by the new Director. At the time of writing we are in interviews with prospective replacements.

And so, as we face the heat, and these difficult times, we appreciate the community we have created, and celebrate its vitality. 

Jon Levine

High Holidays ad artwork by Zoë Meadow.

Uplift and Creativity from a Virtual Community Concert
Beth Chaverim—Deerfield, IL

On Sunday, July 12, the Beth Chaverim Humanistic Jewish Community of Deerfield, IL proudly put on a virtual concert featuring some vocally talented members. Performers ranged in age from children to adults and featured songs of hope and inspiration, connection and aspiration, as selected by Rabbi Jodi Kornfeld. Performers practiced at home and met up remotely just days before the actual performance to rehearse. The intention of the concert was to bring the community together in a creative and uplifting manner during these troublesome times of social and community isolation.

The concert featured:
- Imagine by John Lennon,
- Over The Rainbow by Harold Arlen,
- What a Wonderful World by Louis Armstrong,
- Somewhere from West Side Story,
- Stand Up and Make a Change by Ly Wilder,
- Lean on Me by Bill Withers,
- You’ve Got a Friend by Carole King, and
- You’ll Never Walk Alone from Carousel.

The concert closed with a group sing-along to Od Yavo Shalom Aleinu, led by Brooke Schrager, who was also instrumental in coordinating the technological components of this concert undertaking. Community members were able to attend the concert in its live format through Zoom and/or watch the recording after the event. Performers and audience members alike shared feelings of comfort, connection, joy, and pride in our community that has used song to bring people together.

Carolyn Lewis

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(all rates in U.S. Dollars)
The Congregation for Humanistic Judaism of Fairfield County, CT (CHJ) places a major emphasis on Tikkun Olam or “repairing the world”. It is a core value of CHJ—keeping us all connected. Embedded within this world view is social action. It is the DNA of Humanistic Judaism and plays a critical role in how we, as Humanistic Jews, see the world and our place in it.

As we move through these uncertain times, CHJ is volunteering in programs in a variety of ways. One major component is through donations. In 2020, our membership has donated money to four organizations for a total of $4000—one thousand to each.

Explained Steve Ulman, Chair of CHJ’s social action committee, “We chose organizations from a preliminary list of those recommended by the Connecticut Covid-19 Charity Connection, and the Connecticut Council for Philanthropy. We looked for organizations that could alleviate the impact of COVID-19 in and around the communities where CHJ’s members live. We also checked each organization’s ratings by agencies that monitor the effectiveness of charities.” The list includes:

- The Connecticut Food Bank—partnering with hundreds of local food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and other organizations providing food to those in need across Connecticut, the Food Bank provided 22.5 million meals in 2019.
- Operation Hope—with its food pantry, affordable housing, homeless response shelter, and community kitchen programs, Operation Hope has been reducing food insecurity and homelessness since 1986.
- The Inner-City Foundation for Charity and Education—supports organizations providing assistance, including food, clothing, shelter, counseling, and education, to at-risk children and adults across Fairfield County.
- Federation for Jewish Philanthropy of Upper Fairfield County—provides support to alleviate food insecurity, funding to Jewish Senior Services for Personal Protective Equipment, partnering with other organizations to address community health and financial needs, create online opportunities to learn, observe Holocaust Remembrance Day, and celebrate holidays. A matching grant turned our $1000 donation into $2000!

CHJ, through its targeted donations, is doing its part to help others cope in these difficult times, and fulfilling its mission of Tikkun Olam.

George Rockmore

Photo: Operation Hope worker by George Rockmore.
### Tributes

**To Sue Greenspan**  
In loving memory of your husband, Dan Greenspan  
From Mary Raskin & Gary Sampson

**To Cole Miller**  
In honor of your Bar Mitzvah Year  
From Grandma Diane

**To Susan & Jim Ryan**  
In loving memory of Jim’s father, James  
From Miriam Jerris & Stephen Stawicki

**To Janette Withers**  
In loving memory of your husband, Harold Londer  
From Rabbi Miriam Jerris

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