



# THE ILLUMINATOR

Or Emet – a Minnesota Congregation of Humanistic Judaism

August 2009

## The Rite Stuff

By Madrikh, Harold Londer

Or Emet members will be meeting this month to discuss the content of our regular Friday night “meetings”. Or, as other members might state: Or Emet members will be meeting this month to discuss the content of our Friday night “services”. The use of these two different terms to describe our monthly “get-togethers” gets directly to the heart of the issue we will be discussing. It is at the heart of a broader debate that rages in the secular Jewish community. What Jewish rituals does a secular Jewish community retain, and in what form?

The most recent American Jewish Identification Survey states that 49% of American Jews consider themselves secular. Some of the greatest figures in Jewish history: Spinoza, Kafka, Einstein, Herzl, Freud, etc. were avowedly secular. Throughout Jewish history, some Jews have challenged traditional Judaism. Formal organizations of secular Jews have existed throughout modern Jewish history. Dating back to the 1800’s the “Society for the Culture and Science of the Jews” (Verein für Kultur und Wissenschaft der Juden) was created in Eastern Europe. Organizations such as ‘Workmen’s Circle’, and the “Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations”, were mainstays of the early American Jewish experience. The Society for Hu-

manistic Judaism (SHJ), to which Or Emet belongs, was established in the 1960’s.

And yet, there is enough of a crisis in the movement, that the May-June 2009 issue of the magazine, “Jewish Currents,” which describes itself as “a progressive, secular voice,” is totally devoted to the topic: “Does Jewish Secularism have a future”? The magazine’s circulation has plummeted. SHJ congregation growth has stagnated (Or Emet, however, is one of the fastest growing congregations in the country with nearly a 25% membership growth last year to an all time high!). It is increasingly difficult for secular Jews to feel connected to the Jewish community. The foundation of the state of Israel was often considered to be one of the greatest accomplishments of secular Judaism. At the time of its formation, it was estimated that 85% of the population was secular. It is now felt that by 2030 secular Jews will be in the minority in Israel. In this country, with assimilation, intermarriage, and the rise of religiosity, Jews who do not belong to traditional synagogues are increasingly marginalized, and struggle with maintaining any connection to their Judaism.

How does a 21<sup>st</sup> century secular Jewish organization best serve its community? The answer is not easy. For years we have had

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### *High Holiday Observances at Or Emet*

**Friday, September 18<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 P.M**

An Oneg with apples and honey will follow the conclusion of this service.

**Rosh Hashanah Service at the Minneapolis JCC**

**Saturday, September 19<sup>th</sup>, at 10:30 A.M**

This is a potluck event, and members will soon receive an email with more information.

**Tashlich Service at the home of Alan and Sharon Miller**

**Sunday, September 27<sup>th</sup>, at 7:00 P.M**

**Kol Nidre Service at the Minneapolis JCC**

**Monday, September 28<sup>th</sup>, at 4:00 P.M**

Followed by our traditional “break the fast” event at the home of Harold and Jan Londer.

**Yom Kippur Service at the Minneapolis JCC**

## The Illuminator

We welcome letters to the editor, announcements, articles, commentaries and photographs. We cannot guarantee whether material will be suitable for publication.

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Or Emet is affiliated with the Society for Humanistic Judaism (SHJ) and the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judasim (IISHJ).

## President's Musings and Message ...

The curtain will soon be going up on the production **Or Emet, 2009-2010**, and anticipation is building.

One needs only to peruse the part of the program you find in this Illuminator to want to join the cast of players and the sure-to-be captivated audience for camaraderie, inspiration, entertainment, education and good food, as we enjoy celebrating Judaism humanistically.

The "Directors" (Executive Committee members) have been meeting throughout the summer, as have the other key participants of this exciting creative endeavor, including many of our "Producers" who make up the Program, Jewish Cultural Sunday School and High Holidays committees.

Casting is well underway for both starring and supporting roles. Hopefully you'll decide to join the working cast. Working with a great group of people, on something one believes in, is rewarding. And it's fun.

And we all know that no production would be successful without an audience. That's where we can all come in. Last year our "audience" (membership) was bigger than ever, and we plan to surpass that number this coming season.

Information about purchasing "season's tickets" (otherwise known as "membership") will be mailed to last year's "season ticket holders" soon. And it's never too late to become a new "season ticket holder"! Visitors, of course, are always welcome at all performances, but benefits, like fancy name tags ☺, belong only to those who officially join.

This show will run until next June when, no doubt, several members will be recipients of special awards for their stellar performances. The awards will be given at the Annual Meeting.

Hoping to see you all at our first Sunday program of the year on September 13th and, of course, at our Humanistic High Holiday services and events.

~ Margo Fox

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## New Law Effective Aug. 1, 2009 – A Wonderful Memorial to Edith Davis

**Acupuncturist Services Reimbursement** — Treatment by licensed acupuncturist practitioners will become more widely reimbursed by health care plans that already offer physician-supervised or provided coverage only.

A new law provides equal access to a licensed acupuncturist practitioner for services covered under a regulated health plan. If acupuncturist services provided by a physician are covered, the same services provided by a licensed acupuncturist practitioner must also be covered. It does not require health plans that don't cover any acupuncturist services to begin doing so. It applies to coverage issued, renewed or continued on or after Aug. 1, 2009.

*Rep. Karen Clark (DFL-Mpls), who sponsored the law with Sen. Linda Berglin (DFL-Mpls), said the law is a memorial to Edith R. Davis, considered Minnesota's pioneer acupuncturist. (HF286/SF245\*/CH45)*

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# High Holidays, 2009/5770

by David Fox

The High Holidays will soon be here and, borrowing some words from Rabbi Sherwin Wine, it is "... a time to reflect on the relationship of the universe to human need and human desire.... Human dignity is not a gift of destiny. It is a human achievement, requiring courage and human self-reliance...."

Our Rosh Hashanah service will be held on Friday, September 18<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 P.M. Our speakers at this service will be Lisa Gardner-Springer and Arty Dorman. An Oneg with apples and honey will follow the conclusion of this service.

Our Tashlich service will again be held at the home of Alan and Sharon Miller on Saturday, September 19<sup>th</sup>, at 10:30 A.M. This is a potluck event, and members will soon be asked to RSVP and to declare their food contributions.

The Kol Nidre service will occur on Sunday, September 27<sup>th</sup>, at 7:00 P.M., followed by our Yom Kippur service at 4:00 P.M. on Monday, September 28<sup>th</sup>. Speaking at these services will be Rachel Osband and Harold Londer. Our traditional "break the fast" event will once again be held at the home of Harold and Jan.

All services, except for Tashlich, will be held at the Minneapolis JCC, 4330 S. Cedar Lake Road, St. Louis Park.

The generosity and cooperation of our members assures, once again, the success of our endeavors. All deserve our gratitude and applause.



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## The Rite Stuff

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a Friday night "service" with our Friday program. I have had virtually equal numbers of new attendees approach me with two disparate complaints. Half say, "I enjoyed the evening, but, missed the traditional Jewish components". The other half enjoyed the evening, but cannot figure out why in the world we had to have ANY ritual. Some of our current members feel the service is too long, too "religious" and needs to be shortened. Do we really need a "humanistic shema?" they would ask. Others feel it is important that it be maintained. Without this service, why are we any different than a Friday night program at the YMCA? Isn't that why we meet on Friday nights, anyway?

I think it is healthy to have this debate. It shows that our members truly care about what Or Emet represents to them, and to the broader Twin Cities Jewish community. To a Jew who, for whatever reason, does not feel comfortable joining a traditional synagogue, we offer a truly unique opportunity to connect with one's Judaism in a non-traditional, non-judgmental community. Jews have changed their traditions virtually since the inception of the religion. Animal sacrifice was required by the Torah. Women were excluded from most of the (613!) commandments in religious Judaism for centuries. When I was growing up, in an orthodox Jewish synagogue, there was, literally, no such thing as a bat mitzvah for young Jewish women (of course, every 13 year old boy had a bar mitzvah).

As Sherwin Wine, the founder of our organization (and my personal mentor and friend), said so eloquently: "humanistic values flow naturally from Jewish history and from the Jewish experience... If Jewish history could speak, it would proclaim a humanitarian ethic.. If the Jewish experience could talk, it would guarantee the dignity of all men and women. To study Judaism is to hear these messages". Please help Or Emet achieve these lofty goals.

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# **Jewish Cultural School**

**by Lisa Gardner-Springer**

The 2009/2010 Jewish Cultural School is starting soon and we have some exciting new changes for the year ahead.

First, we are thrilled to have two new teachers on board. Eva Cohen, who was off for the past year as she was finishing her undergraduate studies, is returning to teach the Juniors (Grades 5-8). Lindsay Smith, who was raised and taught in the Birmingham Temple in Michigan, will be instructing our Littles (preK-K). And Scott Oremland will be coming back to teach the Middles (Grades 1-4). We are truly fortunate to have such a dedicated and gifted teaching staff.



Second, based on input from the teachers and parents, we are tweaking the class schedule a little. The school will start promptly at 10 am with a gathering time for all, with snacks, drinks and singing (with music accompaniment) until about 10:20. Then the children and adults will go their separate ways. The school classes and the adults will be free to take breaks independently later if desired, but there will not be another mid-morning snack with both the kids and adults. We hope this new schedule will be less disruptive for both adults and kids alike.

Third, we will be testing out a new online system for parents and teachers to communicate with each other about the school. Details to come.

Finally, Lisa Gardner-Springer and Kirsten Rose will be co-coordinating the JCS this year as Barb Weisman transitions off as the JCS coordinator. Barb has done an amazing job over these past couple of years and we are grateful for her continued support as we learn the ins and outs of the JCS.

**Space is still available for the classes**, so if you know of any families that might be interested in a Humanist approach to Judaism, please have them email Lisa at [school-1@oremnet.org](mailto:school-1@oremnet.org). For newcomers, we offer a very flexible and very affordable tuition arrangement for families to try the JCS out. The Or Emet website ([www.oremnet.org](http://www.oremnet.org)) has details.

## **Sunday Sessions for 2009/2010 (10:00am to 12:30pm) At the Friends School in St. Paul**

**September 13, 2009**

**October 4, 2009, plus Sukkot Celebration at Barbara & Tom's 1:00-3:00**

**November 8, 2009**

**December 6, 2009**

**January 24, 2010**

**February 21, 2010**

**February 28th - Purim Carnival (time & location TBD)**

**March 21, 2010**

**April 25, 2010**

**May 23, 2010**

## Program Committee—Upcoming Events

by Rich Sonenblum

Sunday, September 13, 10:00 am – Noon, Friends School of MN

Adult Program: “Parenting Beyond Belief”

Presenters: Barbara Weisman and Laura Melnick (Or Emet members)

Friday, September 18, 7:00 pm, Minneapolis JCC

**Rosh Hashanah Service** (see page 1 for complete High Holiday Observance Schedule)

Sunday, October 4, 10:00 am – Noon, Friends School of MN

Adult Program: The Popular Front and Popular Culture: The Roles of Jews in Creating an Anti-Racist Culture in the 1930s and 1940s

Presenter: Peter Rachleff. Macalester College professor conducts research and teaches courses in U.S. labor, immigration and African American history.

Plus: **Sukkot Celebration at Barbara & Tom’s 1:00-3:00**

Friday, October 23, 7:30, Minneapolis JCC

**Shabbat Service**

Program: Jews in Sports

Presenter: Ross Bernstein, best-selling author of more than 40 sports books and known nationally in the topics of Passions and Legacies.

Sunday, November 8, 10:00 am – Noon, Friends School of MN

Adult Program: Jewish History/Archeology

Presenter: Andrea Berlin and Emily Kaspari (Or Emet member). Professor Berlin is the Morse-Alumni Distinguished Teaching Professor of Archaeology, Department of Classical and Near Eastern Studies. She and Emily recently returned from a six-week dig in southern Israel

Friday, November 20, 7:30, Minneapolis JCC

**Shabbat Service**

Program: Women in the Bible

Presenter: Muriel Sterne (Or Emet member)

Sunday, December 6, 10:00 am – Noon, Friends School of MN

Program: Baruch Spinoza, Philosopher and Rationalist, Humanistic Jewish Role Model of the Year

Presenter: Roger Jones, professor emeritus U of MN, school of physics and astronomy

Saturday, December 12, 5:00—8:00pm, Friends Meeting House in St. Paul (Note: This is not the Friends School)

**Hanukkah Party and Havdalah**

Friday, December 18, 7:30, Minneapolis JCC

**Shabbat Service**

Program: Fundamentalism – How to Respond

Presenter: Richard Logan (Or Emet member). Richard is a retired Professor of Human Development with emphasis on Cross-Cultural Psychology, Personality Theory and Developmental Psychology.

**Content for January 8th, February 19th (SHJ Visit), March 12th, April 16th and May 7th still to be decided.**

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### **An Important Note About Friday Evening Shabbat Services ...**

*If you would like to “greet and gather with” other Or Emet members and visitors upon arrival to Friday evening services (and who wouldn’t?), please plan to arrive early. It is important that we start the service at 7:30 sharp, in part to accommodate the schedules of our guests and guest speakers.*

## SHJ—Related News

### SHJ Changes Conference Dates

The Society for Humanistic Judaism has changed the date of its next conference to April 29 through May 1, 2011. The 2011 HuJews Conclave will be held the same weekend. There will be a 2010 HuJews Conclave, the date of which will be announced soon.

Recognizing the current difficult economic conditions, the SHJ Board of Directors, following input from communities, voted to postpone the 2010 conference until April 2011. The SHJ is considering several different sites and will make a decision on location based on the best financial circumstances.

The Board of Directors of the Society will meet in the days prior to the 2011 conference. There will be an optional tour following the conference.

Further information will be available in the coming months. Mark the date now – April 29-May 1, 2011, and plan to join SHJ for Conference and Conclave 2011.

### SHJ Chooses Baruch Spinoza as Humanistic Jewish Role Model of the Year; Rescinds Spinoza's Excommunication

The Society for Humanistic Judaism has chosen Baruch Spinoza as their Humanistic Jewish Role Model of the Year. The Society's Board of Directors has elected to rescind the 1656 excommunication of Baruch Spinoza by the Dutch Jewish community, reclaiming him as part of the Jewish community. We are recommending that, during the month of February, Humanistic Jewish communities honor Spinoza's intellectual contributions to the Jewish people, to the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment understanding of Judaism and to a modern understanding of Jewish textual material by celebrating his life, values and contributions to the development of secular and Humanistic Judaism.

Baruch Spinoza was born November 24, 1632, and died February 21, 1677. He was a Dutch Jew excommunicated by the Jewish community in 1656. The writ of excommunication or *cherem* was based on "heresies" primarily Spinoza's questioning of divine revelation of the Jewish texts. There was the additional concern that Christians would look upon his views with disfavor so the Jewish community had no other recourse if it was going to protect its precarious position within the community at-large.

"It is time for Jews to reclaim Spinoza as part of the Jewish community," says SHJ Rabbi Miriam Jerris. "Humanistic Jews should be in the forefront of rescinding Baruch Spinoza's excommunication by the Dutch Jewish community. Spinoza introduced using reason as an approach to Jewish thinking that is commensurate with the best of modern academic scholarship on many issues important to Jews today."

### Brief Notes of Interest

Or Emet's new "**leadership team**" is being formed and will be meeting for the first time on Sunday, August 23<sup>rd</sup> at the St Paul JCC. The team will bring together Or Emet's committee chairs with members of the executive committee to report on each committees' work and to help facilitate coordination.

This year, we'll have **several active committees**, including, but not limited to: program, JCS, ritual, social action and social justice, music, budget and finance, membership with outreach and public relations.

Mark your calendars for February 19-21 when **Rabbi Miriam Jerris will be here**, visiting with and leading sessions for us. Miriam is Community Development Director for the Society for Humanistic Judaism.

## Member Contributions

### **Or Emet: The Light of Truth** by Phillip Griffin (discovered posthumously)

Why do the best answers seem always to end with a question mark?

We need more truth about the old questions. As well as the old answers.

Jews have sought truth for thousands of years. Some have believed that they would find it by faith, from outside human life.

We at Or Emet, however, believe we will find our measure of truth by sight, and not by faith. It is in the world of lived experience that we expect to find more truth.

We honor the efforts of the ancient faithful and their courage in going where no one had gone before. But we also honor the goal of truth as it has not been known before. This is the goal of Or Emet, a congregation of Humanistic Jews: to find and to live better truth in our time.

We have science and art and literature all molded together in the mixture of life in a confusing world. We accept the limitations of individual understanding, but relish the richness of shared insight. We agree and disagree about our conceptions of truth, but we are together in our devotion to the pursuit of truth.

We believe that serving and enriching humanity itself is the purpose of natural life, and that every individual human life is of utmost value along with every other life.

The life of enjoyment and inquiry is the birthright of every person. But what do we know of the individual or of society? How shall we identify and evaluate the core of human life? Our ancestors believed that humanity is defined by divinity. But we have learned that divinity is defined by humanity. The gods are themselves elongated shadows of the people who believe in them. Beliefs in gods obscure and confuse more than they reveal and guide. Knowledge of humanity in the sciences gives us an expanding truth about the world and ourselves.

The light of reason has never been more accessible than it is today. But reason has never been under more mistrust than it is today. Those who cling to blinding faith attack the reason because through fixing on the world of experience it has provided more beneficial ways of living than could ever have been achieved through faith. Humanistic Jews celebrate the accomplishments of scientific enquiry and rational learning.

Because we in Or Emet are based upon the tradition of the ancient prophets who called for justice and freedom for all people, we call all our friends and neighbors to join us in a commitment to service to humanity. Those ancient prophets gave us the invitation and challenge to find in all strangers our friends and finally a family. We extend to all who know us a wish for a life of reason warmed by love and committed to service of our human family.



#### A Beautiful August Evening!

More than thirty Or Emet members gathered at the home of Nancy, Becka & Matt Schwartz (and Oreo & Element, their cats) for a wonderful evening which included a Havdalah Service and a delicious potluck dinner. Highlights included Marisol Miller's raising of the candle.

## Member Contributions—continued

### Why has Fundamentalism Taken Hold in the Modern World?

By Richard D. Logan, PhD

**PREFACE:** *I want to focus on some factors associated with secular cosmopolitan modernity that might account for various groups reacting by seeking to return to an earlier source of meaning and structure: to something fundamental. My approach is intentionally selective, focusing on those who become fundamentalists for cultural and psychological reasons due to culture change and cultural class. My central interest is in what all forms of religious fundamentalism have in common. I will address both Christian, Jewish, and Islamic fundamentalism, and refer to other fundamentalisms as well. I am aware that I am not covering every dimension of fundamentalism and extremism, and I don't mean to diminish the importance of other factors that might lead people to embrace the fundamentalist option.*

**INTRODUCTION:** Many have said that religious fundamentalism takes hold in the modern world out of a fear of modernity. But I want to go into this a little further: So-called modernity involves a movement away from traditional cultural forms and long-established structures of meaning to the cosmopolitan, the diverse, secular, scientific-technical, non-believing; also to Western/American cultural forms --- which means individualistic, media-driven, immediate and youth-centered (rather than long-term and elder-respecting), and increasingly means celebrity-focused, sexually-liberated, and feminist -- thus increasingly disordered, and even "decadent". These disorienting and dislocating secular/cosmopolitan/Western changes have subjected people across the world (including people in our own country) to strange and foreign influences that begin to make their own world alien to them and their own established sources of meaning more distant from them. In many places outside the West these changes can happen in one generation, meaning that children virtually grow up on a different planet from their parents. Thus begins a love-hate relationship with modernity, the West, America -- creating struggles not just between more conservative/traditional parents and their more Westernized secularized children but indeed within the psyches of individuals around the world who find themselves torn in opposing directions -- between the new that attracts them and the familiar that reassures them -- and who, as it were, both love modernity and also hate themselves for doing so.

**NOTE: This article is not published in it's entirety due to space restrictions.  
Please contact Nancy at newsletter-1@oremet.org for the complete article.**

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### Karl Marx Reconsidered

by David Fox

When Karl Marx' name comes up in the West, he is mostly vilified for fathering Communism. But, in fairness, a more balanced view should be taken. His detailed and voluminous observations about 19<sup>th</sup> century life influenced social and economic legislation that we take for granted today.

First and foremost, he wrote about the exploitation of the working class (especially factory workers, farmers and children). He argued for safe and sanitary work environments; a progressive or graduated income tax; a fair inheritance tax; the regulation of the banking industry; the regulation or control of communication and transportation; governmental control of selected businesses (soil conservation, for example); industrial "armies" when needed (such as the WPA in the 1930s); attention to rural concerns (not only urban issues); and, finally, free universal education.

On his father's side, Marx was descended from a family of eminent rabbis. Though he put aside the theism of Judaism, he retained the profound moral aspects of our culture. In him, there is empathy and compassion for the underprivileged of the world.

## Member Contributions—continued

### Upside-Down Welfare

by David Fox

Tom Walz, former social work professor at the University of Iowa, wrote a book in the 1970s entitled “Upside-Down Welfare”. What he explained was that governmental assistance for the poor was called “welfare” and that it had negative connotations. One was to try to avoid it at almost any cost. On the other hand, farmers were given “subsidies”, military veterans were awarded “benefits”, professors were given “grants”, college students were given “scholarships”, businesses were presented with “stimuli”, unemployed workers were given “jobs”, and the elderly and disabled were given “insurance benefits”; and all of these were deemed worthy governmental investments.

In 2009, we have a federal government granting billions of dollars to banks and other big businesses, some of which awarded \$1,000,000 + bonuses to thousands of employees. Did our government issue “stimuli” to businesses too big to fail, a so-called acceptable strategy in our complex economic system? Or, was this simply “welfare for the rich”?

In my view, a rose is a rose is a rose, and a pig is a pig is a pig.

## Annual Meeting Highlights

- ◆ Our Executive Committee for 2009-2010 was elected unanimously.
- ◆ The budget was approved with the recommendation that we let everyone who was not in attendance know how well managed our finances are. We pay rent at a variety of facilities for all of our programs, services and large holiday gatherings; hire JCS teachers; secure liability insurance; print materials; mail the Illuminator; fund the website/ads/etc., and participate fully in SHJ. And we maintain a responsible fund balance.
- ◆ Special recognition was presented to Lionel Davis, Barbara Weisman and our volunteer teachers. Certificates of appreciation were given to the 2008-2009 executive committee members, with special thanks to outgoing member Barry Cohen. Thanks were also expressed to our president, Margo Fox, for all she does for Or Emet.
- ◆ After a lively participation exercise, the meeting adjourned to the Annual Picnic.



2009/2010 Executive Committee Members, pictured left to right: Artie Dorman, Erica Fishman, Margo Fox, Sharon Miller, Harold Londer and Nancy Schwartz.

**A New Membership Category  
for College Students  
and Young Adult Households!**

Watch your mailbox for your  
2009/2010 membership packet!  
Of special note is a new, low category  
of membership dues for college students  
and young adults.



Dues for families and individuals have stayed the same.  
As in the past, if anyone who wishes to join Or Emet  
finds the dues too high, an adjustment can be made.

We welcome your participation!

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