

Jewish Pluralism  
in Israel

Humanism in  
Jewish Education

Secular Humanist  
Convention in Israel

# HUMANISTIC JUDAISM

WINTER 2022

## Many people, many hats

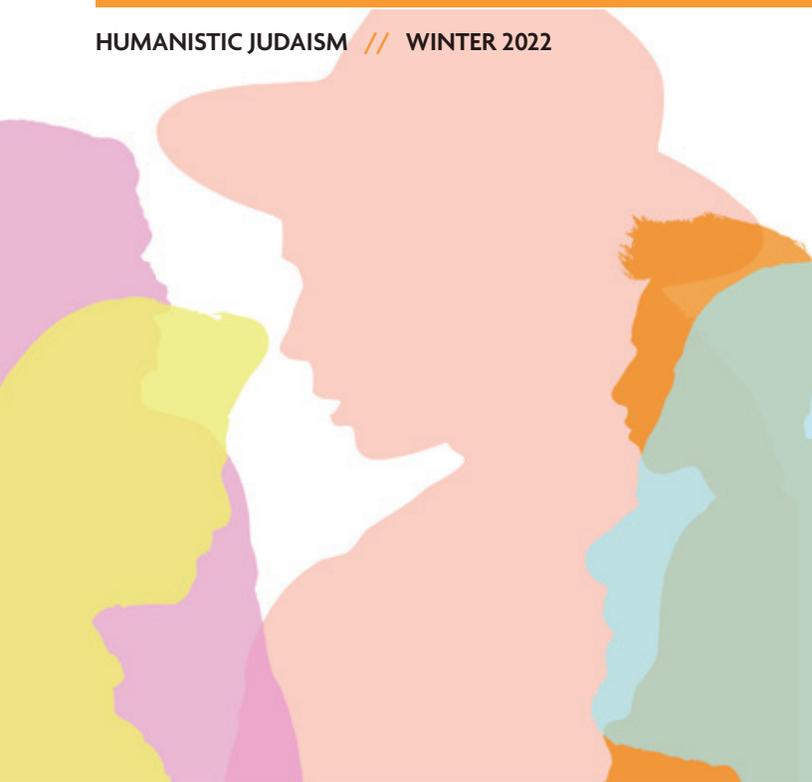
Jewish pluralism  
means making space  
for Secular Jews



## 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.



# CONTENTS

## DEPARTMENTS

- 4** From the editor  
When many make one
- 5** Points of view  
**MARTIN DI MAGGIO** | Aspie and proud!
- 6** Contributors  
Our esteemed writers
- 7** Community News  
The latest from Humanistic Jewish congregations from around the country
- 22** Essays  
On becoming a Humanistic rabbi  
**JEFFREY SCHESNOL** | **MARY RASKIN**
- 24** Commentary  
Cary Shaw on receiving the STW Lifetime Achievement Award
- 26** Tributes

## FEATURES

- 10** Jewish Pluralism  
Lofty Ideal or Fool's Errand?  
**BY PAUL GOLIN**
- 14** Jewish Pluralism in Israel  
An Immigrant's Perspective  
**BY RABBI DR. AVI ROSE**
- 16** We belong  
Humanistic Jews have a place in pluralistic educational spaces  
**BY JEANNE SNODGRASS**
- 20** A passing of the torch  
Mi Yemalel contemporary heroes share the stage with cultural icons  
**BY RABBI DR. AVI ROSE**

# FROM THE EDITOR



## When many make one

The theme for this issue is religious pluralism. The importance of this concept has been on my mind a lot lately, as I live in Oklahoma. As this issue goes to press, our state legislature is considering bills that would jeopardize an inclusive pluralistic approach in the public space in favor of a narrow approach that would compromise freedom of and from religion as well as separation of church and state. (More information on these legislative actions can be found at <https://bit.ly/HJ-Winter2022>).

These bills make it clear that the values of our secular pluralistic democracy are in danger in many locales and that if the opponents of pluralism gain victories in places like Oklahoma, this danger may spread. This is why I'm so appreciative of our authors who have taken on this issue.

These voices include those who speak of the

importance of pluralism within the context of Jewish identity, such as Paul Golin's reflections on the ways that communal Jewish spaces can be more inclusive of Humanistic perspectives (and why we should not always give in to the "frummet common denominator"), as well as Jeanne Snodgrass who shares about her experiences serving as the director of a campus Hillel and the necessary thoughts and attention that goes into ensuring that the needs of all sectors of the campus Jewish community are met. And finally, we have the immigrant perspective of Rabbi Dr. Avi Rose, who speaks of the benefits and challenges of being a Humanistic Jew in a country that has a mixed record on respecting the rights of those who practice and/or identify with non-Orthodox Judaism.

Speaking of the importance of our movement in providing a non-theistic Jewish alternative, we have several articles in this issue discussing the ordination of new rabbinic leaders in our Secular Humanistic movement, both in North America and in Israel. Their stories should give us all hope for the future of our movement.

Lastly, in this issue, we have an essay by Martin DiMaggio that responds to our previous issue's theme of neurodiversity, from his own autistic perspective.

Speaking of responses, I should mention that we welcome our readers to send us submit both longer response pieces like DiMaggio's, but also shorter responses, which we might be able run in future issues, if space allows. We want to hear from you!

Finally, as we are continuing our transition to a new format, we are continuing to seek input about these changes. What is working and what is not? And how are you using this magazine? Is it something that you read on your own, or is it something that you discuss with others? I'm especially interested to hear if our magazine is sparking conversation in your congregation, and ideas on what can make the magazine even more useful.

All comments, letters, etc. are welcome. Please send them to me at: [humanisticjudaismmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:humanisticjudaismmagazine@gmail.com).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James M. Branum". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

**J.M.B.**  
**Editor**

## HUMANISTIC JUDAISM

WINTER 2022

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## Aspie and Proud!

BY MARTIN DI MAGGIO

I was delighted to read Rabbi Tzemah's recent article on neurodiversity (Fall 2021 *Humanistic Judaism*), as being autistic is an integral element of identity which I am proud of. At a recent webinar about the positives of being autistic the question was raised "if you could press a magic button and no longer be autistic, would you do so?" Everyone in the room said a resounding NO! Autism isn't thought of as a condition by many "aspies" (a popular in-word for some Autistics). People started sharing how Autism has enriched their lives; for some, it has given them a passion for justice, for others, their intense focus on their interests has allowed them to excel in their studies or work, and for others, it has enabled them to think out of the box on a daily basis.

I was particularly struck by Tzemah's comments on loving one's neighbour; which I can say is a struggle for many aspies. It is not easy to understand others' motives or tones of voice, and likewise, our neighbours don't always understand us. I suffer a common side effect of Autism called Auditory Processing Disorder, which means I can be sitting with the TV on and hear my neighbours walking up and down their stairs. I hear every car that goes past, every dog walker, and every door opening. That isn't fun. Indeed, it can be a nightmare to live with. If I'm in a busy restaurant and am sitting next to strangers, I can hear everything they talk about and can't easily switch off. This makes it hard to concentrate on what my friends are saying to me and not infrequently this annoys people, especially if they don't know me very well. Once I was out for dinner and was loving the company until my attention dropped because the table next to me started talking about Ottoman history. I have three main intense interests: languages, Judaism, and Ottoman history! Any aspie knows that our interests can command all our attention for hours or days in ways that don't effect neurotypicals.

My father of blessed memory (like many parents of aspies was probably also autistic) was once sent to hospital because he stayed up for three nights absorbed in a subject he loved at university and collapsed with exhaustion. Overstimulation leading to exhaustion is a common side effect of autism.

Just as others don't always understand us, (including why we're not paying attention, or why we tend to dominate conversations and seem to not listen so well to other), so too it is for us with neurotypicals. Understanding others is not so easy. As Rabbi Tzemah stated:

"That is what my gift of autism has taught me. I am so very different, and so I have striven so hard to understand others."

## אני גאה להיות אספי

"I am a proud aspie"

When an aspie says they strive to love their neighbours, that is so much more true for them, because we understand deep down that people are so diverse. Many aspies have an empathy for others that is born of an understanding that the way we present to the world doesn't necessarily reflect who we are inside. I am frequently told that I have no personality in text, or that I am abrupt, overly direct, or even aggressive, but in person I am told that I am warm, jovial, loving and compassionate. I am direct when I need to be, and abrupt when I feel something needs to be said that others aren't saying. I have no fear of speaking out against injustice or calling out problematic behaviours when I see them. Incidentally, a friend of mine travelled to Israel for the first time and came back telling me he felt like he was meeting people with my personality traits everywhere!

Humanistic Judaism's values of radical inclusion certainly resonate with me as

they speak to an aspie sense of equality in diversity. This is so different from the stereotype of an autistic person, as someone who doesn't have empathy; we certainly do have empathy, and perhaps feel it stronger. It is just expressed differently. I can vehemently disagree with someone's position on politics, yet empathise deeply with their motives and try to find ways to reach them from their viewpoint. This translates better in person than online, because as noted previously, I have no text personality. Sometimes we express empathy by talking at length about a time we felt similar to the other person, this for some aspies is a strategy for showing we care, but often neurotypical friends take that to mean something else.

Another gift that Autism gave me is a deep knowledge of not just my own Italian and Jewish identity, but of cultures connected to me, even remotely. I grew up with a Moroccan Jewish friend and his mother would say that I was more Moroccan than

her son. I am also the only grandchild of my grandparents who can speak not only Italian but also my grandfather's heritage language Italo-Albanian. His village has 900 people (as well as neighboring village 4km away of 6,000 people) speak a derivative of 15th century Albanian (they also absorbed Jews escaping the Spanish inquisition). My British born cousins never learnt either language.

It may sound a little bit like I'm boasting; I am not. But telling ourselves we're unique and gifted does not come easy to aspies, as we are so often brought up and surrounded with the message that something is wrong with us, that we don't fit in, that we have no social skills, that we live in a fantasy world, that we can't connect to reality, and that we are disabled and defective. Quite the opposite is true, we are beautiful in our neurodiversity, and like the Hebrew image above says, "I am a proud aspie!" 🌟

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# CONTRIBUTORS

**James M. Branum** (he/him) edits this magazine. He also is an attorney, writer, peace activist, bicyclist, and step-father to a delightful non-conformist. He is an at-large member of the SHJ and is part of the leadership team of Spinzoa Havrurah. He lives in Oklahoma City.

**Paul Golin** is the Executive Director of the Society for Humanistic Judaism.

**Arthur Liebhaber** is the Treasurer of the SHJ and husband of Rabbi Jeffrey Falick

**Martin Di Maggio** is a SHJ member living in London, England. He is applying to the IISHJ Leadership program and is hoping to set up a group in London. He is a sociolinguist working with minority languages, and a community development worker, supporting marginalised LGBTQI communities in the U.K. He is also a keen creative liturgist and a Trekkie!

**Mary Raskin** is president of the Society for Humanistic Judaism and is an Independent SHJ member living in Portland, Oregon. Mary is thrilled that her rabbinic studies are complete.

**George Rockmore** is a retired school teacher and is a member of the Fairfield County, CT congregation.

**Rabbi Dr. Avi Rose** is an artist, researcher, writer and a veteran Jewish Educator.

Growing up in Canada, he completed a PhD in educational and clinical psychology. He teaches in both North America and Israel. He and his husband Binyamin live in Jerusalem and are proud parents to ten-year-old twins.

**Jeffrey Schesnol** is a certified PMP, the Associate Director and Resident Rabbi of the AZ Jewish Historical Society, and the curatorial project manager of its museum exhibits. He is also the project manager of developing the HOPE CENTER for Jewish Heritage, Holocaust and Human Rights Education to open in 2024. He is the Ceremonial and Spiritual Leader of Or Adam Humanistic Congregation of Phoenix & Scottsdale, AZ. He will be ordained as a Humanistic Jewish rabbi in April 2022.

**Cary Shaw** was awarded the 2021 Sherwin T Wine Lifetime achievement award. Cary is a member of CHJ of Fairfield County, CT.

**Jeanne Snodgrass** (she/her), MFA, MAJS, is the Executive Director of Mizzou Hillel in Columbia, MO, a Rabbinic Candidate with IISHJ, and an elected member of her local school board. She is interested in the performance of Jewishness and social justice and how we find connections to Judaism in a diverse and pluralistic society. In her free time Jeanne enjoys dancing, reading, hiking, and occasionally revisiting old knitting projects and pretending she's going to finish them.

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# COMMUNITY NEWS

MI, DETROIT | CONGREGATION FOR HUMANISTIC JUDAISM OF METRO DETROIT

## CHJ Detroit hosts two members of congress

CHJ-Detroit has continued its tradition of welcoming prominent elected officials, closing out 2021 with visits by two U.S. representatives with national profiles. The first to visit was Rep. Rashida Tlaib of the 13th district. While she is known nationally for her outspoken support for Palestinian rights, the topics of her presentation were immigration reform and water safety, two issues of major importance to Michiganders. Before a packed Meeting Room (masked and vaccinated!) she delivered an update on these areas. The Q & A also included questions about Israel and Palestine which she answered thoughtfully.

Israel and Palestine were on the front burner when CHJ-Detroit hosted Rep. Andy Levin of the 9th district to speak about his lead sponsorship of the “Two State Solution Act.” Rep. Levin is a committed Reconstructionist Jew with a long history of leadership in the Jewish community. He is also a long-time friend of our congregation. He summed up the evening this way: “What a wonderful evening discussing my Two-State Solution Act with a big Shabbat crowd at the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism. They asked such hard and vital questions, and the atmosphere was so warm and engaged. What a great model of civility combined with passion for justice. Thanks for having me!”

These Shabbat services, and more, can be seen on CHJ-Detroit’s YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/btcongregationforhumanisticjudaism>

In between these two visits, CHJ held its annual Souper Supper Shabbat Hanukkah event. It was a great feeling to be together in person after delivering the food curbside during last year’s holiday season. The event is held each year to raise funds for our annual Winter Mitzvah Project. Souper Supper volunteers make or buy soups, breads and desserts, and the temple provides the latkes. The proceeds are used to fund hundreds of bagged lunches for the NOAH Project of Detroit, a project to feed the houseless and hungry located at the Central United Methodist Church downtown.

– Arthur Liebhaber



From above, CHJ-Detroit Rabbi Jeffrey Falick with Rep. Rashida Tlaib and Rep. Andy Levin

*Due to the covid pandemic, most upcoming events in the next few months are being held online. Information on how to register for online events can normally be found on the congregational websites, which can all be found at: [shj.org/find](http://shj.org/find).*

*These briefs were compiled using congregational newsletters, websites, and social media, as well as reaching out to individual congregations. We are hoping to have every congregation having some bit of news in each issue, so if your congregation is doing anything interesting, please let our editor know at: [humanisticjudaismmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:humanisticjudaismmagazine@gmail.com).*

**AZ, PHOENIX** | Or Adam Congregation for Humanistic Judaism hosted guest rabbinic candidate Eva Cohen for an online Havdalah program about reproductive justice.

**AZ, TUCSON** | Secular Humanist Jewish Circle held a special shabbat discussion on reproductive rights led by Rabbi Jack Silver, on Jan. 28.

**CA, BERKELEY** | Kol Hadash, Northern California Congregation for Humanistic Judaism is looking forward to a visit this spring from SHJ executive director Paul Golin to speak about the Jews for Secular Democracy initiative.

**CA, ENCINO** | Adat Chaverim, Congregation for Humanistic Judaism held an online Havdalah celebration in January to honor the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. with songs and spoken words.

**CA, ORANGE COUNTY** | Pacific Community of Cultural Jews did a 2-mile hike at a nearby park to celebrate Tu Bi'Shevat.

**CO, BOULDER** | Beth Ami, Colorado Congregation for Humanistic Judaism is having a special zoom celebration of SHJ role model Yaakov Malkin on Jan. 29th.

**CT, FAIRFIELD COUNTY** | Congregation for Humanistic Judaism, Fairfield County held its annual Tu Bi'Shevat via zoom as way to “celebrate the Earth and its many gifts in a Humanistic Jewish manner and acknowledge our gratitude for what the Earth gives to us, as well as our responsibility to live responsibly within the natural world.”

**DC, WASHINGTON** | Machar, The Washington Congregation for Secular Humanistic Judaism held an online “Repro Shabbat” event in collaboration with the National Council for Jewish women on Jan. 28.

# COMMUNITY NEWS



Artwork by Emily, a first grader and member of the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism, Fairfield County, CT.

CT, FAIRFIELD COUNTY | CONGREGATION FOR HUMANISTIC JUDAISM

## A Hannukah Bash to be remembered!

On December 4th, 2021, The Congregation for Humanistic Judaism (CHJ) celebrated the seventh night of Hannukah with our traditional potluck dinner in Fairfield. And what a wonderful party it was, seizing the opportunity during a lull in the pandemic. The Omicron variant had not begun to spread, so CHJ made the decision to go ahead with the celebration. It was a hybrid in-person and Zoom event. To ensure people's safety, all guests had to be fully vaccinated, including boosters, and wear masks when not eating. Everyone remained healthy.

With more than 50 members and guests in attendance, and approximately 20 more on Zoom, it was a night filled with tradition, music, food, and plenty of sharing among

attendees, including menorahs brought from home to be used as centerpieces.

Bottom line: we all had a wonderful time with many special moments. Guitarist Adam Feder and violinist Ernesto "Ness" Villalobos – both members of New York City's renowned Shul Band – provided incredible music and helped set the tone for the evening. We all sang and some even danced between eating the wonderful homemade dishes, including latkes. In addition, children made recycled-CD dreidels. Guests partook in a "photo booth" and a raffle for Hannukah-themed cookware.

Given all the needs in our community, we collected toys and clothing for donation to 100+ Bridgeport children impacted by gun

**FL, BOCA RATON** | Congregation Beth Adam, South Florida Center for Humanistic Judaism will host SHJ executive director Paul Golin for a virtual presentation on the topic of: What Do Jews Believe About God? And how Is Inter-marriage a Positive?"

**FL, GAINESVILLE** | Gainesville Humanistic Judaism Meetup \* had a program on "Celebrating Hannukah without Myth" for their December meeting.

**FL, SARASOTA** | Congregation for Humanistic Judaism is continuing their Lunch and Learn online series, "An Introduction to Jewish history." All are welcome and registration is via their website.

**IL, DEERFIELD** | Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation is planning a celebration of their 21st birthday on May 14th. More info will be available in the coming weeks on their website.

**MA, BOSTON** | Kahal B'raira, Congregation for Humanistic Judaism held a lovely service combining Tu Bi'Shevat and Martin Luther King Jr Day that focused on environmental social justice.



violence, supporting the local survivor program of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense.

Within two weeks, it was back to "lock-down" as Omicron surged in our community. Grateful to have connected briefly, we hope to reconnect in person very soon.

— George Rockmore

**MD, BALTIMORE** | Baltimore Jewish Cultural Chavurah Rabbi Katz (of Baltimore's Chevrei Tzedek Congregation) presented "Examining the Fetus in Jewish Texts: Implications for the American Abortion Debate" on Jan. 28.

**MI, DETROIT** | Congregation for Humanistic Judaism of Metro Detroit is working to establish a support circle to sponsor an Afghan refugee family in cooperation with HIAS, the national Jewish refugee aid organization.

**MN, TWIN CITIES** | Or Emet, Minnesota Congregation for Humanistic Judaism will be having a Refugee Shabbat event on March 4 which will discuss the global refugee situation as well as Afghan resettlement in Minnesota.

**NC, ASHEVILLE** | Jewish Secular Community of Asheville recently hosted Lutfullah Sadat, an 18-year old Afghan refugee who is now living in Asheville as part of a program on refugee resettlement on Jan 18.

**NY, NEW YORK** | The City Congregation for Humanistic Judaism is working with the Jews for Secular Democracy (JFASD) initiative to organize a NY state cohort of volunteers to fight for church-state separation.

**NY, WESTCHESTER COUNTY** | Westchester Community for Humanistic Judaism held a humanistic Tu Bi'Shevat service led by Rabbi Frank Tamburello on Jan. 14.

**OR, PORTLAND** | Kol Shalom, Community for Humanistic Judaism was excited to hold their annual meeting at their new home, the Portland Eastside Jewish commons.

**WA, SEATTLE** | Secular Jewish Circle of Puget Sound celebrated the birthday of trees with a Tu B'Shevat hike on Jan. 16th.

**CANADA, TORONTO** | Oraynu Congregation hosted its David A. Glazer memorial program on Feb. 27th, a panel discussion on the topic of "Humanistic Judaism after Covid: Impact, Challenges and Opportunities."

**ONLINE (EST-BASED)** | The Spinoza Havurah \* is preparing to launch an "Introduction to Humanistic Judaism" class that will begin this summer.

\* Congregations in formation

## ONT, TORONTO | ORAYNU CONGREGATION

### Meet Oranyu's new rabbi

Rabbi Jonathan Cohen began serving as Oraynu's congregational rabbi during the 2021 High Holidays. A longtime law professor at the University of Florida, Rabbi Cohen received his M.A. in Jewish Studies from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and rabbinical ordination through the Jewish Leaders Spiritual Institute. He holds A.B., M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Economics from Harvard University, where he also received his law degree.

Rabbi Cohen has been deeply involved in Jewish life for many years. Over the past decades, he has helped to found and grow a chavurah-style service (the "Circle Minyan"), taught courses in Jewish law at his university, served as a student rabbi for a small congregation and for a senior living community, and served as a song leader in the Hillel setting. Before joining Oraynu, Rabbi Cohen was an active member of Gainesville, Florida's Humanistic Jewish Community, and in the summer of 2020, he was guest editor of *Humanistic Judaism Magazine*.

Much of Rabbi Cohen's scholarship has addressed topics in conflict resolution, especially the roles of apology and forgiveness within the secular legal system, but he has also published a number of articles in Jewish thought, especially related to the roles of ethics and law in shaping the Jewish people. Currently, he is writing a book, *If the Bible is Fiction*, which explores the implications of biblical non-historicity for the future of liberal Judaism.

Rabbi Cohen's passion for Humanistic Judaism is two-fold. First, it is a place where people can say what they mean and mean what they say: they can be honest about what they believe and what they don't believe. Second, he believes that Humanistic Judaism offers a large and welcoming "tent": a place where atheists, agnostics, and theists can all participate in the search for meaningful Jewish life.

Rabbi Cohen believes that community is a central foundation of Jewish life and that learning is not only a critical endeavour but can be a joyful enterprise. As one of his rabbinical school classmates expressed, "I couldn't separate joy from Judaism if I tried." In Pirkei Avot 3:2 (The Ethics of the Fathers) it is written that, "When ten sit together and occupy themselves with Torah, the Shechinah [Divine Presence] abides among them." While Rabbi Cohen does not take that statement literally, he greatly values the spirit of learning-in-community that it celebrates, and aims to foster that spirit here at Oraynu.

Contact: jonathan.cohen.tikkun@gmail.com



Rabbi Jonathan Cohen

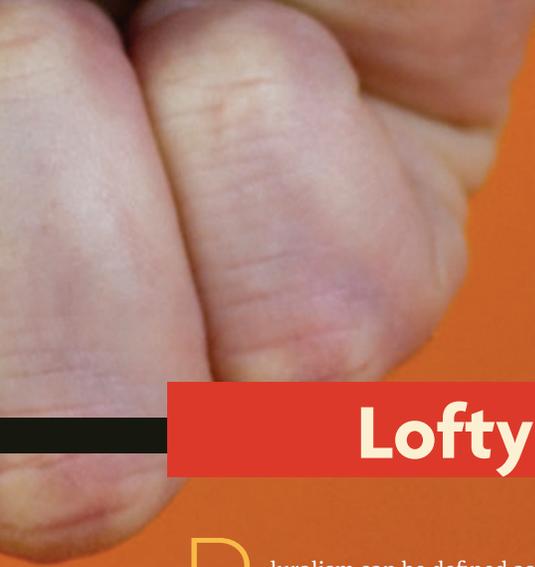
– oraynu.org

# Jewish pluralism

BY PAUL GOLIN

Mark Twain said, “If you don’t like the weather in New England now, just wait a few minutes.” If you don’t like my position on Jewish pluralism now, ask me again tomorrow. My thinking about whether or not Jewish pluralism is an essential goal bounces back-and-forth more often than a US Open tennis ball.





## Lofty ideal or fool's errand?

**P**luralism can be defined as the respectful inclusion of multiple groups holding differing or even competing worldviews and ideals. Seems like a no-brainer of a positive value. Isn't inclusion always preferable to exclusion?

One challenge is in implementation. The wider the spectrum of worldviews, the more difficult it is for all involved to feel genuinely included. And Jewish identity is a pretty wide spectrum. Another challenge is whether all groups merit inclusion. At some point there must be parameters of who's in and who's out, unless the focus is all of humanity.

There are a number of notable attempts at pluralism in the North American Jewish community. Arguably the

most important is the local Jewish federation system, which serves as a fundraising umbrella supporting Jewish non-profits regardless of denomination, ranging from Orthodox day schools to Humanistic Judaism congregations—a number of which have received federation grants. Likewise, Jewish Community Centers (JCCs) see their work as cultural, non-denominational, and open to all.

Less common are Jewish organizations where pluralism is the central goal. Limmud hosts Jewish learning conferences where participants of any background or belief are not only invited to attend, but also invited to present on their differing Jewish perspectives. Civil dialogue about potentially divisive issues is celebrated.

Several leaders in our movement have presented at Limmud gatherings. One of my sessions at Boston Limmud was titled, "There Is No God and I'm Still Jewish." It was a fun, friendly, well-attended conversation despite the (hopefully) provocative title.

### *A Seat at the Table*

Coalitions can also create pluralistic spaces. Not long ago, the Society for Humanistic Judaism became a member of the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable, which brings together organizations committed to progressive causes. The Roundtable includes the organizing bodies of Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Renewal

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*Jewish Pluralism continued on page 12*



LIFTY

Judaism, as well as at least one Modern Orthodox social justice group and many unaligned Jewish organizations focused on issues such as women's equality, LGBTQ inclusion, and climate change.

While Humanistic Jews may have been marginalized from the organized Jewish community in the past, that doesn't mean a person has given up their Jewish identity. Humanistic Judaism can speak to the wider Jewish community and many such folks' interests and concerns.

By being in the room, we can better serve our peers on the Roundtable, to grapple with their beliefs and motivations, including their religious convictions. We find common ground and see the humanity in one another, even when his or her worldview is different from ours. Granted, the conversations around social and political causes on which we've found common ground are kind and empathetic, so it's not like I'm walking away energized by the potential of Jewish social justice. But I do feel it's some of the most important work I do.

I'd also like to believe the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable's spectrum of pluralism has been stretched by our presence, and the work of some of our members. Pluralism has been made more inclusive of secular and Humanistic Jews. We've seen changes to community sign-on statements: instead of "because we were all created in God's image," I've suggested, "because Jewish tradition teaches that we were created in God's image." I understand the push to change in bringing our religious heritage to the fight for equality, but the former phrase is supernatural speculation presented as truth and I can't sign it. The revised version is historical fact that all Jews can agree upon.

Likewise, I've asked for the seemingly pluralistic phrase "as people of faith" be broadened to include a secular outlook, "as people of faith and conscience." Language matters, perhaps more to Humanistic Jews than anyone. It feels validating when our

partners are willing to tweak language to include us. And they've expressed nothing but appreciation for the correctives, as they want to be more inclusive.

#### *A Part of Pluralism, but Not Pluralistic*

Our movement is an essential piece of a pluralistic Jewish tapestry. That said, it is important to acknowledge that Humanistic Jews are not for every one, and that's okay. We are a denomination founded by, for, and about atheist/agnostic/agnostic/science-based/freethinker/skeptic/Humanistic Jews—plus, but not limited to, we don't turn people away, we welcome all, but not all of these labels, their Jewish social justice work, or their Jewish identity. We've better served ourselves in the community.

Even for those who do identify with one or more of the above labels, if they still seek theistic prayer or want to use the traditional Jewish holiday calendar, they are likely better served elsewhere, and in fact can get elsewhere in the Jewish community. Secular Humanistic Jews are not the only Jewish events for folks who don't want to hear any of the above labels. We can say what we believe and believe what we say.

Are accommodations made at times for unique circumstances? Of course. But the expectation should be that Humanistic Jewish households are not the primary Jewish households to accommodate my theology by using a Humanistic Sh'ma. They're not pluralistic in that way, and neither are we. And that's okay. We can say what we believe and believe what we say.

Serving the full plurality of Jewish households, though, means including Humanistic Jews in wider pluralistic settings. If our local ICC or federation is hosting a community-wide Hanukkah party, could we ask that a Humanistic menorah-lighting blessing be read alongside the traditional theistic version? Probably not, if we're walking in off the street for the first time. But what if we are already deeply involved in their work, or

if we have overlapping lay leadership? That makes it much more likely.

While not pluralistic as a movement, we can still convene pluralistic events and programs ourselves—as all Jews can, since we are all part of the whole—and in fact SHJ operates a pluralistic Jewish social justice initiative, Jews for a Secular Democracy (JFASD). The goal of the Jews for a Secular Democracy initiative is to bring multid denominational Jewish perspectives to the defense of American church-state separation. For example, JFASD can advocate for reproductive justice through both the Jewish perspective (which has been a focus of the movement) and secular Jewish perspectives (which may call for a different approach to reproductive justice and individual and societal health as the only relevant factors, not religious interpretation). By serving as convener of this pluralistic initiative, we guarantee our own inclusion as Humanistic Jews. And we demystify Humanistic Judaism for our participants and partners from other denominations. We can say what we believe and believe what we say, even if we take different avenues to the same conclusions.

#### *Hosting Pluralism Requires Compromise*

As a Humanistic Jew, I've come to recognize the value of compromise. It is for my own psyche to be advocating full-throated for my kind of Judaism, rather than remaining neutral or having to present all approaches as equally valid.

Prior to 2016, I spent sixteen years in various roles at a pluralistic organization called Big Tent Judaism/Jewish Outreach Institute. The mission was to work across denominational and institutional lines to help the whole Jewish community become more inclusive, particularly toward intercultural and interfaith households.

Intermarriage is of course one of the most significant challenges facing the Jewish community. One of the proudest of Big Tent Judaism's accomplishments as a small organization stewarding the positive shift that did occur among North American Jewry on the issue, there were many instances when I held my tongue and even felt marginalized in the service of pluralism.

For example, at times I found myself defending against claims that intermarriage is "the single greatest threat to the Jewish people." I was supposed to understand such hyperbole as nothing but a theoretical con-

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# Jewish Pluralism in Israel: An Immigrant's Perspective

BY RABBI DR. AVI ROSE

Twenty years ago, I decided to relocate my life to Israel and participate in the great experiment that is Hebrew Culture. For most of my life, I felt drawn to this unique way of being a modern Jew, most especially to the arts—Israeli music, dance, theater, cinema, and visual culture. For me, these are points of connection to the greater Jewish story that add meaning to my personal Jewish experience. I wanted to study and teach others about the richness of this tradition, something that I have been fortunate to do for most of the time that I have lived here.

As part of that work (and my own personal process), I studied the ways in which Israelis construct their Jewish lives, how the ingathering of Diasporic histories has melded with modern Zionist values such as Democracy and individual liberty. I discovered that there are a variety of ways in which Israelis relate to their Jewishness. Some are content to base their Jewish identity around Israeliness, to live in a Jewish majority culture, speak Hebrew and follow the calendrical rhythm of the State. Others actively participate in what can best be described as a local Jewish renaissance, a complete re-thinking of core values and practices. These largely grassroots initiatives run the gamut from religious to cultural, are often innovative, progressive, and almost always centered on the needs of individuals and communities. They are socially and polit-

ically diverse, sharing a common goal of making Jewish life personal and filled with meaning.

Regardless of how they might wish to be Jewish, all Israelis are subject to a set of state-sponsored rabbinic institutions which are fiercely hegemonic and autocratic in their Orthodoxy. These bodies directly impact key facets of civic life such as food, public transport, business, or the ways in which Israelis get married, divorced, or buried. This complex and frequently difficult reality (which is commonly referred to as the “status quo”) is increasingly challenged by ordinary Israelis and non-governmental organizations who are no longer content to live with blatant violations of basic democratic principles. The local Secular-Humanist Jewish community is one such body. It stems from a Zionist value system that shaped the foundation of Israeli society and offers a viable, meaningful alternative to religious-oriented Jewish practice.

## *One Jewish State, Many 'Judaisms'*

The late Professor Yaakov Malkin, a central architect of the Israeli Secular-Humanist Jewish movement, stated that in Israel, there are many 'Judaisms' and that at heart, most Israelis are primarily connected to their Judaism via culture.<sup>1</sup> In contemporary terms, Professor Malkin's words imply that in Israel, Jewish life is non-binary, a spec-

trum of doing and belonging. Most Israelis navigate their personal intersectionality, constructing a sense of self that incorporates Jewishness with other facets such as gender, ethnicity, and political ideology.

Statistically speaking, Professor Malkin's contentions ring true. A recent population survey indicates that 43.1% of Israelis define themselves as “Secular,” 21.1% as “Traditional but not very religious,” 12.3% as Traditional-Religious, 11.3% as “Religious” and 10% as “Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi<sup>2</sup>).” A concurrent study by the Pew organization adds dimension to these findings, indicating that even among those who describe themselves as “Traditional” or “Religious,” there is a wide and fluctuating spectrum of belief and practice.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it appears that there are many versions of Judaism in Israel, with the common thread being a shared connection to Israeli culture.

The picture that emerges from these and other studies is one painted in broad and colorful strokes, Israelis are navigating their Jewishness in many ways. A minority chooses to ‘color within the lines’ of Orthodoxy, while most are interested in crafting more unique self-portraits. With close to 50% of Israeli Jews descending from Mizrahi or Sephardic traditions, there is a desire to create Jewish experiences that intersect with the music, food, customs, and rituals that came from these Diasporas. Likewise, Ethiopian Israelis are proudly incorporating their one-of-a-kind Jewish heritage. Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union want their cultural heritage reflected and respected as a legitimate form of Jewish expression. Feminist and Queer Jews are no longer willing to be excluded and are pushing their communities to make space for themselves and their families. Liberal streams of Judaism—some brought to Israel via Europe or North America, others home-grown—are demanding a place of honor and respect within the officially sponsored and sanctioned Jewish establishment.

## *Rejecting the Jewish Rule of Law*

While Israelis are busy working out how to be Jewish in the first democratic nation-state built to give them full autonomy and control over their personal destiny, they are saddled with a legal system that imposes upon them



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# We belong

## Humanistic Jews have a place in pluralistic educational spaces

BY JEANNE SNODGRASS

*Ben Zoma said: Who is wise? He who learns from every man, as it is said: "From all who taught me have I gained understanding" (Psalms 119:99) -Pirkei Avot 4:1*

For close to a decade, I have been working as the Executive Director of a Hillel at a large state school and for nearly four years I have also been studying and learning as a Rabbinic Candidate with the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism (IISHJ).

Being Jewish and being active in the Jewish community has always been important to me, and while I have identified with different specific Jewish denominations over the years, and still do, I deeply value the connection to a larger commu-

nity. Sometimes those relationships and connections feel complicated.

Denominational spaces have the luxury of being able to more easily define boundaries and practices, while pluralistic spaces must find ways to be accessible and relevant to those with differing and sometimes oppositional beliefs. Within the broader Jewish community we encounter divergent opinions on a range of issues such as the role of women in worship, who counts as Jewish, what constitutes authentic Jewish observance, what (if any) stance the Jewish community should take on Israel, and the affirmation of LGBTQ identity.

There are real complexities that living into a vision of pluralistic Jewish commu-

nity requires we embrace, but I believe in its importance. I also believe that the best version of Jewish pluralism leaves space for all of us to show up in our particularism. And all of that is why I believe it's so necessary for Humanistic and Secular Jews to be active participants in these spaces.

I see this most clearly in my work. As an international student-focused organization, I have seen Hillel champion Jewish pluralism and work to embrace all the tension and sometimes conflict that comes with that. College students are in a transitional stage and many are examining their beliefs and values away from their home community for the first time. Having a space to safely practice, question, and explore beliefs (including non-beliefs) and values is essential.

When I talk with colleagues about new programming and engaging Jewish college students, one challenge of providing pluralistic educational content with limited resources is deciding whether to focus on programming for those students who are already engaged with Hillel and like what is currently being offered, or providing alternative programming to attract students who do not yet feel connected.

Earlier this Fall, I was contacted by the Director of Jewish Student Life at another Hillel. This person was approached on their campus by a student who wanted to connect with Jewish community, but who believed that Hillel wasn't a good fit because they had heard that Hillel "didn't provide programming for Secular and Humanistic Jews."

All Hillels, like all colleges, are slightly different in their culture and programming, and every student's experience varies, but as someone immersed in both these worlds I was particularly sad to hear this was a common perception. In this instance, the colleague I was speaking with said that they wanted to ensure that any Secular Jewish student would feel welcome and included if they came for an upcoming Shabbat program. This led to

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*We Belong continued on page 18*



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*We Belong continued from page 16*

a great conversation about what language could be used, what the meaning of Shabbat could be, and what might be of interest, and what it meant to be a Secular Humanistic Jew. While I could answer a lot of the questions raised, it became apparent that the most important thing was to have a conversation about their particular needs.

Both the situation and the conversation serve as important reminders. Those of us working to provide educational content in a pluralistic setting need to keep ourselves open to new ways of presenting information and continue to learn about all the ways folks connect to Judaism and Jewish identity. We should constantly be asking ourselves about the expectations around Jewish learning and how it is presented. Some questions to consider:

*Do we need to always reference God,*

*Should it connect to a holiday?*

*Programs in our pluralistic spaces*

*Israeli food, Yiddish theater, movies with Jewish characters, or can it be any content that is written by someone*

*What is the default level of observance*

*around food and prayer?*

*What actually is "mainstream" Judaism?*

In addition, we need to embrace the idea that Jewish identity for many young adults is cross-denominational and much more nuanced than simply Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, or "not religious". Educators in pluralistic spaces need to be able to model personal practice, with support from the organization, while being committed to

helping students explore all of their options. And those of us who feel comfortable and see value in being in non-denominational spaces, need to show up. Whether in leadership and education roles, or just as participants, we need to be willing to be present and speak out about what we need or when something feels exclusionary.

At my time in different Jewish communities has been overwhelmingly positive. This involvement has both shaped my beliefs and also given me a comfort level with spaces of diverse religious observance that I know may not be the norm. I have been a member of Reform and Conservative congregations, of non-denominational chavurah (friend) groups and of the Society for Humanistic Judaism. All of this provided, and in many ways continues to provide, exposure to different perspectives on Jewish tradition and practice.

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I came to my work at Hillel because Jewish identity, education, and meaningful involvement across denominations have been integral to so much of my lived experience ... Educators at Hillels and other non-denominational organizations have an opportunity to build stronger and more impactful programming by including Secular and Humanistic expressions of Judaism.

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# A passing of the torch

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Under the glow of the Chanukah candles, the Humanistic movement convened in the historic national chalet erected by the State's second president Yitzhak Ben-Zvi. In the spirit of the holiday, the theme for the two-day event centered on heroes, "Modern Maccabees" of Jewish and Israeli culture. The IISHJ-TMURA conference was chaired by the Dean of the Israeli rabbinic and educational programs, Rabbi Sivan Maas-Malkin and hosted Rabbi Dr. Adam Chalom, and many important spiritual, political and academic leaders.

In what has become a tradition, the event began with a series of walking tours, highlighting the heroes of Jerusalem's secular cultural scene. This was followed

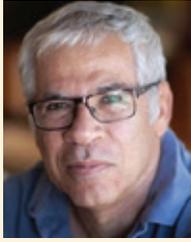
by a pluralistic Dean's roundtable where the leaders of the movement shared ideas on how cultural heroes can inspire modern leadership. Later, the focus was on Israeli politics when former Israeli parliament (Knesset) members Dr. Aliza Lavie, Mr. Dan Meridor, and Professor Yuli Tamir discussed cultural heroes as inspiration for social and political activism.

The artistic component of the conference came in two forms. Each of the six new ordinands contributed to a visual exhibit on the lives of their chosen heroes. These posters were on display throughout the conference. On the evening of the fifth Chanukah candle, a musical event hosted by Israeli music historian and broadcaster Noam Gilor (a current rabbinic fellow) where

# Meet the New Rabbis

## Dani Danieli

An organizational adviser and mentor, Dani had a long and highly distinguished career in Jewish education and coexistence leadership at the Jerusalem Foundation. He has served as the CEO of the Avi-Chai Foundation and was the founding director of its highly impactful cultural center in Jerusalem. Dani currently serves on several boards of organizations devoted to culture and the advancement of social and human rights, including the advisory board of TMURA. He and his wife Liora are parents to three and grandparents of five.



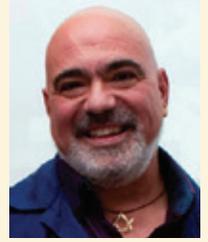
## Dr. Iris Karasin

An educational consultant, lecturer and specialist in learning disabilities and at-risk youth, Dr. Karasin was on the faculty at the David Yellin College of Education. Currently in private practice, Iris organizes TMURA's academic advisory board. She has created a program of Secular *Bible (Tanach)* study for young adults and is a visual artist. Iris and her husband Moshik are parents to four and grandparents to ten.



## Dr. Avi Rose

Artist, researcher and writer, Avi is a veteran Jewish Educator. Growing up in Canada, he completed a PhD in educational and clinical psychology. Interested in the connection between Jewish/Zionist art, culture, and identity, Avi teaches in both North America and Israel. Hailing from a family of rabbis, Avi (the 6th to be ordained) leads community and life-cycle events. Along with Rabbi Sivan Maas, Avi has developed a course (soon to be shared on-line) on the history of Jewish figurative art based on a seminal IISHJ exhibit. He and his husband Binyamin live in Jerusalem and are proud parents to ten-year-old twins.



## Artal Rylski

An expert in special education and occupational therapy, Artal had a distinguished career of pedagogical leadership within Jewish and Arab communities. She is active in the Secular-Humanist congregation of Re'im (Mod'in) and volunteers with asylum-seeking communities. Artal is an artisan, crafting jewelry and Judaica inspired by archeological artifacts. Artal and her husband Zevik have raised three children and are grandparenting two.



## Doron Rosenblum

In his long and varied career, Doron has been a leader in the Israeli scouts, his home kibbutz of Ashdot Ya'akov (Ichud), and was a Shaliach (Israeli cultural/educational emissary) to North America. Doron has studied photography, organizational psychology, and Jewish text. He is a leader/educator with the "Yamma" liberal congregation in the Jezreel Valley. Doron and wife Saraleh are parents of four and grandparents of seven.



## Eitan Zur

An educator interested in community and culture, Eitan is a leader in a diverse set of activities ranging from the study of philosophy and text, to organizational innovation. He leads and officiates at communal Jewish celebrations and life-cycle events and is currently involved in several initiatives aimed at strengthening shared society in Israel. A member of Kibbutz Ga'ash, Eitan and his partner Nofar recently welcomed their third child.



each of the ordinands discussed and sang the works of beloved Hebrew poets.

The following morning a group of distinguished intellectuals convened in memory of Professor Yakov Malkin to discuss the impact of their cultural heroes. Led by Professor Irad Malkin, the panel included Professors Dan Avnon and Eli Bar Navi (former Israeli ambassador to France).

Of course, the main event of the day was the ordination of six new Secular-Humanist rabbis who represent a cross section of Israeli society in terms of age, background and geographic location. Greetings and blessings were offered by the deans, rabbinic leaders, board members along with partners and families of the new

rabbis. A special award was presented to the writer and social activist Sami Michael in recognition of his role as a Jewish Secular-humanistic cultural hero.

One by one, each of the six ordinands were introduced by Rabbi Sivan Maas Malkin who gave a synopsis of their studies and communal activity, to which Rabbi Adam Chalom added his individual comments and reactions. Each new rabbi then delivered a short speech that came from both the mind and heart, speaking passionately about their journey, their hopes and dreams as leaders of our movement.

We look forward to seeing you at the next ordination conference slated for December of 2023, or as our ancestors would have said next time in Jerusalem! 🕎

## On Becoming a Humanistic Rabbi

JEFFREY SCHESNOL | ARIZONA

I look forward to being an ordained pulpit Humanistic rabbi. I have served Or Adam Congregation for Humanistic Judaism as a ceremonial and spiritual leader for eight years, including as lay leader, Madrikh, rabbinic candidate and “resident” rabbi. I now stand at the threshold of receiving Semikhah (rabbinic ordination) with great anticipation.

I have no expectations of being a *gaon* (genius), *chachom* (wise), *tzadik* (righteous), *kadosh* (holy), *ish mofet* (paragon), or *ma’or gadol* (great light). Instead, I seek to be one of a number of Humanistic *maskilim* (enlightened persons) who seek to engage a wide circle of people to share learning by encouraging diversity, inclusion, self-discipline, courage of conviction, and dignity, as well as to preserve Judaism as a unique peoplehood through working for our cultural, ethical, and moral aspirations and to strive for opportunity for Jews in society, not as separate but equal, but rather as true equals, through fighting antisemitism, discrimination, and prejudice of all kinds.

I seek to promote humanism, rationalism, freedom of thought, and inquiry; to educate, not indoctrinate. I am proud to become a competent rabbi (teacher) focusing on learning, educating, and inspiring youth and adults.

A line from the traditional Shema, is, “V’shinantam l’vanecha “ “And you shall teach them (these words) to your children.” The point of a Passover seder is to teach the narrative in a way that will resonate multigenerationally. This value on learning and thinking critically works when no one is pressured to believe in any one ideology and all free to ask questions in a safe environment. We must educate our adult population who are woefully ignorant of their own religion’s history, diversity, ever-changing dynamism, and continual reinvention. We study and



JEFFREY SCHESNOL

learn together. The constant in Judaism is not “God, Torah, and Israel;” it is change and adaptability to enable survival.

While the Talmud teaches “kol yisrael arevim zeh bazeh,” “all of Israel are responsible for each other,” we are equally responsible to our neighbors and fellow citizens of the world. I can inspire the importance we place on human community by gathering to celebrate the tranquility of the Shabbat and Havdalah; leading holiday celebrations and remembrances connecting us to our ancestors, each other, and our children and grandchildren. Leading a congregation as we mourn together, celebrating together, honoring passages through life-cycle commemoration, and



I seek to promote humanism, rationalism, freedom of thought, and inquiry; to educate, not indoctrinate.

— Jeffrey Schesnol

pastoral assistance are noble callings.

As we say in our Shabbat celebrations: “We are a community, a community of believers. We believe that Judaism is the entire experience of the Jewish people. We believe in the value of celebrating Jewish culture, music, art, humor, food and identity.”

We are here for each other whenever needed. In sickness and in health, for better or worse; being able to transcend differences to serve a congregation holistically.

Ultimately, it is important for rabbis leading Secular Humanistic Jews to stand for our convictions with courage and integrity. We must continue to state and articulate our own and our movement’s values loud and proud. 🕎

\* This excerpt of a liturgical text is adapted from one by Rabbi Miriam Jerris.



**MARY RASKIN | OREGON**

It is fair to say that Humanistic Judaism changed my life. Of course, I didn't know this would happen. In fact, I didn't even know I had been introduced to it.

Let me explain... I had the opportunity to live and work in Toronto. One spring when it wasn't possible to return home for Passover, my husband and I were invited to a family seder at the home of Rabbi Eva Goldfinger. The gathering was warm and welcoming. The service was so meaningful that I asked if I could take a copy home. It wasn't until the next day that I noticed the word 'God' was not to be found!

Upon returning to our home in Portland, Oregon, my husband and I began a search for a synagogue. It was during a march for peace that I spied a group of people holding a sign that read Kol Shalom – Voice of Peace. We quickly joined them. A lively discussion



**MARY RASKIN**

about Humanistic Judaism engaged us for the entire march. We had found our Jewish home.

When I learned there was an Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism, I immediately signed up for the Madrikha and master's degree programs. Now I had found the Secular Humanistic Jewish world. My studies in the history, philosophy, and culture of this new world were illuminating and provocative. My participation in the

life cycle ceremonies, holiday celebrations, and teaching opportunities of the Madrikha program introduced me to a rich and creative Judaism. Humanistic Judaism was now a part of my heart and mind. I give heartfelt thanks to my teachers, fellow students, and community for these opportunities.

So why be a rabbi? I wanted to change the world. And indeed, I did. What I didn't realize was that the world I would change would be my own world. My continued Jewish studies introduced me to an even richer world of

Jewish thought. The people I served through life cycle ceremonies, holiday celebrations, and teaching continued to inspire me. But my world was about to change again!

Shortly after I began my rabbinic studies, I joined the national board of the Society for Humanistic Judaism. My world expanded to include those who were actively engaged in inspiring, organizing, and advocating for people aligned with Humanistic Jewish values. I am honored to be a part of this group of creative, energetic, and generous people.

Humanistic Judaism is my intellectual and spiritual home. It is home to a community that honors everyone that is important in my life. It is home to a community of shared values, efforts, celebration, and support.

Rabbi Wine put it very simply: "Where is my light? My light is in me. Where is my hope? My hope is in me. Where is my strength? My strength is in me. And in you."

Why did I become a Humanistic Rabbi? Because I want to make the world a better place, with you. 🕎

# COMMENTARY

## Cary Shaw on receiving the STW Lifetime Achievement Award

Thank you so very much for this wonderful Sherwin T. Wine Lifetime Achievement Award. I am proud to be a member of the Society for Humanistic Judaism, and am honored by this accolade. I am hoping this is not a signal that my achievements or my lifetime is over. I promise you that as a “predeceased” recipient I will not do anything unworthy of this honor. I wish to thank Rabbi Miriam Jerris, Paul Golin, members of the SHJ Board, and the leadership and representatives of the respective congregations.

I would also like to thank SHJ for taking advantage of this virtual format, to open this presentation not only to members of the SHJ Board, which is meeting this weekend, but also to our friends, relations, and members of our congregations, including the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism of Fairfield County, Connecticut to which I belong, and also to members of Humanists and Freethinkers of Fairfield County Connecticut of which I am co-founder and current President. I encourage all of you to get to know the others on this call. You are great, compatible, wonderful people.

I will address questions that are often asked:

What are our values? Are they Humanistic? Are they Jewish?

How can we explain Humanistic Judaism to others in a clear way?

What makes Humanistic Judaism special? What is our impact?

I would like to encourage and inspire those who are already Humanistic Jews to understand the importance of the movement. I would like to share my understanding of Judaism in general and Humanistic Judaism in particular with those who may be unfamiliar with them,

or are seeking additional ways to communicate them.

Although small in numbers, SHJ stands for something exceedingly important: That Jewish people can stand up for what are the true Jewish values, without having to adopt superstition, and do so in recognized Jewish congregations.

Every so often we are asked, “how can you celebrate Jewish holidays and not believe in God?” My answer is that I believe in the core values of Judaism. We celebrate Rosh Hashanah by introspection of our actions over the previous year, gaining wisdom and understanding, and we resolve to do better in the future. At Passover we celebrate freedom, for ourselves, and also our hope for others, honoring the effort and sacrifice to achieve it.

By the way, Joan and I visited a Humanistic Jewish community Passover service in Brussels, Belgium, done in French and Hebrew, which celebrated Passover also as the birth of the Jewish people as a people. In my congregation, at Tu Bi'Shevat we harken to the Jewish folk tale of the old man planting the seedling of a tree. He was queried as to why we would do that since he would not live long enough to enjoy its fruit. He replied that he benefited from people before him who planted trees, and he is planting for the benefit of those who will come after. Thus, Tu Bi'Shevat becomes the Jewish earth day, to take care of the earth, for ourselves and future generations.

I am a Jew by choice.

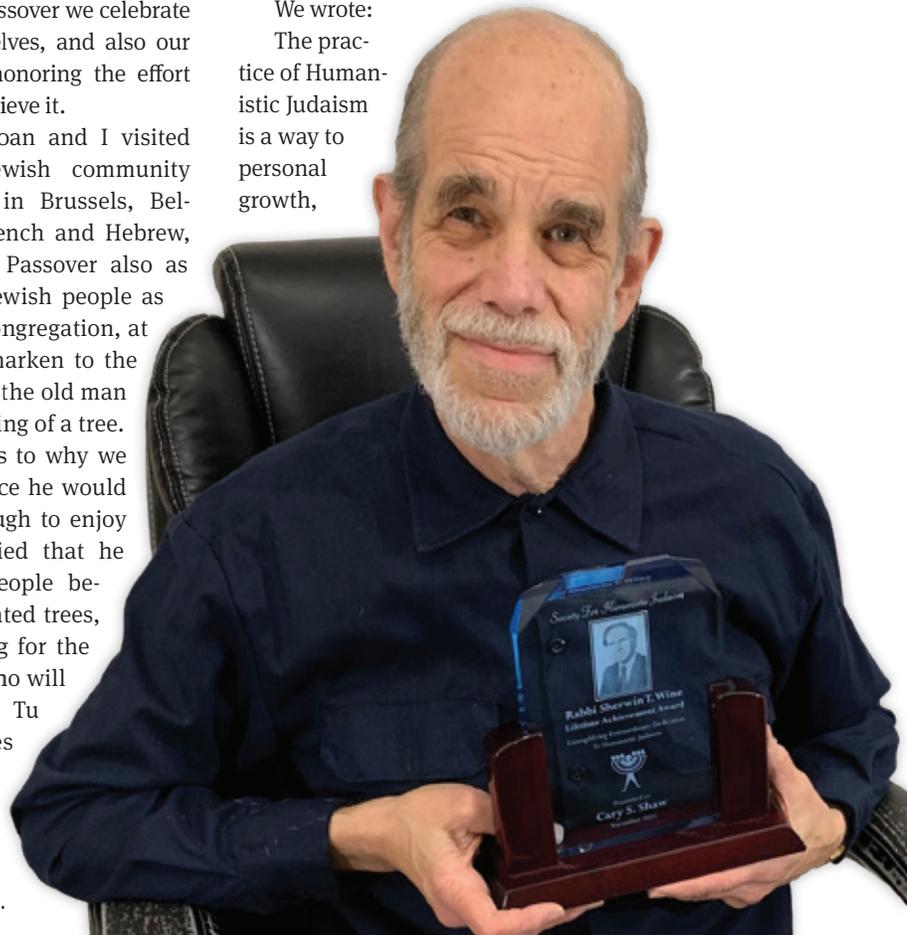
I am also a Jew by birth.

By this, I mean that I was born of a Jewish family and that I have affirmatively decided that Jewish values are my values.

As the year 2002 approached, Elie Shafer, the President of my Congregation for Humanistic Judaism in Connecticut, asked if I would chair an effort to define in writing our Humanistic Jewish values. I accepted the challenge. We had a rotating attendance at our meetings, crafting and re-crafting our values. Finally, we presented the result at our Annual Meeting. It was adopted unanimously.

We wrote:

The practice of Humanistic Judaism is a way to personal growth,



meaning, and fulfillment.

As a Humanistic Jew, I seek:

- To increase the well-being of others (*Tzedakah*).
- To perform acts of loving-kindness (*Gemilut Chassadim*).
- To pursue justice, counter oppression, and make the world a better place (*Tikkun Olam*).
- To reflect personally on my own behavior, its motivations, and to commit to improving myself, not only at High Holiday time but throughout the year.

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would you respond to that? A professor at Fairfield University has a sign on her door that reads: "There are no theists in emergency rooms."

What are Jewish people very proud of? What are Jewish people most concerned about? We are proud of the high percentage of Nobel prize winners who are Jewish. We are concerned about the 1940s, to the murder of one-third of the entire world population of Jewish people.

When we proudly recognize a number of Nobel Prize winners that a lot of these scientists are not believers in a god or gods. When all the six million Jews who were murdered by the Nazis, we do not subtract the number who were not believers. In neither case do we include Jewish

It is known that the majority of people who are not Jewish are not believers in a god or gods. When all the six million Jews who were murdered by the Nazis, we do not subtract the number who were not believers. In neither case do we include Jewish Doublers have always been against those who don't conform. The genius of Sherwin Wine was not in originating Jewish doubt, but in being values and beliefs so clearly, and by establishing the concept that Humanistic Judaism is embodied in congregations.

We are aware that Jews are a small minority of the American, and indeed the world population. So what do we make of this?

Consider Judaism in marketing terms. In Judaism, we understand that we may experience negative emotions: fear, anger, jealousy, greed. But we must strive to overcome these emotions and do what we know is

right, for we are to be measured by our deeds. Contrast that with forms of other religions where simply belief in the deity is by itself a guarantee to enter heaven. But truth is not to be obtained by flattery or by self-serving public opinion.

Within Judaism, many attend synagogue either to be with family, or to be in the milieu of neighbors and business prospects. Many others, not aware of the Humanistic Jewish alternative, have left the organizational fold.

Some of us Humanistic Judaism

According to the recent Pew Research Center survey, 26% of Jewish people believe in the God of the Bible. I dare to say that the average person is not even aware of Humanistic Judaism. Awareness is a key to freedom of thought—the idea that you are not alone, and that you are a part of a greater com-

The Society for Humanistic Judaism is like many organizations. It stands proudly for a set of beliefs and values of a much smaller population that doesn't necessarily join as paid members. In essence, we have come out of the closet. As I read about other organizations, they are described not by their paid membership, but as having so many adherents, or representing so many people, or accounting for a certain percentage of the population at large. That is an appropriate way to look at SHJ.

Concluding:  
At its core, Judaism in its philosophy and culture is consistent

Humanistic Judaism provides a way for us, and people who join us, to join in community, express ourselves authentically, and to reinforce our values.

And further, Humanistic Judaism holds a candle to this idea. In the words of the Humanistic Jewish saying: Where is my light? My light is in me, and in you. Thank you. ✡

The genius of Sherwin Wine was in articulating values and beliefs so clearly, that Humanistic Judaism can be embodied in congregations.

— Cary Shaw

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In love and memory of  
my mom, Doree Samuels,  
a proud Humanist and  
the Music Director for  
the Birmingham Temple  
for over 30 years

– *Gary Samuels*

# Ten modern plagues that threaten America's separation of religion and government

**FAVORITISM** Despite the constitutional prohibition against a national religion, court rulings and policies continue to favor one religion over others or none, for example by allowing federally-funded adoption agencies to discriminate against non-Protestants.

**EXCLUSION** By claiming crosses and other Christian iconography are “secular,” the courts erase Americans of other or no religions, as with the taxpayer-maintained Bladensburg Cross that supposedly represents all local WWI war dead yet excluded the names of Jewish soldiers.

**DISCRIMINATION** By twisting the notion of “religious freedom,” the government supports discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people in the commercial, public, and military sectors.

**ENFORCED IGNORANCE** Laws requiring school standards for secular subjects like science and English are not being enforced, allowing fundamentalist Christian schools to teach that man co-existed with dinosaurs and fundamentalist Jewish schools to barely provide secular education at all.

**DIVERSION** Although religious organizations receive tax-exempt status in lieu of government funding—to maintain the separation of church and state—the government still seeks to divert funding to churches anyway, through grants for repairs and school voucher programs.

**OBFUSCATION** Christian fundamentalists disguise their religious agenda as education, influencing local governments and school boards to teach intelligent design as science and mandate bible courses in public schools.

**MEDDLING** State and federal government policies toward women's reproductive rights and health care are increasingly influenced by a fundamentalist Christian religious approach, resulting in a sustained assault on *Roe v. Wade*.

**DENIAL** The urgency of addressing climate change is downplayed by government officials beholden to big polluting industries, who hide behind religious claims that we can “leave it in the hands of a much, much higher authority.”

**SUBVERSION** Through a well-documented plan by Christian supremacists, Project Blitz is a coordinated effort to overwhelm state and federal legislatures with bills promoting their religious agenda, such as anti-LGBTQ laws and requiring “In God We Trust” signs in all public schools.

**PRIVILEGE** In order to consolidate their already-strong sway over government, Christian fundamentalists seek to repeal the Johnson Amendment that prevents non-profits including churches from endorsing political candidates; without it, unlimited dark money would pour into campaigns through churches and turn houses of worship into political tools.

## JEWES FOR A SECULAR DEMOCRACY

### WE BRING JEWS TO ACTION ON ISSUES OF RELIGION-STATE SEPARATION.

Through advocacy and education, mobilizing people and resources, and partnerships with allies, Jews for a Secular Democracy brings more Jews to action on religion-state issues.

While there are great organizations in the secular world fighting for the separation of church and state, and great Jewish organizations fighting for social justice in general, Jews for a Secular Democracy is a unique initiative focused on issues of religion-state separation from a Jewish perspective.

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Help bring real religious freedom —freedom for all religions, and freedom from religious coercion—by demanding that the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution be upheld through a truly neutral, secular government.

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**Jews For A Secular  
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*A Pluralistic Initiative of the Society for Humanistic Judaism*

# Society for Humanistic Judaism

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