Embracing Neurodiversity

Have we been inclusive enough?
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Cary Shaw is the 2021 Recipient of the Sherwin T. Wine Lifetime Achievement Award
FROM THE EDITOR

I want to see our magazine be a relevant voice, not only in our movement, but in the broader movements of Judaism and Humanism.

pronouns and descriptive terms of others, and I will provide an argument for the rich benefits that our movement can gain through embracing neurodiversity.

Relevance, however, is not only about content, but also a matter of design, which is why we are excited to launch the new design (created by Alex Lumelsky of SKY Creative) with this issue. We would appreciate your input on it as we continue to refine it in future issues.

Second, I want to see our magazine be a tool for strengthening and growing our movement. We will be doing this primarily through a revamped Community News section, which will feature not only longer-length reports from congregations, but also short news highlights.

We also hope to share many voices of members of our movement, speaking to why they are Humanistic Jews, including in this issue, an essay by William Thompson that provides his answer to that question.

We hope our readers enjoy this issue and we look forward to hearing your thoughts about what we can do to improve, as well as what topics or themes you would like to see explored in future issues. The best way to send feedback is to email me at humanisticjudaismmagazine@gmail.com.

J.M.B.
Editor
As a Secular Humanistic Jew, and an autistic person, I appreciate diversity.

In both aspects of my life, I know how it feels to be ignored, left out of conversations, made to feel “other,” and to be discriminated against in subtle (and not so subtle) ways. I also know what it’s like to be the target of others’ jokes, and how it feels to openly discuss whether they approve of who or what I am.

Humanistic Jews are, by nature, a diverse group. We welcome many people that other branches claim they accept, but really do not, placing needless social barriers to full acceptance. That means that we welcome atheists, agnostics, cultural Jews, the Jew-curious, and even the DIY Jews who crave non-theistic ritual and tradition. All are welcomed and openly accepted in Humanistic Judaism. Even those who say they are “just Jewish” find an open door with us.

There is a wide range – a spectrum – of Jews that comprise Humanistic Judaism. We are a diverse community that cherishes, celebrates, honors, and welcomes diversity. We hold diversity in both Judaism and in humanity as equal and sacred at all levels.

I have noticed, though, that one place where Humanistic Jews can grow is in embracing neurodiversity and its connections to other forms of diversity. We are already making great strides in recognizing and welcoming autistic members, along with members with ADHD, dyslexia, OCD, and other “differently wired” brains. As a movement though, we have not intentionally addressed the intersectionality of diversity in gender identity, and the ways that neurodiverse LGBTQ+ people are not always welcomed fully.

Our movement has long welcomed LGBTQ+ members, leading Humanistic Jews from the wide spectrum of human sexual identity to join our voices in this space, but I notice that, as a movement, Humanistic Judaism has not always strove to challenge the assumption that a “normal” Jewish life will reflect neurotypical and heteronormative values and identifications.

A prime example of this is the controversy about personal pronouns. Some say that pronoun usage is a matter of proper grammar alone, and ask, why should this even matter? It matters because using another’s chosen pronouns and descriptive terms is a way of acknowledging the other person’s own identity.

It would matter to most of us if someone called us by the wrong name repeatedly. It would upset us if someone refused to acknowledge our spouse or partner – simply because they disagreed with our way of life, or our beliefs. It would hurt us, if someone refused to respect us or accept us as human beings, because they didn’t like who we love, what we believe, what we are, how we relate to the world and people. Having our identity invalidated is a violation of our humanity. It is a form of emotional and psychological rejection and abuse. Our movement would recognize that discriminating against any of these individuals because of the color of their skin, their sexuality, or their ethnicity is hurtful and inhumane. So we should recognize that failing to honor their preferred pronouns is also a form of discrimination.

As Jews, we come from a heritage of cultural resistance, and of finding ways to maintain our traditions and culture in the midst of dominant and hostile cultures around us. We know what it means to be in the minority, and to be disrespected. The Jewish people have a history (in our best moments) of protecting the rights and dignities of others. And as Humanists, we affirm the value of all of humankind, in all of our beautiful and sometimes challenging diversity.

As Humanistic Jews, I believe we must take our values and apply them more fully to the issue of respectful language. We should never perpetuate the violence of disrespect on others. More than that, we should also seek to proactively find ways to value and cherish others as they are – life-affirming, consenting adults with complex identities, engaged in loving relationships, and bringing who they are to the world. Human diversity is a wide landscape with lots of room for variety. Nature and the Universe love variety, and perfection is an illusion.

Human diversity is part of our human evolutionary path. It is time for Humanistic Jews to more fully embrace it.
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MI, DETROIT | CONGREGATION FOR HUMANISTIC JUDAISM OF METRO DETROIT

The “mother shul” of Humanistic Judaism has changed its name!

Following one of the core principles of Humanistic Judaism—that we say what we mean and mean what we say—over the summer the founding congregation of our movement officially became known as the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism of Metro Detroit (or CHJ-Detroit for short). Intended to better communicate who we are, what we stand for and, crucially, where we are located, the change was the result of a year-long process. During that time, we invited members and friends across the world to submit ideas. One point of convergence quickly emerged: the vast majority wanted our new name to highlight Humanistic Judaism, in order to help us spread the word about our movement.

While our founding name has nostalgic importance to our members and for Humanistic Jews everywhere, it has long proved to be a liability to local outreach, confusing and uninformative to those not “in the know.” The name change is but one in a series of innovations we’ve undertaken to attract new members. These include putting in place a voluntary annual membership pledge system and making our Spinoza Youth Education Program free to all members!

With in-person programming returning and blessed by spectacular weather, we celebrated Sukkot as a Food Sustainability event. After putting the high holidays online this year, this social justice committee-sponsored program served as our first major holiday gathering. Members came together around and inside the Sukkah to feast on dishes inspired by the sustainability movement while learning about its connection to environmentalism and climate change. In celebration of the holiday, Rabbi Jeff showed us how to shake our lulav and etrog and talked about the themes of the holiday.

— Arthur Liebhaber

MI, DETROIT | CONGREGATION FOR HUMANISTIC JUDAISM OF METRO DETROIT

A temporary sign displays the new name of our movement’s founding congregation.

AZ, TUCSON | Secular Humanist Jewish Circle recently discussed the bestseller, My Promised Land by Ari Shavit.

CA, BERKELEY | Kol Hadash, Northern California Congregation for Humanistic Judaism is hosting a monthly Shmita Art Break in which members work side-by-side on either guided activities or their own ongoing creative projects.

CA, ENCINO | Adat Chaverim, Congregation for Humanistic Judaism went on a field trip to the Skirball Cultural Center for the exhibition of Sustain: From Loss to Renewal, which looked to Jewish traditions of mourning as a guide through collective grief.

CA, ORANGE COUNTY | Pacific Community of Cultural Jews gathered together in person for Sukkot at a member’s lovely backyard.

CO, BOULDER | Beth Ami, Colorado Congregation for Humanistic Judaism took advantage of the beautiful fall weather to host many of its High Holiday programs in the great outdoors this year.

DC, WASHINGTON | Machar, The Washington Congregation for Secular Humanistic Judaism will be holding their annual Hanukkah celebration in combination with a special award presentation. SHJ’s initiative Jews for a Secular Democracy Constitutional Defender Award will be awarded to US Congressman Jamie Raskin. Register at http://bit.ly/dec5machar

FL, BOCA RATON | Congregation Beth Adam, South Florida Center for Humanistic Judaism hosted an early community Hanukkah celebration.

FL, GAINESVILLE | Gainesville Humanistic Judaism Meetup* met with the Tampa Bay HJ group for the discussion “Civil Dialogue: Religion, Race, Politics, and Class.”

FL, ST. PETERSBURG | Humanistic Jews of Tampa Bay* met with the Gainesville HJ group for a discussion on “Separation of Church and State: An American Tradition or Not?”

IL, DEERFIELD | Beth Chaverim Humanistic Jewish Community hosted Professor Nava Scharf on the topic of “Siblings, Jealousy and Rivalry in the Bible” on October 18.
Seeking deeper connection after the fatigue of over 18 months of virtual events, The Congregation for Humanistic Judaism (CHJ, CT) gathered on the Westport beach to rekindle our annual Havdalah service of the Jewish New Year.

It was a perfectly beautiful August evening – fantastic sunset, light breeze, stars beginning to come out – as we gathered in a circle to share a service, sing songs, eat and drink, and of course visit and catch up. According to the experts, being on the beach with a lovely breeze is a safe and reasonable way to gather in groups and it worked for us. Returning members traveled from Massachusetts and new neighbors also checked us out.

Of course, we can't be outside all year – not in Connecticut! So we plan a hybrid of indoor events combined with a virtual option for those not ready to emerge.

The discovery of Zoom is a “keeper,” allowing inclusiveness for the educational Jewish Journeys and Shabbat programs. We’ve fostered partnerships with community organizations. For instance, to better understand refugee perspectives, CHJ will partner with the Westport Library for a speaker from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Mondiant Dogon will share his story and newly published book, “Those We Throw Away are Diamonds.”

In the fall, Connecticut expects to welcome 30-40 new Afghanistan refugee families, so CHJ members are volunteering with the CT Institute for Refugees and Immigrants to be trained to help provide support for them.

– George Rockmore
NC, CHAPEL HILL | Kol Haskalah, A Humanistic Jewish Congregation hosted a virtual evening on the topic of “Exploring Free Speech” on Oct. 19th with Amy Spitalnick.

NJ, MORRIS COUNTY | Kahal Chaverim, NJ Congregation for Humanistic Judaism ushered in the new year by celebrating their high holiday services outdoors at the Fosterfields Living Historical Farm.

NY, ITHACA | Kol Haverim Finger Lakes Community for Humanistic Judaism met to celebrate Sukkot with a brown bag picnic at a creekside pavilion at beautiful Taughannock Falls State Park, followed by a hike to a gorge in the park.

NY, NEW YORK | The City Congregation for Humanistic Judaism Rabbi Tzemah hosts a twice-weekly online zoom class on “Reading Biblical Stories through Humanistic eyes.”

NY, ROCHESTER | Beth Kasalah, Rochester Society for Humanistic Judaism’s October study group discussed ways that they can effectively communicate regarding the COVID-19 pandemic with people who do not respect science. It was led by Bernie Marcus, a retired biology professor.

NY, WESTCHESTER COUNTY | Westchester Community for Humanistic Judaism will be presenting a special concert with pianist Peggy Reich “Jewish Musical Reflections” on November 20th.

OR, PORTLAND | Kol Shalom, Community for Humanistic Judaism held a social action forum with Phoenix Rising, an organization that aids in prison-to-community transitions.

WA, SEATTLE | Secular Jewish Circle of Puget Sound is having a Hanukkah party on Mercer Island.

CANADA, TORONTO | Oraynu Congregation warmly welcomed their new congregational leader, Rabbi Jonathan Chohen during the high holidays.

ONLINE (EST-BASED) | The Spinoza Havurah* hosts frequent online Shabbat meetings discussing intriguing and varied topics from Albert Einstein’s religious beliefs to “What is religion and what does it mean to be religious?”

* Congregations in formation

AZ, PHOENIX | OR ADAM CONGREGATION FOR HUMANISTIC JUDAISM

Or Adam celebrates 35th Anniversary

In the spring of 2022, Or Adam will celebrate its 35th anniversary and our first Rabbi, Jeffrey Schesnol, will be officially ordained by the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism (IISHJ). He is quoted regularly in the Phoenix Jewish News and Jewish Life Magazine, and in November will begin writing a monthly column for the magazine.

For now, all our events are on Zoom, which has newly made us a “borderless” congregation, meaning we have members from all over the country, as well as one member in New Zealand. When asked why he decided to join our congregation rather than just be an at-large member of the SHJ, our New Zealander said, “It fits in with my time zone, so I came for the dinner, but stayed for the company.” He went on to explain that he especially appreciated our wide-ranging conversations and the ability to participate in real time.

We offer a monthly Current Controversy Discussion Group, a Book Club, a Movie Discussion Group, and Shabbat and Havdalah Celebrations. We also have a quarterly Speakers’ Bureau. We observe Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Hanukkah, Tu B’Shevat, Purim, Yom HaShoah, and Passover. We also provide families with young children a monthly Sunday School class and a B Mitzvah program.

– Susan Schesnol

FL, SARASOTA | CONGREGATION FOR HUMANISTIC JUDAISM

Coming Back Better!

As with most congregations, CHJ Sarasota has had a difficult year. But we have faced the obstacles and have been rethinking old ways and embracing new ones.

Services have been a challenge. Zoom works, to a point, but being together, sharing music, food, greetings and general human contact, cannot be replaced. But technology has allowed us to be together, and, best of all, we learned about technology!

Armed with our new expertise, we embarked on a weekly “Lunch and Learn” course based upon the fascinating twenty-part series of YouTube videos created by Rabbi Adam Chalom, entitled Introduction to Jewish History. SHJ provides excellent resources for this program, and our five rotating volunteer moderators also bring their own research. Registration has been excellent, and our one-hour conversations have been very stimulating. We are all either discovering, or rediscovering, our connection to Humanistic Judaism.

We have also used technology to host our speaker series. The October lecture, by Harold Halpern, columnist for the Sarasota Herald Tribune, was entitled “Israel’s New Government – How will it Address Domestic and Foreign Policy.”

As we prepare to come back live for our Chanukah celebration, we are looking forward to new challenges and opportunities. In February we will celebrate our first B’Nai Mitzvah in fifteen years! Thirteen-year-old Sally Rozelle is busy writing her service, working on her mitzvah project, and even learning to read Hebrew.

Let the new year begin!

– Diane Schulman, PhD
Why I Am a Humanistic Jew

I was not born Jewish. I come from a Southern Baptist family that (mostly) believes Protestant Christianity is the only sure path to salvation and eternal life. I went to church almost every Sunday of my childhood and frequently on Wednesday nights. I was baptized at the age of five, which was unusually young for our denomination, and was “born again” when I was about 13 years old. I did a brief stint in the Catholic Church, which scandalized my family, before eventually abandoning Christianity altogether, which horrified them. In my twenties, I joined a Unitarian Universalist fellowship for a couple of years before deciding their non-ideological approach didn’t work for me. Oddly enough, I ultimately found a way to express my spirituality through Judaism, the religion that introduced “God” to the world. My introduction to Judaism came through the Reform Movement in a small synagogue in a small Southern town. The Friday evening services welcoming Shabbat were a wonderful experience, even though most nights the congregation struggled to form a minyan. The chanting and music, combined with a liberal approach to religion, were a breath of fresh air for me coming out of the theological conservatism of Christianity. This small Reform temple helped me to see religion as a refuge rather than an ordeal.

This first encounter with Judaism didn’t initially lead me to convert. I felt that it would be hypocritical to convert to Judaism when I didn’t believe that God existed. Luckily, I met my Jewish husband shortly afterward. Through my relationship with him and his family, I stayed in contact with the Jewish liturgical year—celebrating Purim, Passover, Rosh Hashanah, and Hanukkah year after year. It was during this time I joined the Unitarian Universalist fellowship and learned about liberal theology—the game of redefining God into what Sherwin Wine derisively called “abstraction with capital letters.” Finally, after attending the Jewish wedding of my husband’s friend, I decided that I needed to be Jewish, not just Jewish adjacent.

I went through the conversion process with a Reform rabbi who had no problem with unconventional ideas of God. In fact, the diversity of Reform Jewish theology was one of the first topics we discussed. So, I worked
I am a Humanistic Jew because I find in Judaism a spiritual discipline that helps me to find and express meaning in my life. I am a Humanistic Jew because I find the beliefs, values, and principles of Humanism to be the best and most accurate description of reality and morality as I understand it.

within the liberal theological system of God as the Universe, Goodness, being, etc., I completed my year before the bet din that had my dunk in the mikvah. Mazal tov! I’m a Jew.

It was toward the end of the conversion process that I discovered Wine’s book Judaism Beyond God. This lenting criticism of the hypocrisy and inconsistencies of liberal Judaism and wear me down. With Wine’s argument in Judaism Beyond God, I found the obvious disappointment. Although I cannot accept the idea of God, I do have a general feeling about what I can only call the “sacred” qualities of life. It is this that allows diffuse greatness which I encounter in life that has become the source of my own “spirituality” (for lack of a better word). The sense of awe and wonder which can be evoked by placing the beauty, grandeur, and majesty of nature; the sense of “oneness” (for lack of a better feeling) that comes from meditation, the love for my husband and my children, my sense of ethical dependence with others; feelings of self-transcendence. All of these experiences (and more) are sacred, meaningful, and spiritual.

So, I have the sense that Judaism as a spiritual system, I agree that liberal theology is philosophically and theologically believe God exists. I am supposed to do with that? I ended up combining two approaches to Judaism, one from Sherwin Wine and the other from Harold Kushner.

Wine argued that Judaism does not create a humbling yet uplifting spiritual experience. Observing Shabbat and the holidays gives me time to engage in a deeper meditative practice, attend uplifting communal services, study Jewish literature and philosophy, listen to Jewish music, study Hebrew, or learn about Jewish history. Shabbat and the holiness of the Sabbath are a reminder of the presence of other people, and other living things. The wine, candles, blessings had to be reworded, something that comes from meditation, the love for my husband and my children, my sense of ethical dependence with others; feelings of self-transcendence. All of these experiences (and more) are sacred, meaningful, and spiritual.

Thank you for your interest in Humanistic Judaism!

2. A rabbinic court that determines whether a proselyte can become a Jew.
3. A ritual bath used for purification and for the conversion ceremony.
4. Romain Rolland in a letter to Sigmund Freud coined this phrase which refers to a feeling of “being one with the external world as a whole” and a “sensation of eternity.”
5. The religious system of dietary laws based on the Torah and Talmud.
6. Commonly translated as “monetary charity,” but literally “justice.”
7. Beginning of the month in the Hebrew calendar.
A Rabbi on the spectrum speaks out

I am a congregational Rabbi on the autistic spectrum. How is that at all possible? How could I genuinely thrive in a pastoral profession that rewards extroversion and is mostly the purview of those who intuitively grasp social dynamics?

I can't understand my closest family members most of the time, let alone a room full of people who I know only peripherally. And yet I have thrived. That is because along with the deficits of people on the spectrum, there is a precious gift that being neuro-atypical bequeaths me, but it took me a while to find it.

Allow me to share a sliver of my journey with you. I am a child of the '80s. Growing up then there was simply no language around high-functioning autism. I knew I was different, but I couldn't describe how. Something was always more than a little bit wrong, but I didn't know what it was. There were times I was happy, but I wouldn't say I had a happy childhood.

I could never look others in the eye and my body language was fairly wild. I shied away from most touch. I was so literal, and I was so lonely. From a young age, I always sought to understand, but was too often frustrated. As a child, I would reach for books on the higher shelf, I was a precocious reader, and my parents were academics. One of the books that changed my life was a book decoding body language for those who don't intuitively grasp it. I was finally able to pry open a window to understand the other, and more importantly how others saw me.

As I grew older there were other windows, the most important of which was poetry. The book on body language gave me some insight into people's minds. Poetry allowed me to go deeper.

I began to write poetry, and I began to write prayers. It was my poetry and prayers that led me to the rabbinate, their cadences of secular transcendence rooted in ancient texts drew the attention of others and through them I found my community.

But it is one thing to find a community and it is altogether different to lead. You can't lead through poetry, can you?

My favorite poem in the world, by Avraham ben Yitzchak begins with the words:

“Happy are those who sow but do not reap
For they have wandered far
Happy are those who are generous
And in their glorious youth have made
the days lighter,
Throwing their jewels as they traverse the
story of their lives”

It is a poem about the greatest human beings, who have enriched the world and touched everyone in passing. It is a poem about unfettered generosity. It is a poem about philosopher kings, who have achieved the second naivete and live out their ideals at peace with the world.

This poem is one of my literary models for how to live life, and I always ask myself whether I am holding myself up to the ideals encapsulated in this poem.

The answer is no.

One of the central tenets of Humanistic Judaism is the verse from Leviticus 19, which commands: “love your neighbor as yourself.” This tenet has been expressed in many different ways throughout history. Hillel the Elder says this encapsulates the entire Torah. James the brother of Jesus said that it is part of the Royal law. Kant said it was the prime imperative, and there were and are countless thinkers all over the world who echo this directive.

One of a more skeptical bent may retort, “Love your neighbor as yourself” is great as general principle, but it was first articulated in the Hebrew Bible, a text which most definitely did not advocate a humanist philosophy. In the context of Leviticus “Love your neighbor as yourself” meant: Love him...
and not her, since women are unequal to men. Love your neighbor the Israelite, but not the Canaanite who you are commanded to destroy. Do not love your neighbor if he happens to be the idolater who you are commanded to expunge from your midst, or the homosexual who you are commanded to kill.

It is such a beautiful articulation, so profound and universal, but I doubt that many in the biblical period actually believed it in its entirety or lived up to it. Human nature has thankfully progressed and today many of us do believe this more fully than ever before in human history, but I personally still do not think that I have lived up to this categorical imperative.

Have I truly treated my neighbor as I myself would wish to be treated?

I ask myself, am I truly a “neighbor” to an African American woman? Have I truly considered the systemic racism that she endures constantly, her blocks as she seeks to educate her children, and provide for her family, or even walk down a street in peace?

I ask myself, have I truly loved and sought to understand transgender human beings who experience the world so differently, would I unthinkingly misgender people if that were indeed the case?

I am Jewish and my family bears the scars of the Holocaust, yet how do I address the other anti-Semitism that I am guilty of, anti-muslim bias? Can I appreciate the harangue of comments and looks endured by a woman who wears a hijab?

Can I truly understand the other, whoever the other may be? Can I truly put myself in someone else’s shoes when I live in my world of privilege?

I have resolved that I shall continue in my attempt to do so, for that is the nature of a universal principle, we cannot entirely live up to it, only strive towards it. That is what my gift of autism has bequeathed me. It is because this attempt is entirely genuine without guile or pretense and people see this and appreciate it that I connect to my community. It is why I am an effective rabbi.

This essay was first published at TheHill.com and is reprinted with the permission of the author.
Have we been inclusive enough?

BY JAMES M. BRANUM
Neurodiversity Glossary

**Ableism:** discrimination and social prejudice against people with disabilities and/or those perceived to be disabled.

**ADHD:** short for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, which encompasses differences in brain development and activity that affect attention, the ability to sit still, and self-control. A subtype is ADD (attention deficit disorder) which does not have the hyperactivity element.

**Aspergers:** a diagnosis used under the previous edition of the diagnostic manual for a subset of Autism. It is from this term that the popular expression “aspie” is derived. The term is still used by some people but it is becoming less common.

**Autism:** a term that refers to a set of differences in thinking, social interaction, communication, and the regulation of emotions and sensory experiences. The term can be used in a clinical context (as in a diagnosis of a condition) but also a term of identity by autistic people.

**Autism Spectrum:** an umbrella term used to cover a broad range of neurological differences that fall within and/or are adjacent to the diagnostic criteria for Autism. The word “spectrum” is used as a metaphor to explain how Autism manifests in different ways for different people.

**Dyslexia:** most often manifested in difficulties in reading, but it also is manifested in issues with short term memory and organization.

**Dyscalculia:** difficulty to conceptualize numbers, size, distance and shape.

**Dysgraphia:** difficulty in hand-writing.

**Dyspraxia:** difficulties with movement. It can include fine motor skills (like tying shoelaces) or gross motor skills (such as riding a bike).

**Echolalia:** repetition of vocalizations (either sounds or words). This phenomenon is sometimes present in Autism and in Tourette Syndrome.

**Executive Function:** the ability to plan complex cognitive tasks and then to implement those tasks. Issues of executive function can cause difficulties in everyday living.

**Functional labels:** a controversial concept of labeling neurodivergent people as high or low functioning based on diagnostic criteria. Many Autistic people object to these labels as being overly simplistic and at times misleading.

**Identity-first Language:** a method of self-reference preferred by many neurodiverse people who see their neurodiverse identity as a part of their identity, such as “autistic person” rather than “person with autism” (see also people-first language below).

**Neodivergent:** Sometimes abbreviated as ND, a neurodivergent person has a mind that works in a different way than the dominant social standards of “normal.”

**Neurodiversity:** the biological fact that human minds are incredibly diverse and have a wide range of differences in neuro-cognitive functioning.

**Neurodiversity movement:** a movement that sees neurodiversity as part of the normal human experience, and as such advocates for full autonomy and social support of those who are neurodivergent.

**Neurotypical:** Sometimes abbreviated as NT, a neurotypical person is anyone who is not neurodivergent.

**People-first language:** A method of labeling people that seeks to put the person before a diagnosis, in other stating what a person “has” rather than what a person “is,” such as in saying “person with autism” rather than “autistic person.” This usage is most common in the medical community, but has been rejected by most (not all) of the neurodiversity movement.

**Special Interests:** a term for intense areas of interest that many Autistic people have, which sometimes become hobbies and even vocations, but also are sometimes labeled by some as “obsessive interests.”

**Stimming:** Short for self-stimulatory behavior, it is the repetition of physical movements, sounds, words or moving objects. Often stimming is a calming experience for Autistic people.

**Tourette Syndrome:** a chronic tic disorder characterized by the present of both motor tics and vocal (phonic) tics.

A list of source used to compile this glossary can be found at: https://bit.ly/HJ-neurodiversitylinks
I married later in life at age 35. The experience of being newly married and a step-father in middle-age enriched and challenged me, especially as it relates to issues of identity. In time, these experiences led me to go through two overlapping journeys of self-discovery. The result was my: (1) being adopted into Judaism through the SHJ in 2014, and (2) being diagnosed as being autistic in 2016.

When I went through these two initiations of understanding, I saw them as two distinct parts of my life, but today I understand that my Humanism, my Judaism and my Autism are all integrally related to each other as core parts of my identity. But I also think that my feelings of connection between these concepts is bigger than just their co-coherence in my identity, rather I believe that the embrace of neurodiversity (see glossary) could be an integral part of the Humanistic Jewish experience, one that would provide new challenges but also opportunities for our movement.

I am excited about these opportunities because they touch on core principles of what it means to be a Humanistic Jew. As Humanists, we value human potential in all of its varied forms, and hence we believe that we all have something important to share as part of the collective work of seeking a better world, not in the hereafter, but RIGHT NOW. And as Jews, we stand with the underdog, the outcast, and those who are told they don’t count. So supporting the interests of neurodivergent people is in our philosophical DNA.

One of the opportunities brought by embracing neurodiversity is the resulting infusion of new ideas. Neurodivergent people experience the world differently than neurotypical people and we think differently. As such, many of us have remarkable skills when it comes to problem solving and artistic creativity. In fact, many argue that the continued presence of autism and other forms of genetically-derived neurodivergence might in fact be an evolutionary adaptation that has served humanity well. This creativity could be a catalyst for significant positive changes in our congregations and our movement as a whole.

A second opportunity is pragmatic, because respecting neurodiversity brings in new people. The academic world has recently noticed what many Autistic people have known all along — that we are more likely to be atheists, agnostics or religious freethinkers than the neurotypical majority. At the same time, some of us also are deeply engaged and interested in religion, often as one of our special interests (see glossary) but have experienced misunderstanding and rejection by our past religious communities. These dynamics make Humanistic Judaism an attractive philosophical home for many neurodivergent people.

And the numbers go beyond neurodi-
vergent people themselves, but also to their family and friends, many of whom will only feel comfortable in a collective Jewish context that is welcoming to their neurodiverse loved ones.

A third opportunity that deeper inclusion provides is the opportunity for new intersectional justice work. Neurodivergent people have long been organizing ourselves in advocating for our own interests, but we have also been active in confronting other kinds of oppression. Indeed, many neurodivergent people are also activists for issues of gender and sexuality (since a high percentage of neurodivergent people identify as being LGBTQ+). Welcoming neurodivergent people into our communities often means welcoming new activists who are working to undo all forms of oppression.

Finally, the embrace of neurodiversity by our movement provides an opportunity for all Humanistic Jews to better understand aspects of ourselves, and each other. I say this because many of the traits of the various conditions associated with neurodivergence are in fact traits that are also shared by portions of the larger population, often by people who might not meet all but not all diagnostic criteria set by the DSM-5. People who fall into this broader phenotype of conditions might be made to welcome neurodivergent people, but also from the wisdom and shared experiences of neurodivergent people.

As Jews, we stand with the underdog, the outcast, and those who are told they don’t count. So supporting the interests of neurodivergent people is in our philosophical DNA.

Thank you for your interest in Humanistic Judaism!
A life of reason

BY GEORGE ROCKMORE

Cary Shaw is the 2021 Recipient of the Sherwin T. Wine Lifetime Achievement Award

The Congregation for Humanistic Judaism (CHJ) located in Fairfield County, Connecticut is thrilled and proud of Cary Shaw for being selected as the 2021 recipient of the Sherwin T. Wine Lifetime Achievement Award. Cary clearly deserves this honor for a lifetime of work and commitment to the ideals and ideas put forth by Humanistic Judaism and the humanist movement.

If Cary’s worldview and values could be summed up in a phrase, it would doubtlessly be “working to make the world a better place through science, reason and rational thought.” Throughout his professional and personal life, Cary has worked tirelessly to better the lives of people in his workplace and community.

Born and raised in the Jewish Reform tradition, Cary began to question his “God” beliefs early on – even prior to his Bar Mitzvah. By the time he was 12, Cary was questioning the concept of an all-knowing God who makes decisions for you. At some point in his young adult life, he realized he was not alone in his worldview after reading about people like Thomas and Aldous Huxley. As Cary himself relates, “I realized I could lead a life of substance as a non-believer. I also realized that others had their doubts as well. I came out of the closet.”

He attended MIT, earning a degree in “Operations Research” – an area that focuses on applied math and statistics. He went on to earn a graduate degree from the Harvard Business School. Upon graduation from Harvard, Cary moved to Washington D.C., where he worked for the National Planning Association as an economist.

In his spare time, Cary founded, at the age of 27, the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA), an advocacy group for cyclists and sustainable transportation serving Metropolitan Washington DC. Cary enjoyed bicycling, and was aware of the problems: unsafe roads, a lack of bicycle paths and a variety of obstacles bicyclists encountered every day. It was new for a local bicycle organization to speak up about these hazards.

At the time of WABA’s founding, the country was beginning to develop an awareness of environmental issues such as auto pollution, along with other associated issues, such as higher gas prices. Of course, many people in Washington and around the country had taken part in first Earth Day celebration. Through persistence and hard work, WABA was founded in 1972. Since its founding, WABA has grown to be an extraordinarily large and effective organization with literally dozens of community events and activities. >>
Cary Shaw’s t-shirt highlights a central principle followed by the Humanists and Freethinkers of Fairfield County.
In 2013, Shaw formed the secular group Humanists and Freethinkers of Fairfield County (HFFCCT.org), with the goal of focusing on humanistic issues and goals, compatible with the ethics and values of CHJ, but open to all.

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Cary wants to ensure restricting services based on non-medical institutions receiving public monies, yet medical rights in hospitals, particularly women have appropriate access to their health care. CHJers also belong to HFFC.

Cary's accomplishments have evolved. In 2013, he noticed there was no organization in his area that focused strictly on humanistic issues, so it was time to form a secular group that would be compatible with the ethics and values of CHJ, but open to all. He paid special attention to creating a separation between religious initiatives that did not conflict with CHJ's values, ethics and programming efforts.

To achieve this goal, Cary accepted the invitation to address an annual meeting of the Humanists and Freethinkers of Fairfield County (HFFCCT.org). In a typical month HFFC now features a main meeting of Fairfield County (HFFCCT.org). In a typical month HFFC now features a main meeting, Book Etc. group, Science Readers group, and Social Hour. These include charitable activities, solstice parties, and movie events. Topics include humanism, "religious" movements, dogmatic delusions, medical advances, social concerns such as immigration, poverty, electric vehicles, and indigenous people of North America.

Programs on the lighter side include trivia nights, a talk by a TV comedy writer, and on one particular evening, there was a free-flowing conversation of people discussing their cat's behaviors. Needless to say, there is something for everyone and HFFC has attracted a solid, ongoing membership that continues to grow. Many CHJers also belong to HFFC.

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In honor of your presidency at Machar, Congregation for Secular Humanistic Judaism
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“To our cousins who are always there for us, loving and compassionate and always put family first.”
Marsha & Jay Gamerman

Susan Ryan
Mazel tov on the publication of your book, “The Beatles, Fab Four Cities.”
We are so proud of you.
Love Miriam Jerris & Steve Stawicki
In honor of your 60th Birthday
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Noreen Zimmer
In memory of your husband, John
Miriam Jerris & Steve Stawicki

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In memory of Roy Calder (1927-2009), founder of the Northern California chapter of the Society for Humanistic Judaism, now Kol Hadash.
David Brandon
Why Humanistic Judaism?

Humanistic Judaism provides community for people of all backgrounds to explore and shape the evolving meaning of Jewish traditions through a nontheistic, inclusive worldview. It incorporates a humanistic philosophy of life into Jewish liturgy, holiday celebrations, and lifecycle events in place of traditional worship of the supernatural. Founded in the 1960s by a community led by Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine, it gives voice to the way most Jews already believe: that ethics and values are human-made, not divinely revealed, and are continually progressing based on reason, knowledge, empathy, and justice.

Today, our faith rests in one another, in the power of people to understand our world and influence it for the better to achieve universal human dignity and steward the future of our planet. For justice to exist in our world, we must create it together. And to gain new knowledge we trust academic and scientific methods over religious dogma. Because our approach is cultural rather than religious, we welcome all to participate without boundaries and we celebrate the diversity of our multiracial, multicultural, and LGBTQ+ households.
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Check our website for more information www.shj.org/find

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