

Humanistic Judaism

Magazine

The Pandemic: What Have We Learned?



"In the Waves" by Stanley Goldstein, oil on canvas (2019)

**Science vs. Disinformation:
Humanistic Jews Weigh In**
by Dan Pine

Poems by:
Rabbi Adam Chalom
Rabbi Eva Goldfinger
Rabbi Miriam Jerris
Rabbi Jodi Kornfeld
Rabbi Peter Schweitzer
Rabbi Tzemah Yoreh

**A Jewish Humanist's Guide
to Coping with Covid**
by Dr. Billie Pivnick

**The Pandemic Blossoming of
Online Offerings**
by James McDevitt-Phelps
Summer 2021

Table of Contents

From the Editor

[p. 3](#)

The Unwritten Eulogy

[p. 4](#)

by Rabbi Jodi Kornfeld

Science vs. Disinformation

[p. 5–6](#)

Humanistic Jews Weigh In

by Dan Pine

Covid Psalm to My Listening Heart

[p. 7](#)

by Rabbi Eva Goldfinger

A Jewish Humanist's Guide to Coping with Covid

[p. 8–9](#)

by Billie Pivnick

Time and Space 2020

[p. 10](#)

by Rabbi Adam Chalom

Humanistic Judaism Magazine for Kids!

[p. 11–14](#)

by Robyn Raymer and BJ Saul

Two Poems

[p. 15](#)

by Rabbi Miriam Jerris

High Holiday Liturgy 5782

[p. 16](#)

To Forgive Is Human

by Rabbi Tzemah Yoreh

Place and Purpose

by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer

The Pandemic Blossoming of Online Offerings

[p. 17](#)

by James McDevitt-Phelps

Art by Stephen Fleck and Jason Rice

[p. 18](#)

Community News

[p. 19–22](#)

Tributes, Board of Directors, Communities

[p. 23–24](#)

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From the Editor

I fervently hope the vast majority of our readers are 1) vaccinated; 2) well; 3) enjoying the summertime; and 4) looking forward to High Holiday celebrations that are at least partially “normal”—in person, that is. This issue of *Humanistic Judaism* focuses on lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic, which—depressingly enough—is still with us as of August, 2021.

Since we are humanists, we prize the humanities, including visual art and poetry. Much of this issue consists of poems by artistic, thoughtful Humanistic Jewish rabbis and beautiful work by visual artists. May these creative offerings provide hope, comfort, and inspiration.

Speaking of inspiration, don't miss the articles by and about members of our community who resourcefully discovered silver linings in the pandemic's dark and dreary cloud. These imaginative, determined Jewish humanists include calligrapher Irene Blumenthal, author Fred Cantor, and SHJ board member James McDevitt-Phelps. We also pay tribute to Deb Godden of Machar and thank her for her generous, effective work for SHJ in general and *Humanistic Judaism* in particular.

Psychologist Billie Pivnick (who happens to be our founder Sherwin Wine's niece) provides us with an intriguing and compassionate “Jewish Humanist's Guide to Coping with Covid.” In “Science vs. Disinformation,” Dan Pine interviews three SHJ members—educational, medical, and public-health professionals—about their ideas on the pandemic, the vaccines, government's role, and the part social media has played during these perplexing, often tragic, times.

And a big thank-you to Rabbi Jodi Kornfeld and BJ Saul for helping me craft our children's pull-out section on the Fall Holidays. Shanah Tovah to all! 🔥



R.R.

Cover art:

"In the Waves," 2019, oil on canvas, by Stanley Goldstein, a working artist living in San Francisco. Goldstein has been represented by galleries nationally and shown at museums such as the San Francisco Fine Arts Museums' De Young and the Legion of Honor. He teaches and takes commissions. You can see more of his work at www.stanleygoldstein.com or on Instagram at [stanley_goldstein_art](https://www.instagram.com/stanley_goldstein_art).

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3

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Science vs. Disinformation: Humanistic Jews Weigh In

by Dan Pine

When a drive-through Covid-19 vaccination site opened in her neighborhood last February, Irene Dorfman wanted to help.

A registered nurse with 25 years of experience, she volunteered to administer shots at the Lake County Fairgrounds, just north of Chicago. Thousands of eager, quarantine-weary residents cruised through, rolling down their car windows and rolling up their sleeves for Dorfman.

"People were jubilant," she recalled. "They were so happy they could get this vaccine that could change the whole pandemic. As they drove by, we would clap our hands and shout 'Yay!' I left there feeling this was one of the best professional things I've ever done."

But not everyone who drove up for a shot felt relieved that scientists had crafted safe and effective vaccines in record time.

"I did have one person who said she was not happy at all about getting this vaccine," Dorfman added. "She felt she was protected already, but she knew she had to get the vaccine for traveling. She just felt we were subjected to getting these vaccines because the government mandated that we had to get them."

As a nurse and as a member of Kol Hadash, a Humanistic Jewish congregation on Chicago's North Shore, Dorfman prizes science and rational thought. For her, two of the unfortunate side effects of the pandemic have been the politicization of common sense and the erosion of trust in science.

"I'm a very science-minded person," she said. "My platform is to prevent disease from occurring. Wearing a mask was politicized. I couldn't believe that people would not want to wear a mask, risking their lives and other people's lives, because of their political views."

Yet that is what happened, thanks to the incompetence of the previous administration and to the belittling of experts, such as Dr. Anthony Fauci, on the part of fact-averse partisans and their media megaphones. To date, Covid-19 has killed more than 600,000 Americans, and yet a steady drumbeat of anti-vax disinformation, and even Covid denial, persists in many quarters of the country.

Though the vaccines have been a success and the pandemic in the United States is receding by most metrics, the clash over basic public health measures has left many worried about the response to the next pandemic.

Howard Alper is one of them. A chemist by training, he works for the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. There, Alper serves as a biostatistician for the World Trade Center Health Registry which has been investigating the physical and psychological consequences of the 9/11 attacks. The longitudinal study of more than 70,000 New Yorkers is one of the largest surveys of its kind.

Alper said when the pandemic began to ravage New York in the spring of 2020, his department pivoted its focus to Covid, collecting data and doing epidemiological analysis. Like Dorfman, Alper laments the politicization of the pandemic, with one side having evolved into an anti-science camp. He feels this may have potentially devastating consequences.

"Democracy has evolved in some people's minds," he said. "You have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and now your opinion is valid as anyone else's, including in areas [which require] expertise. I think that's very dangerous. I could be viewed as elitist, but you do have to recognize when someone knows more than you do."

The pandemic triggered even more personal worries for Alper. Having had a kidney transplant, he knew the virus posed an especially grave danger. He and his wife rarely left their Upper West Side apartment after the onset of the pandemic.

Alper's wife, Dahlia Remler, is a Harvard-trained professor of economics at Baruch College, part of the City University of New York. Both are members of The City Congregation (TCC), a Humanistic Jewish congregation in Manhattan. Until recently, he served on the board, and she had been part of the team that helped TCC convert its programming to Zoom.

Because of her husband's elevated health risks, Remler became something of a Covid-19 super-sleuth, reading all she could about the virus, its origins, its spread and its particular risk to immunosuppressed patients like her husband.

"Covid is just so random," she concluded. "Even in places that did things very well [during the early part



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Covid Psalm to My Listening Heart

by Rabbi Eva Goldfinger, 2021

Too busy taking care of
others' needs and wants.
No time for contemplation
about my own.

Covid changed all that.
Locked down—segregated from others,
I now had time to think about myself.
What are my needs?
What have I done well—or accomplished?
What still waits to be improved—or fulfilled?
So I offer a song of prayer,
A Psalm to my listening heart.

Let me...
Assuage my yearnings
Balance study and song
Contribute my best to *tikkun*
Do less and do it better
Embrace differences
Forgive my shortcomings
Give of myself wholeheartedly
Hear the song in everyone
Invoke adventure and change
Judge with compassion
Know my real needs and meet them
Lead with wisdom
Make a positive difference each day
Nurture my inner child
Open myself to lightness
Patiently deal with all trials
Quiet old beasts lurking in me
Recieve life's gifts with joy
Serve others' needs in measure
Trust that I am inherently loveable
Use my gifts to attain and give pleasure
Voice my responses strongly and gently
Worry less and trust more
Xxx (kiss) each morning with song
Yearn for the attainable
Zealously pursue my passions

Let my yearnings to know find resolutions
And let my stresses be eased.
Let unfinished tasks find realization
So my mind and soul can be at peace.

Oh, let me balance stillness and motion
And let my patience and passion mate
Then I can be filled with harmony and elation
So adventure and community will be my fate.

Eva... are you listening? 🔥





A Jewish Humanist's Guide to

Coping with Covid

by Billie Pivnick

How my husband and I rejoiced at being welcomed back to the comfort of our “home away from home” restaurant when it reopened after an 18-month Covid-induced hiatus! Because we were seated near the *maitre de*, we saw and heard joyous reunions so numerous as to forge a familiar pattern. “We’re so glad you’re back!” customers exclaimed, one after another. “We’re so glad to BE back!” retorted the *maitre de*, with a beaming smile and an open-armed gesture. He had a similar conversation with at least thirty people in the short time we supped, also remarking to his assistant about such reservation calls as one from “you know, the older couple who always sat at Table 63 on Friday evenings.”

Reuniting after a long time apart from loved ones is the order of the day in these post-Covid times, and provides much hope. However, this experience is often fraught with more difficulty than imagined from our locked-down isolation. Many of us are not eager to return to our offices or complicated family entanglements; many are even resentful about having to give up cherished, hard-won solitude or autonomy. Wanting to believe the world is safe again for social traffic keeps us engaged, which is good for our sense of well-being. But, of course, the wisest among us understand that the companion that never leaves us is uncertainty.

How have people survived so many months of constant worry or warding worry off? In normal times, our biologically-based “attachment systems” take care of us. When fearful, we seek comfort and security in proximity with loving caregivers, a group that includes spouses, parents, close friends. When “tanked up” on feelings of security, we feel free to roam, explore and adventure into novel or exciting situations again. When no security-inducing relationship exists, we feel chronically insecure. It may not surprise you to know that chronic insecurity creates the foundation for impaired mental and physical health. To create foreseeable outcomes, some cope by throwing themselves into work or travel. Others cope by embracing sustained intimacy—never mind the occasional boredom. Still others cannot choose a reliable strategy for creating predictability, thereby becoming chronically disorganized and finding it hard to settle. When this happens to someone, we say they are failing to cope well. When it happens to ourselves? Sometimes we cannot find the words because in that state we cannot organize our thoughts well, either.

Recent articles written by psychological professionals (see for instance, (<https://apsa.org/PTSE> or <https://apsa.org/coronavirus> or <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/node/1163942/preview>) term the muddled-up, emotionally “blah” result *Pandemic Trauma Stress Experience*. Laypeople call it simply “languishing” (see Adam Grant’s *NY Times* article, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/19/well/mind/covid-mental-health-languishing.html>) and contrast it to “flourishing” (see Dani Blum’s article, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/04/well/mind/flourishing-languishing.html>). The discombobulated or unmotivated state is reversed, at least to some extent, by engaging in experiences of “flow”—activities or relationships characterized by high absorption: writing, making art, running or playing tennis, doing crossword puzzles. Acts of altruism seem to create positive arousal because they can improve our feelings of self-worth.

Uncomfortable as it may be, languishing is a luxury not afforded to all. Of the nearly 30 million Covid cases resolved as of this writing, over 600,000 (or 2%) resulted in death. Well over 2 million people (nearly 7%) were newly hospitalized, with another spike on its way. Translated into psychological terms, these statistics mean profound levels of separation anxiety, loss, and grief. The sudden nature of many of these illnesses also render them traumatic. Trauma makes mourning difficult to resolve. Freud called traumatic bereavement “melancholia” because sufferers’ sadness stuck around for extended periods of time and created deep changes in their ability to communicate in words. After the traumatic First World War, breakdowns in social cohesion produced distorted group processes, resulting eventually in Hitler’s demagogic rise and the demise of millions. Since then, psychologists have put a premium on social mourning after mass catastrophes through a process called memorialization, in which many individual narratives are assembled so that disparate stories can be integrated, organized, and experienced with their accompanying emotions by surviving community members and descendants (See Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit’s wonderful book,

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Time and Space 2020

by Rabbi Adam Chalom

Each moment we think we are still,
we move through time and space.
We feel alone, yet
we are connected
through law and custom,
ancestry, biology,
affinity and enmity,
shared experience of fear and isolation.

Days became weeks became months,
The bliss of quiet faded to
the weight of solitude,
We called and we wrote,
to escape our few rooms.
Learned to Facetime and Zoom,
and maybe
bake sourdough bread.
But the timing was off,
the spacing too far.
The world just seemed askew.

Now we find ourselves on the threshold,
Somewhere between opening up
and shutting down.

What can heal us:
Is it time and patience?
Is it space and distance?
Is there nothing we can do,
or is going nowhere the best we can do?

So with Corona, so too Rosh Hashana.
On the threshold,
Between opening and shutting.

What can heal:
Time and patience?
Space and distance?
What can we do?

What we need is what we have:
time
and
space.

Let us give ourselves these gifts,
this time and this space,
this moment,
now. 🔥



HUMANISTIC JUDAISM MAGAZINE FOR



A CROSSWORD PUZZLE FOR THE FALL HOLIDAYS

Fall Holiday Words:

apologize
apples
begin
bountiful
gratitude
harvest
honey

renewal
RoshHashanah
ShanahTovah
shevarim
shofar
sorry
Sukkot

tashlich
tekiah
teruah
Tishri
YomKippur



CLUES:

DOWN:

1. One blast on a shofar
2. Seventh month of the Jewish calendar
4. To let go of bad thoughts, words, and actions
5. "Happy New Year!"
7. Last day of the Days of Awe, ten days to say "I'm sorry"
9. When you regret something, you feel _____ you did it.
12. Thankfulness
14. To say you are sorry
16. To gather crops

ACROSS:

3. To start
6. A musical instrument played on Rosh Hashanah
8. Plentiful, as in "a _____ harvest"
9. The name of a holiday that means "more than one sukkah"
10. Fruits eaten with honey on Rosh Hashanah
11. Bees make this
13. The Jewish New Year
15. Three blasts on a shofar
17. Starting over
18. Nine short blasts on a shofar

Answers: Down: 1. tekiah 2. Tishri 4. tashlich 5. ShanahTovah 7. YomKippur 9. sorry 12. gratitude 14. apologize 16. harvest 18. teruah Across: 3. begin 6. shofar 8. bountiful 9. Sukkot 10. apples 11. honey 13. RoshHashanah 15. shevarim 17. renewal 18. tekiah

Directions: Use the clues to complete the crossword puzzle with all 19 of the Fall Holiday Words listed. **Hint:** Don't add a space between words in two-word answers like **Rosh Hashanah**; instead, write them like this: **RoshHashanah** (as if they were website names).

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

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Two Poems

by Rabbi Miriam Jerris



High Holiday Liturgy: The New Year 5782

It's a new year like no other.

We've been huddled in our pods reaching out and relating through phone or video. Zoom has become a household name.

How good and pleasant it has been to see the faces of family, friends, and community members.

But now we are ready for more.

We are ready for hugs and in-person conversation.

We are ready to see the smile on your lips, not just in your eyes.

We are ready for the new normal—whatever that may be, whenever that may be.

Welcome 5782—Happy New Year.

How good and pleasant it is for brothers and sisters to dwell together.

Hinnay ma tovu ma naim shevet achim gam yachad

הנה מה־טוב ומה־נעים שבת אחים גם־יחד:

Coming Out of Covid

I've read 96 books since March of 2020. I have not hugged my grandchildren.

Taking a risk, we drive 4,500 miles to Yellowstone National Park and back home. We eat sandwiches we have made for lunch and take out for dinner. We see beautiful sites, exhilarating vistas, experience quiet time in nature, come home healthy, not without anxiety.

Weddings cancelled, plans changed, dreams crushed, fantasies rearranged, no celebratory embraces.

Funerals happen as need requires.

No hugging, no comforting the bereaved except with words.

Words, no matter how beautiful, cannot substitute for the warmth of a loving embrace.

Winter and holidays home alone as mutations multiply. Depression a constant companion to shake off like a dog coming out of a bath, yet still wet.

The sun sheds its light, even in February, when we receive our first vaccinations.

Feeling giddy, yet unsure.

I emerge from a deep sleep, like a bear leaving its den after hibernation.

My head is foggy, my steps uncertain, my heart aching for something more.

Where can I go? Who can I touch? When can I hug my grandchildren?

Six weeks later, we hug loving friends, have dinner together and play cards like in “normal” times.

My grandson celebrates his B Mitzvah on Zoom, me remembering those times with family, full of joy, feeling both pride and sadness.

A date to hug my dear friend is made. Tears are shed.

Six of us, all vaccinated, celebrate Passover together.

At work, all three of us, no masks, hugs exchanged, appreciation felt.

And now the world is open before us.

Am I elated?

No! Still I feel fear, distrust that those not vaccinated will cease to wear masks.

This is not an open and shut case.

The residue of anxiety and sadness still remain.

When will I hug my grandchildren? 🕯

Photo: Recently, Rabbi Miriam Jerris was able to hug her daughter, AJ Chalom, for the first time in more than two years.

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The Pandemic *Blossoming* of Online Offerings

by James McDevitt-Phelps

The pandemic kicked off two months after I moved. I was weary from eight months of living between the ruins of my Hurricane Michael-trashed home and the camper my family set up in the backyard, and I was full of excitement about the big steps I was going to take in the new world of greater Orlando. I was going to get involved in the local film and theatre community, get a job, go to big events, host a regular D&D game, host parties, and save up and get an annual pass to Universal Orlando, where I would regularly go now that I lived only half an hour away.

I managed to buy that pass in February, and visited Universal Orlando for a total of maybe eight hours before the pandemic hit.

We hadn't yet finished unpacking from the move.

Needless to say, my plans, like everyone's, got derailed by the Covid-19 virus. I hadn't had a chance to make any new friends. My part-time job allowed me to work from home, but it was over by June. I couldn't do theatre work, host D&D games, or use my Universal Orlando annual pass. So, when I saw that Kol Hadash's *Intro to Jewish History* and The Birmingham Temple's *Being Jewish* classes were being held online, for free, and open to everyone in the greater community, I jumped on the opportunity. After all, a fun, social, educational activity beyond what I had access to before? That's exactly the kind of thing I had been excited about getting involved in in Orlando, and which the pandemic had snatched away from me.

And so, every Tuesday evening I attended class on Zoom, with Kol Hadash's weekly class preceded by The Birmingham Temple's bi-weekly class every other week.

It was wonderful.

The classes were great to take together. They covered a lot of the same material, but at different times and with different emphases and levels of detail, so the repetition helped to solidify knowledge while not feeling repetitious. I got to meet new people and see them regularly, learn fascinating new things, and engage in stimulating discussions. After a while I learned about The Birmingham Temple's Saturday morning text study, and I joined that as well. (I enjoy it so much that in the middle of my most recent move I actually stopped to attend on my way to my new house, on my phone, in the vestibule of a grocery store.)

I have never lived near an in-person SHJ community. Most of their benefits, therefore, have historically been beyond my reach. The pandemic blossoming of online offerings, however, has given me the chance to access more than I ever have. For a year and a half filled with sadness, struggle, and disappointments, these offerings have been a bright spot, a real silver lining to a very dark cloud.

While the two classes that I started with have ended, I still regularly attend The Birmingham Temple's Saturday text study and their new class, *Unrolling Judaism*. I am impressed with the hybrid structure of the latter, with attendance available in person or online. I hope it is an example of the kind of innovations SHJ communities all over will embrace in the coming months. We are Humanists, and as such we value progress and learning from our experiences. We can't go through something as significant as this pandemic and not ask ourselves what we've learned and how we can improve. I am convinced that some of the answers involve the value of online offerings, and how they can continue to serve our community into the future. 🔥



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CommunityNews

Kol Hadash in the Chicago Area Celebrates Its Twentieth Anniversary

Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation—Chicago, IL

On June 26th and 27th Kol Hadashians celebrated the 20th birthday of our congregation. Festivities were kicked off with a Zoom Havdalah celebration including a comedic emcee, music, slide shows, toasts, memories, trivia, history, and more. Members received a “party bag” at their doors in advance, for a unified Havdalah celebration. This allowed us to have our mini-Havdalah candles, “spices” (a fragrant tea bag), and a few other fun items to add to our sense of togetherness. Looking back on 20 years of photos and hearing from our founders, as well as from newer members, was truly inspiring. Check it out on our YouTube channel here: <https://youtube.com/channel/UC3Beuc595xLwEj8Iiw1I8g>. The celebration continued the next morning with an in-person picnic at a local park. Being able to see each other in person and chat in a natural, 3-D setting was a great reminder of why we join together with our community and all that we look forward to.

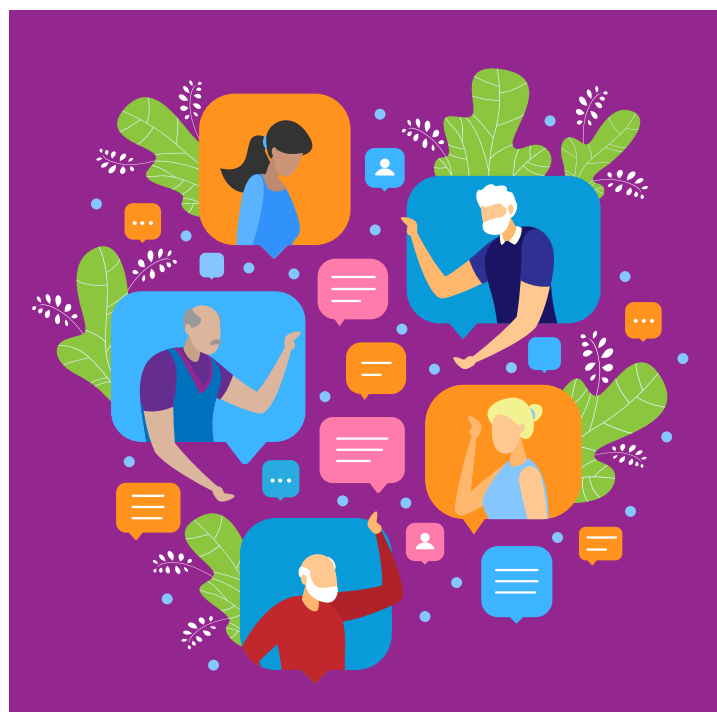
Meanwhile, like others, and in the ongoing endeavor to build and foster our community, Kol Hadash is contemplating our “re-opening.” Of course, we never closed! In short, we want to be together, we want to be sensitive to the needs of those who aren’t ready or able to join in person, and we want to make efforts to optimize all that we learned and created during the pandemic. Providing virtual participation has both expanded our membership and enabled current members to participate more often. We are discussing ways to best provide in-person, hybrid (in-person while also webcasting—what some are calling “multi-access”), and Internet-only programming in the right balance in the coming congregational year. 🔥

Victoria Ratnaswamy



SHJC of Tucson, Arizona Benefits from Going Virtual

The Secular Humanist Jewish Circle—Tucson, AZ



Going virtual during the pandemic has had many benefits for the members of SHJC (Secular Humanist Jewish Circle) of Tucson. We reduced our dues (no need to rent any facilities) and increased our programming. In addition to a regularly scheduled book club and a monthly salon (discussion group of hot topics) the most rewarding benefit was being able to sponsor a once-a-month Friday night educational seminar and Shabbat with our rabbi, Jack Silver. Jack and his wife Sharon live in Phoenix and did try to drive the dusty desert road to the Old Pueblo whenever their dogs would give them the weekend off. The wonders of science made that trip unnecessary. Even though we are an older group (not quite geezers), the majority of our members learned the Zoom technology.

Here is the best part: Rabbi Jack is leading a discussion about the historical roots of Judaism and the connection to Humanistic Judaism. We talk about the “official” Torah portion and whether or not it has any meaning for us today. One member volunteers to do a D’Var Torah (some research), go down the rabbit hole and give a brief talk. I was the first to volunteer with the parsha Bamidbar from Numbers.

We will probably be together in person for major holidays, but I think that these smaller intimate virtual venues will also keep us connected. 🔥

Susan Rubin

Community News

New Direction for Machar's Jewish Cultural School

Machar: The Washington Congregation for Secular Humanistic Judaism—Washington, DC



Machar, like so many other SHJ communities, had to deal with many challenges during this past year. One of them was the relocation out of the area of Heather Gale, our Jewish Cultural School director. But Heather left us with a rather ingenious idea: asking Rabbi Jeremy Kridel to supplement his rabbinic role and take on the JCS director position as well.

Rabbi Jeremy already works closely with JCS and he plans to continue with what JCS does well, while adding some important new dimensions to classes and to student activities. He will focus on creating experiential and project-based learning opportunities for students, illustrating how Humanistic Judaism can be relevant for their own lives. Another goal is helping students and their families feel more connected to one another and to Machar as a community. His added role will also enable him to engage with our B Mitzvah students and families even more closely throughout the Mitzvah process.

Machar is excited that Rabbi Jeremy is embracing this opportunity. We look forward to an interesting, exciting, and engaging year ahead. 🔥

Darlene Basch

Thank You, Deb Godden!

In this issue of *Humanistic Judaism* magazine, we express our thanks and appreciation to Deb Godden, who brought her many talents to the shaping of HJ since its 2017 inception, to producing and editing the *Humanorah* publication from 2015 and to the Society for Humanistic Judaism more broadly. Currently she is stepping down as the editor of the Community News section of the magazine; in her always well-organized fashion, she gathered/nagged for news from our affiliates, then spiced up the content and meticulously edited the section. To the magazine—as to other spheres in her life—Deb brought order, creating a clear calendar schedule for submissions and production, and crafting a user guide to professionalize the use of photography.

Deb got into the IT business in 1977; this eventually led her to training journalists across the U.S. and in London, where she met David Godden. They married in 1991 and moved to San Diego in 1996. David was already a secular guy, but the “Godless Goddens” found their true home in San Diego’s Humanistic Jewish Congregation.

At the first meeting they attended, Rabbi Sherwin Wine, the founder of our movement, spoke. Deb says, “A big lightbulb flashed!” David said, “If you want anything Jewish in your life, Deb, this is it. We must join.” And they’ve both felt they belong in humanistic Judaism ever since.

Deb got very engaged through the original Humanistic Judaism listserv, meeting people throughout the secular Jewish world. She then started taking courses in 1998 in Michigan, loving the learning; she completed training to be a madrikha in 2003. She found the counseling and leadership focus a good match for her hospice volunteer work of 15 years.

Deb first joined the SHJ board as the representative from San Diego, but then her organized notetaking skills came to the fore. Soon she was the Executive Committee’s Secretary, from 2001 until 2014; the records attest to her careful attention to detail.

Her technology skills moved us forward too! As chair of the SHJ Education Committee, Deb established an online resources site for educators. She gathered our schools’ directors at a lunchtime meeting at the International Federation for Secular and Humanistic Judaism in New York City in 2000, a ritual we continued at Colloquium meetings and now online as quarterly Zoom meetings.

The Goddens moved to Takoma Park, Maryland in 2003. Becoming members of Machar, the Washington Congregation for Secular Humanistic Judaism, felt like coming home to their many friends there. They have lived in Charlottesville, VA since 2009 but remain members of Machar.

In 2011 the Sherwin T. Wine Lifetime Achievement Award was bestowed upon Deb for her dedication to the Society for Humanistic Judaism. Her excitement about humanistic Judaism and her thoughtful expressions of our movement are still highly visible, stimulating great discussions in our online groups. In translating her passion for humanistic Judaism into well-organized, diligent, and creative work, Deb Godden has strengthened our movement in so many ways. 🔥

Marlene Cohen

Humanistic Judaism





Congregation for Humanistic Judaism

Irene Blumenthal's Pandemic Year: Squeezing Sour Lemons to Create Sweet Lemonade

Congregation for Humanistic Judaism—Fairfield County, CT

The past year and a half has put us through enormous changes and stresses and has been quite challenging for many of us. Clearly, it has not been an easy time. For others, the pandemic opened up possibilities that may not have existed before.

As Jewish humanists, we know that how we live is up to us. With that in mind, one member of The Congregation for Humanistic Judaism (CHJ) took advantage of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions and combined them with Zoom technology. In fact, this past year provided her with a wonderful opportunity.

As Irene Blumenthal tells us: "I spent my pandemic year taking all kinds of online calligraphy related classes. Before Covid-19 canceled all in-person classes, these courses were only offered live at conferences in distant cities, requiring air travel, hotel stays and quite a lot of expense. Suddenly, these great teachers were doing Zoom versions at reasonable prices, [classes] that I could take in the comfort of my living room. I'm probably the only person who truly enjoyed being forced to stay home. I became part of the calligraphy community on Instagram and 'met' some lovely people."

In the midst of the pandemic, Irene also fell down a flight of stairs—breaking her arm and five ribs—but her "calligrafriends" from around the country sent her hand-drawn, beautiful get-well cards. Fortunately, she is on the mend.

Clearly, this was an occasion when someone took lemons and created lemonade. Please take a moment to view some of Irene's wonderful work. 🔥

George Rockmore



Fred Cantor's Pandemic Year Project:

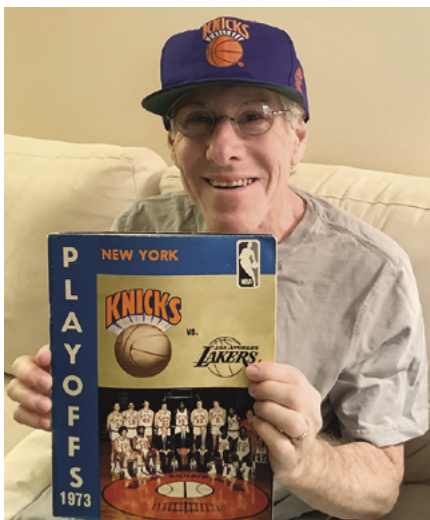
Writing a Memoir About His Six Decades as a New York Knicks Fan

Fred Cantor and his wife Debra Silberstein attend services and events at the Connecticut CHJ. They heard that we at *Humanistic Judaism* were looking for stories about creative projects people worked on during the pandemic. Fred emailed us about his:

"Because I have immune system issues, we took extra precautions in essentially staying confined to our apartment and avoiding people. So, to transport myself 'far away' from the pandemic, I decided to immerse myself in a personal creative project: working on a memoir about my six decades as a Knicks fan.

I enjoy online historical research—and I figured that looking at vintage newspaper articles online and watching old game videos to confirm and/or jog distant memories would take me to another place. And it did: between going back in time and writing up my memories, days would fly by.

And, as I continued my writing, I thought I might have something that had appeal to a broader market. So, I shared sections of my memoir with some old friends—and they absolutely thought it could be a book out in the marketplace.



Page 22 cut from this preview edition.

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Tributes

To Jonathan Cohen

Mazel tov on becoming the Rabbi of Oraynu Congregation
From Miriam Jerris

To Susan & Eric Herschman

Congratulations on your daughter, Carly's engagement
From Miriam Jerris & Steve Stawicki

To Miriam Leventhal

In memory of Norm Tepley
From Miriam Jerris

To Bev Siegel

In memory of your son Jeffrey
Rabbi Miriam Jerris

To Barbara Sugerman

Mazel tov on your new home
From Miriam Jerris & Stephen Stawicki

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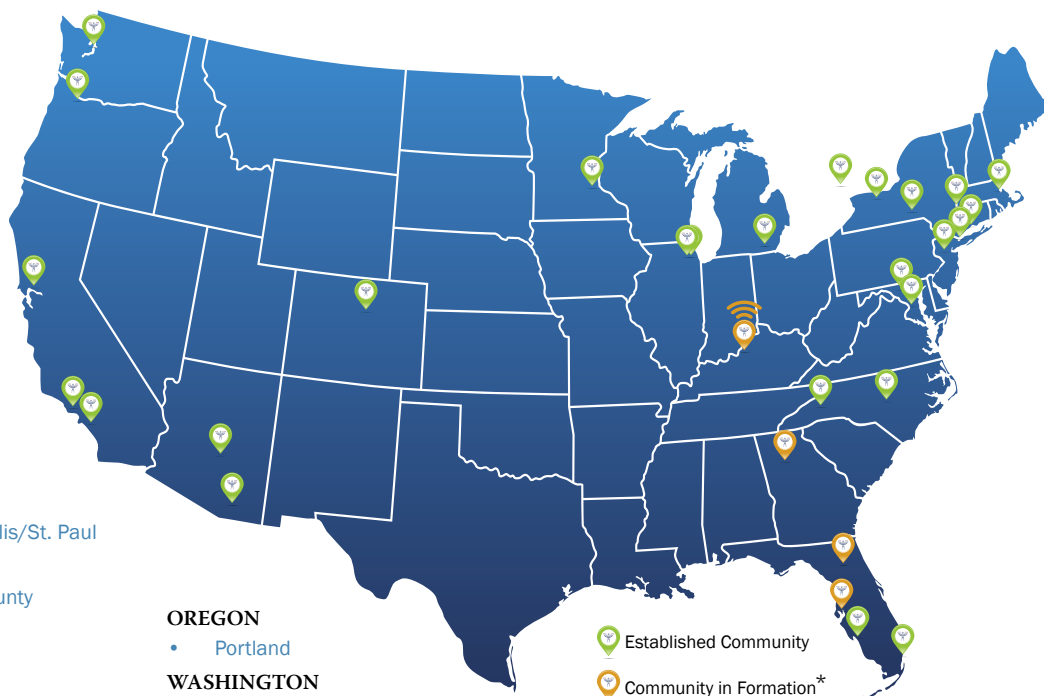
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