



# THE ILLUMINATOR

Or Emet – a Minnesota Congregation of Humanistic Judaism

November 2011

## Why? Oh Why? Oh Why?

By Madrikh, Harold Londer

A plane crashes in the jungle. One hundred and twenty are dead; bodies are carted away. The plane is crushed beyond recognition. The next day, a whimper is heard in the smashed fuselage. A frail, frightened, thin, 7 year old girl is pulled from the wreckage. She is alive!! WHY? A miracle, of course!

A cancer patient looks at her oncologist? How could I get cancer? I don't smoke, I eat a healthy diet, I exercise, my mother lived into her 90s! By God, I went to church religiously! How did I get cancer? WHY did I get cancer??

A lottery winner, a divorced attorney, is interviewed by the local television station. 50 million dollars!! A "miracle" says the lucky man, his family smiling behind him. Millions see the television interviews; experiencing a mixture of good feelings for the winner, and, with a furtive glance to the heavens, ask... WHY NOT ME?

The human tendency to ask "why" is universal, and probably dates to prehistoric times. Why does the sun rise? Why does the rain fall? Why does the baby cry? There must be a reason! There MUST be a reason!!! For eons, for millions and millions of people, the answer has evoked the will of God. So simple, so undeniably straightforward, so universal, and to so many, so comforting.

Why was the girl saved? God intervened. Why did you get cancer? It was God's will, and mortals like us cannot understand God's actions. Why did the lottery winner win? He, and his family, had prayed for this for years. God has answered their prayers!

And why did God allow the crash in the first place? Why, if he could do so at his own discretion, didn't he save the others on the plane? The other children, at least!! Pray tell, why not dole out the pain of cancer to those who smoked, or the evil, the slovenly, those who don't go to church, those, who

dammit, DESERVE it.

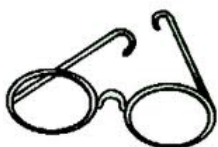
And why is this successful attorney, this family, this sinner, selected to win the lottery? Why doesn't he give it to the man with the dying child who cannot afford insurance, or the local minister who has struggled to build a school in Africa? Why, in the world, would you, God, select a successful RICH attorney? This is who you select for one of your "miracles?"

Jesse Bering, in a quirky little book entitled "The Belief Instinct," argues that the tendency to believe is a universal human trait, which has evolutionary advantages. Those who believe fit better in a community, yielding more protection against the hazards of the world, than those who are isolated. Activation of "God concepts" undermines the anonymity of the situation, and, as a result, cures selfish behavior." It doesn't matter if the idea is true or false.

Must there always be an answer? Is there always a "why" to every experience? We are taught to believe this. If there is not a theistic answer, there must be a scientific answer. The rationalists, as well as the religious, seek AN answer. One is forced to come up with an explanation that satisfies one's own belief system. I am a medical oncologist. I see many patients who are cured of their cancer. Typically, they explain the fact that they are doing well with their pre-existing belief system. If they are religious, it is because they prayed, and God answered their prayers. If they are taking nutritional supplements, and alternative "medicine," it is that that is saving them. If they are into new age philosophy, it is their positive attitude, YOGA, and stretching. If they are social creatures, it is their friends, their support group, their spouses, and their family's support that has carried the day. My favorites are those who say it is "because they have the best doctor."

And yet, I believe that the answer may just be, in many situations, that there is NO "why?" The Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, the wonders of meiosis and random chro-

*(continued on page 3)*



### A note from the Editor:

**Please put on your reading glasses!**

**We had lots of good stuff to publish in this issue, so I had to use a very small font for some of the articles. My apologies to those of you who hate the fine print! And to those whose articles were not included this time.**

## 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 Judaism (IISHJ).

## President's Message

In the previous issue of the Illuminator, I said I intended to talk about the three aspects of Humanistic Judaism: (1) how Humanistic Judaism is, even "without God", still significantly Judaic, (2) what it means to be humanistic, and (3) the significance of secularism. In this issue I want to talk about what is uniquely and even powerfully Judaic about Humanistic Judaism. There is in fact a great deal. And it goes well beyond conducting traditional Jewish ceremonies and affirming Jewish identity, although these are very important.

The importance of Humanistic Judaism may not lie in something as historically singular as Abrahamic monotheism, yet it is still as significant when all of its elements are put together. And do not forget that, from a dispassionate perspective, monotheism was the *invention* of the Jewish people, notwithstanding the fact that their sacred texts say that it was a revelation given to them. It also goes without saying that the invention of monotheism was an intellectual as well as theological leap forward that made a monumental difference in world history, becoming a cornerstone of three great world religions which in turn became cornerstones of two great civilizations: the Western world and Islamic civilization. Fast forward to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and it also goes without saying that the Western Enlightenment made a monumental difference in the world, as it led to cosmopolitan modernity featuring science and democracy. As it happens, Jews were not only instrumental in the birth of monotheism but also in the leap forward of Western civilization we call the Enlightenment. Or Emet, more than any other Jewish group, is directly heir to the Enlightenment -- with its flowering of science and reason -- and to the role Jews played in it.

Consider this: In writing about how Jews should relate to the new 18<sup>th</sup> century world of secular democracy, reason and science while still remaining Jewish, Jewish thinkers like Spinoza and Moses Mendelssohn wrote so incisively that a much broader audience (including no less than Jefferson et al) were influenced by their works. This meant that ideas written originally to provide Jews with a rationale for becoming secular democrats also helped build nothing less than the modern secular cosmopolitan Western world itself. And yet these secular Jewish thinkers never advocated abandoning Jewishness, and they certainly still considered themselves Jewish (even though Spinoza was famously excommunicated). One of the ways they remained Jewish is that they were carrying on the ancient Jewish tradition of living an intellectual life of inquiry and debate that was first practiced by Talmudic scholars of ancient times. They urged the same of Jews of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

One of the major tensions in modern Jewish life (and for Or Emet) has been the maintenance of a Jewish identity while increasingly engaging with the secular world. This not a new issue. This was a major theme of the *Haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment, the philosophical movement that occurred alongside the Western Enlightenment. Lacking the close community of shtetl and ghetto, and also without the close religious community of synagogue as cornerstones of culture and identity, Jews who now lived in the modern secular world faced a special challenge in maintaining their cultural identity. How could they leave the synagogue and still be Jewish? The answer was to continue to be on the intellectual leading edge of culture and ask brave new questions, as Jews have long done, and to continue to be members of the wider Jewish community and to practice those rituals that kept alive their culture if not their religion. So, what is true about the practices and values of non-theistic Jews that is also true of observant ones is a tradition of intellectualism, scholarship, inquiry, and debate that is part of historic Jewish culture. Humanistic non-theistic Jews have, since the Enlightenment and the *Haskalah*, continued to live lives that featured the following aspects that had long characterized the Jewish community:

- A. The dualistic experience of both significant marginality in the wider world coexisting with strong community. Secular Jews still had strong support systems in their families and secular Jewish communities if no longer their religious communities. Their marginality in the Christian West gave them a unique perspective that fostered their intellectual creativity (e.g., Marx, Freud).
- B. A special balance between valuing the community (both local and worldwide) and the individual that proves highly adaptive to the modern world – strong

(Continued on top of page 3)

individualism with strong community support and identification. The new valuing of the mind of the individual that came with the Enlightenment would become a cornerstone of Humanistic Judaism, which still carried on the traditional importance of the community.

- C. Both humanists and religionists also continued to experience being the victimized minority, victimized for being different and for being successful, though now in the modern world. Many of Hitler's victims were secular Jews, not religious ones. This leads to a special empathy among secular humanist Jews – who are more likely to become social activists – for other minorities. It is secular Jews who often take social stands *that extend beyond the interests of their communities*, so *tikkun olam* remains alive and well among humanistic Jews, perhaps even more so than among religionists.
- D. A modern, cosmopolitan sensibility that actually has been around for centuries. In fact, Jews have been “modern” for centuries before the rest of the world, used as they are to debate and argument – and exposed to so many differing cultural perspectives living on the margins of so many non-Jewish cultures.
- E. A history of building successful lives against the odds.
- F. A history of Influencing the world far beyond their numbers, partly because of having the special vantage point that comes with marginality, partly because of a potent intellectual tradition of inquiry and reasoned debate, and partly in recent times from having so fully embraced the modern cosmopolitan post-Enlightenment culture of science and rationalism. One of the reasons for so fully embracing the post-Enlightenment world of cosmopolitan modernity is that Jews have been cosmopolitan with a predisposition toward democratic argument for many centuries. Consider how many of our important public intellectuals (not just academics, scientists, and philosophers) are Jewish: Tom Friedman, David Brooks, Noam Chomsky, Alan Dershowitz (a card-carrying member of SHJ), Paul Krugman, Naomi Klein, Jeffrey Sachs.

What remains significant then is the full pattern of mind, behavior, and values that we call Jewish. There is a set of things – a *vibrant culture* – that remains unique and significant.

**Postscript:** Though secular and humanist, humanistic Jews are not necessarily atheists nor anti-religion, and for the most part respect observant Jews as fellow members of the same historic community. In fact, because we value reason and science, we respect *all* people who are truly thoughtful and have intelligent reasons and evidence for the beliefs. And we enjoy engaging them in civil debate as a way to build democracy, which is after all nothing more than a civil argument among people of different views. Also, in saying that we in Or Emet positively affirm our Judaism, I do not believe that we should confront religious Judaism in any way – except for rigid fundamentalism which I believe is downright dangerous for *any* religion. It is not our central mission to argue people out of their Jewish (or any other) faith, but rather to celebrate and affirm another robust and vital part of Jewish culture and history: the story of those Jews who began to live in the secular world and the secular Jewish culture that began to build. This secular culture was founded on science and reason, rather than Torah study, as the intellectual means for succeeding in a modernizing world. And yet these thinkers remained Jewish and carried on many of the same traditions as their religious brothers and sisters.

Next time, humanism.

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## Why? Oh Why? Oh Why? - continued

mosome migration, the new science of Chaos theory all suggest that for many questions, there is, quite literally, no explanation. We do not know why a tree branches the way that tree did? We do not know where a leaf dropped at the top of a waterfall will end up? We do not know if one's child will be right-handed or left-handed, a world class athlete or a pianist, or have a freckle on his cheek or on his back. How long we will live, or how we will die.

To many this idea is frightening. The idea that there is no controlling force in the world, no answer to all of these “Why's,” no father/mother figure in the sky watching over us, is terribly depressing. I really love it. I hate the idea of determinism. I hate the idea that a series of molecular chain reactions, determined in advance by the laws of science, can predict my future, as much as I reject the idea that a God is deciding what I will eat this morning, whether the Vikings will win today's game, and what my wife and I will do this evening after dinner. The joy of life is its randomness, its unpredictability, the uncertainty when this paragraph will end.....

I keep six honest serving men  
(They taught me all I knew);  
Their names are What and Why and When  
And How and Where and Who.

I send them over land and sea,  
I send them East and West;  
But after they have worked for me,  
I give them all a rest.

The Elephant's Child

(R. Kipling)

# Jewish Cultural School

Submitted by Lisa Gardner—Springer

The Jewish Cultural School is off to a wonderful school year. We have more than 20 students in our pre-K-Teen school and everyone is having a wonderful and educational time of it all.

During the High Holidays, a number of students from our school participated in readings from the services. Every one of them had great poise and confidence, although we had to do some interesting ju-jitsu with the microphones for some of our shorter readers, which our madrikh Harold Londer wryly noted each and every time.

In our last session in October, we had the great fortune to have Shira Schwartz lead the adults and students in Israeli dance. It was an amazing experience. All of the students then went back to their classes and each took turns decorating a panel for our Sukka. A big thanks to David and Margo for hosting Or Emet's Sukkot Party this year.

I'd like to give you a little taste of what all the classes have been up to:

**Teen Crew (8th grade-High school):** Under the guidance of our new teen crew leader, Leigh Kelner, the teens are coalescing around how they will be active members of Or Emet. Last session, they started exploring how they might organize a bake sale for charity, and what types of organizations to which they might donate the proceeds.

**Juniors (Grades 3-7):** The Juniors, taught by Eva Cohen, are continuing their study of biblical and ancient Jewish history as part of our newly instituted curriculum. Students learned that Israeli dances similar to the kind they had just been taught are integral to Simchat Torah, an autumn holiday that is observed in more traditional synagogues. The class is working on a biblical timeline, which places Torah stories/events in historical context. Individual students read aloud events (e.g. Adam and Eve created, Tower of Babel falls) and their dates, and then performed a "fact check," looking at how scientifically-verified/evidence-supported claims stacked up against traditional God-based Jewish understandings about the age of the earth, the origin of humans, et cetera.

**Middles (Grades K-2):** In October, the Middles focused on Sukkot, and the value of Hard Work, also part of the curriculum. Under the tutelage of Sarah Berman-Young the Middles made edible lulavs out of vegetables, and then practiced shaking them. The Middles also learned two songs for Sukkot. With the Littles class, we sang "Did you ever shake a lulav?" to the tune of "Did you ever see a lassie?", and we ended the class with Zum Gali Gali, an Israeli song about the importance of working together.

**Littles (Pre-K):** The Littles, taught by Josh Kaplan, are a small but mighty crew. Neva and Evan realized their names consisted of all of the same letters! After they finished decorating the sukkah panel, we went back to our classroom to hear a story about Sukkot. The story had the word "butler" in it, which proved to be comedic gold for the preschool set.

The school website at [oremnet.wordpress.com](http://oremnet.wordpress.com) has more details on our lesson plans and what the students are covering in class.

Coming up: Channukah! This year's Channukah party will be from 5:30-8 pm at Newell Park in St. Paul on Sunday December 18. Nancy Schwartz and Joan Barnett will be helping to coordinate the big celebration and food, so please watch your emails for the potluck reservation information. We will need help setting up and cleaning up, so please talk to Nancy if you can lend a hand. The students will have a rehearsal of their performances from 10:30-noon on December 11 but I'm still working on a venue. Watch your emails.

Another note: This is my last year managing the JCS. It has been a wonderful two years (it will be three by May) of watching this school mature and grow. I will still be involved, of course, but it is time for the torch to be passed to another. If anyone wants to take on this incredibly rewarding effort, please get in touch with me at [school-1@oremnet.org](mailto:school-1@oremnet.org)

Finally, if you know a family that might want to try out our school, please encourage them to contact me and give us a go. Word-of-mouth has been very successful for us in building our school community. Plus, the first session is free for those who want to take us for a test drive.

**Thank you everyone!**

## **From the Ground Up: News from Or Emet's Social Justice & Action Committee**

Submitted by Arty Dorman

The Social Justice/Action Committee continues to meet regularly. Our goal is to share information on emerging issues and opportunities for action, as well as identifying a small number of actions we can take collectively as a community.

With that in mind, we will be identifying an outreach activity to volunteer at a shelter or serving meals to those in need on Christmas day. For those who don't take part in family observances on that day, but would welcome an opportunity to give back to the community, stay tuned for more information which will come via e-mails and announced at upcoming Or Emet programs. If you want to be sure to be included, contact Claire Press at [clairhpress@aol.com](mailto:clairhpress@aol.com).

We have been collecting personal care items for the participants of Listening House for over a year, yet the need continues to be present every month. Please bring anything you can donate to Friday evening or Sunday morning programs. To learn more about Listening House's services for people facing homelessness or economic hardship, visit their website, <http://listeninghouse.org>. A 10 minute video on the site provides a great overview of their program.

Other topics:

- Johanna Lester has been attending interfaith meetings to plan opposition to the proposed Minnesota marriage amendment which will come before the public for a vote next year. Johanna will bring back word as to opportunities for Or Emet to be engaged as a community.
- Our committee is exploring the possibility of forming a landscaping team to work with Habitat for Humanity this spring or summer - something we considered last year, but too late in the year to take action. Stay tuned for more on this. We also have indicated our desire to support in whatever way is helpful, social action projects taken on by the Jewish Cultural School, and in particular, the Youth Group.

While a committee dedicated to Social Justice and Action is an important component of Or Emet, we know full well that many among us engage in such actions on their own, and that collectively we connect with social justice issues through many of our Friday and Sunday programs, such as our recent programs on Jewish Voices for Peace and on Sustainability. All are meaningful ways to draw upon our Jewish culture and values, in the context of a humanistic belief system, to create a more just and whole world.

Our next meeting will be Sunday, Dec. 4 at noon (following the Adult Program) at the Friends School. All members are welcome to attend.

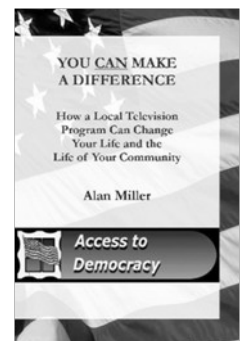
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### ***You Can Make A Difference* by Alan Miller**

reviewed by Jane Katz

All of us have been exposed to **Alan Miller's** wit, both biting and benign. But how many know that this Or Emet curmudgeon wrote a newly published book, has written screenplays, is an award-winning columnist, teaches classes in cinema and film history at Mpls Community College, and also teaches a course he created, HOLOCAUST/GENOCIDE: Films of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, at Inver Hills Community College.

Alan has just published a book entitled "*YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE: How a Local Television Program Can Change Your Life and the Life of Your Community.*" The book chronicles Miller's experience as host and producer for 12 years of his local show ACCESS TO DEMOCRACY, seen on television in Eagan and also available online. Alan has interviewed Holocaust survivors, dissident academics, political leaders, sports and business people, and other movers and shakers of our community. His in-depth interviews include a notable cast of characters from the late Paul Wellstone to Iman Abdisalam Adam, and these interviews, as recounted by Miller in the book, not only inform us about our community, but help "to dispel some of the fear-mongering and stereotypes" that impede progress. I was fascinated by the account of how Miller and his wife Sharon filmed a documentary on Katrina. They interviewed survivors traumatized by the hurricane and shot excellent film footage. I recommend that you read the book and see the show.



## Program Committee

**Sunday, December 4, 2011, 10:00 am – Noon, Friends School of MN**

Adult Program: “Does Professional Journalism Matter in the Internet Age?”

Presenter: Joel Kramer, CEO and editor of MinnPost, a not-for-profit online news site for people who care about Minnesota

**Sunday, Dec 18, 2011, Channukah Party at Newell Park from 5:30-8:00 pm;** more details on back page of this newsletter

**Friday, December 23, 2011, 7:30 pm, Minneapolis Sabes Jewish Community Center**

Adult Program: TBD

**Friday, January 13, 2012, 7:30 pm, Minneapolis Sabes Jewish Community Center**

Program: “Stories and Poems from a Career with Refugees and Immigrants”

Presenter: Diane Pecoraro, St. Louis Park Community Poet, former MN ESL and Adult Education Statewide Program Manager, and now ESL professional development consultant

**Sunday, January 22, 2012, 10:00 am – Noon, Friends School of MN**

Adult Program: “Marriage Equality and the Marriage Amendment”

Presenter: Adele Brown, Jewish Community Action

**Friday, February 3, 2012, 7:30 pm, Minneapolis Sabes Jewish Community Center**

Program: “The Innocence Project and the Death Penalty”

Presenter: David Schultz, The Innocence Project

**Sunday, February 12, 2012, 10:00 am – Noon, Friends School of MN**

Adult Program: “Ernestine Rose: Humanist of the Year”

Presenter: Molly Wilbur-Cohen, Peace Activist and Musician

**Sunday, March 4, 2012, 10:00 am – Noon, Friends School of MN**

Program: “Street Protests from Tahrir Square to Wall Street via Tel Aviv”

Presenters: Allan Malkis, Sr. Program Evaluator, Ramsey Co. Community Human Services; Howard Schneider, Former Sr. Planner, Office of Planning and Analysis, Dakota Co.; and a third panelist, TBA

**Friday, March 9, 2012, 7:30 pm, Minneapolis Sabes Jewish Community Center**

Program: “El Colegio Charter School and Higher Education Access”

Presenters: David Greenberg, El Colegio founder, and Gerardo Dominguez, El Colegio alumnus

**Sunday, March 18, 2012, 10:00 am – Noon, Friends School of MN**

Program: “Why Can’t Humanists Get Along Better?”

Presenter: Dr. Robert Tapp, Dean & Faculty Chair Emeritus, The Humanist Institute, New York City

*Donations & Tributes*

**Donations:**

Edna Bernstein

Lionel Davis

Rollie Langer

Madeline Gartner

Martin Segal

Lisa Gardner Springer

A donation from our Madrikh Harold Londer  
in celebration of the wedding of  
Carly Beetsch and Corbin Doty

A donation from Seija Farber for the  
memorial service for her husband Lawrence, performed by  
Harold Londer

A donation in memory of the father of Janet Mayer by  
Richard and Carol Logan

**High Holiday contributions:**

Chernan Coblentz

Alex Lubet

Lawrence Doaks

Jack Stuart

Paul Modell

Madeline Miller

Karol Rubin

Gary Marx

# High Holiday Highlights

2011/5772

Our High Holiday events offered opportunities to gather together and participate in programs highlighting renewed commitment to Humanistic Jewish values. Each service, led by Madrikh Harold Londer, combined both traditional and unique features. Members shared special talents with singing, cello, violin, piano and shofar in addition to personal commentaries – from humor to political, personal, and scholarly content along with high-level thinking and analysis. Everyone delighted in the prominent participation of children from the Jewish Cultural School.

## Rosh Hashanah

**Rosh Hashanah** service, led by Madrikh Harold Londer with member participation, was a time for renewal, reflection and new beginnings focusing on the affirmation of human power and dignity.

**Rosh Hashanah's Oneg Shabbat** showcased team effort with challah made by teen members along with an array of member-prepared traditional foods.

For **Tashlich** we headed to a beautiful lake in Lebanon Hills Park. Starting with a brief ceremony, we then performed the Tashlich custom, which symbolically enables starting the new year renewed. At conclusion of the ritual, we enjoyed a tasty potluck lunch at the Millers' home.

## Yom Kippur

**Kol Nidre** was a beautiful service serving as a reminder of our humanness and connection to all humanity with a time to gather and reflect.

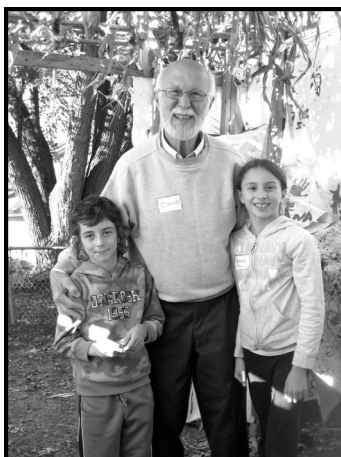
**Yom Kippur** afternoon service reflected on the solemnity of the day offering opportunity for all to begin a year with behaviors we value.

**Break-the-Fast** was a participatory pot-luck event staged as an indoor picnic at the JCC, conveniently accessible to the Yom Kippur service.



**Some photos  
from  
recent events!**

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**In the last issue of the Illuminator, we told you about an essay contest sponsored by Moment Magazine called, "The Elephant in the Room."  
The 2011 question was, "What does it mean to be Jewish without belief in God?"  
Below is Margo Fox's submittal to the essay contest. We are waiting to hear the results.**

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## It's All Good

### Part I

Being Jewish (albeit, with a slight "twist") involves all the items you'll find on this list. Following each of the ten listed here, is a brief explanation to make it quite clear.

- #1 Living a moral and an ethical life.  
(If I were I man, I would not beat my wife.)
- #2 Learning about Judaism and our long history,  
With lessons abounding in wisdom and mystery.
- #3 Marveling at ancestors, their heroic resilience;  
And let's add to that their *saichel*, their brilliance.
- #4 Feeling a kinship with all other Jews,  
having shared so much *tsuris* and foods! foods!  
foods! foods!  
(*Oy!* We're *ungashtupped*, *zoftick*, and  
singing the blues.)
- #5 Providing our children with knowledge and pride  
so they hold their heads high if others deride.
- #6 Appreciating humor, and culture and arts.  
We laugh and we cry and we feel with our hearts.
- #7 Respecting of nature - its power and beauty.  
Protecting resources is everyone's duty.
- #8 Valuing family, community, and all of mankind;  
Being loving, and knowing  
that we're all inter-twined.
- #9 Celebrating holidays throughout all the year --  
Let's sing out this song. Sing it loud. Sing it clear.

**"It's All Good!"** sung to the tune of "**Dayenu!**"

*Blowing shofars, building sukkas,  
Tossing sins and frying latkes,  
TuBishvat-ing, eating matzo  
It's all good!*

#### **Chorus, repeat 2 times:**

*It's all go-od! It's all go-od!  
It's all go-od! I-it's a-all go-o-o-od!*

- #10 Last, but not least, #10 is unfurled:  
It's *Tikkun Olam*, "healing the world."  
Examples are many, like kindnesses done,  
and actions to aid a less fortunate one.

## It's All Good

### Part II

As a child I was taught the worship of God.  
I prayed, I believed ... went along.  
It felt safe to think that the power was placed  
In the hands of a God kind and strong.

Many years since have passed  
and with them my faith  
in a deity who cannot be known.  
Faith has now been replaced  
by a feeling of hope  
that the goodness of man will be shown.

To be good and do good - and work for what's right  
unencumbered by threats or by fear;  
To be good and do good and work for what's fair  
just because we're alive and are here.

I live as a Jew and a humanist, too.  
My power I harness for good.  
These lessons I learned as a child still ring true:  
"to use reason" and "do as I should."

The question you ask that inspires this writing,  
Assumes God exists, does it not?  
Whether that's true or isn't, no one really knows,  
And, for me, doesn't matter a lot.

If we live well and love well, and are loved in return;  
If we're true to ourselves and continue to learn;  
If we know that we're Jewish,  
through blood or through bond;  
Then, what else need I tell you as I write to respond?

~ by Margo Fox, 2011

#### **Glossary of Yiddish words:**

*saichel* means "common sense, good sense; tact, diplomacy"

*tsuris* means "trouble"

*Oy!* is used if you or someone else does something stupid. (It can also be used when annoyed, disgusted, bored, surprised or in pain.)

*ungashtupped* means "over-stuffed"

*zoftick (zaftig)* means "having a pleasingly plump figure; full-bodied; well proportioned"

## Member Contributions

### The Pilgrims in Our Family: Another Look at Thanksgiving Day

by Natalie Rosinsky

Three hundred years and counting—that is the time between pilgrim voyages in our family. Let me explain.

As a Jewish parent, I was delighted decades ago to discover Barbara Cohen's fine book for young readers, *Molly's Pilgrim*. Molly has difficulty explaining Thanksgiving Day and its history, so important in elementary school, to her Russian-born mother. Only when that Jewish woman realizes that the Pilgrims were after all just immigrants is she able to help Molly with her homework—making a Pilgrim doll. The doll they craft, though, looks as though it might have just arrived at Ellis Island, not Plymouth Rock! Molly and her classmates learn unexpected lessons about cultural differences and contemporary pilgrims. That they also learn that Plymouth Colony's Pilgrims may have modeled their first Thanksgiving on a Jewish holiday is a surprise bonus. Their teacher points out the similarities between harvest-time Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles described in the Pilgrims' "Old Testament," and Thanksgiving. Our son Daniel found this surprising, too. It gave him a new way of thinking about his great-grandparents, my grandparents, who immigrated to this country from Russia and Lithuania around 1910.

But he had more to learn about the pilgrims in our family. As my mother-in-law proudly pointed out, Daniel *was* a direct descendent of two of the men who had stepped onto Plymouth Rock in 1620 C.E. Richard Warren and Thomas Rogers, ancestors on her side of the family, survived the gut-wrenching 66 day voyage of the Mayflower to the New World. They were among the 102 passengers officially listed on that ship's manifest. Yankee determination had helped Daniel's grandmother complete and document genealogical research that traced her lineage. After the Society of Mayflower Descendants accepted her research, she proudly joined this group and enrolled Daniel as a junior member, too.

Yet pride is surely not the only emotion linked to this heritage. Another, closer look at history reveals the shameful treatment of native peoples by the Pilgrims. This is epitomized by the fate of the Wampanoag, who joined the Pilgrims in that so-called first Thanksgiving. Once numbering between 12,000 to 24,000 strong, the Wampanoag today have only between 3,000 to 5,000 tribal members. They were starved, killed, and 'outlawed' out of existence by the Pilgrims and their followers—people with leaders like minister Increase Mather, who wrote that "Indians are speaking Apes." The Pilgrims are, contrary to popular opinion, the badly behaved immigrants in our multi-branched family tree.

Today Daniel himself lives in a foreign land—sojourner rather than pilgrim, but newcomer nonetheless. The 'Thanksgivings' celebrated in the Islamic republic of Turkey take place at the end of the holy month of Ramadan and after the sacred journey or *haj* to Mecca. Our son and—and to a lesser degree, we—live with religious and national rhythms foreign to our family's dual Jewish and Christian heritage. Yet this experience is a sobering and uplifting reminder of what people world-wide share on our journeys through life. To recast the words of poet William Butler Yeats, each of us has a "pilgrim soul" that may—indeed, should—be cherished.



#### Award-Winning Crop Art by Laura Melnick and Mark Dahlager

Creating amazing crop art is a family affair for Laura Melnick and Mark Dahlager. Laura's "Snowy Day In Hell" won the *Best In Show* purple ribbon at the MN State Fair.

This was Laura's third purple ribbon! At this time, Laura says, "I don't think I have another in me!" Mark's 'QR Code' in seeds won third place in the State Fair's advanced amateur category. A smart phone could actually 'scan' Mark's seed piece. Upon scanning it, you would be taken electronically to a website Mark created that was a video satire of a Kanye West song. In Mark's version, the video was about seeds. Sitting on the bench in the crop art room, Mark and Laura had fun watching people holding up their phones to scan the code!

#### Or Emet's Circle of Caring

Circle of Caring is about caring for each other and building a supportive community during periods of distress or life transitions.

Through Bikur Cholim, we are committed to bringing Or Emet's strengths to those in need. Depending on individual situations, we can offer help in a variety of ways (e.g., calls, cards, visits, shopping, rides).

Please assist by keeping us informed when you, or someone you care about, is experiencing difficult times.

Committee members are Joan Barnett, Faith Oremland and Claire Press.





Save the Date  
for our annual  
**Channukah Party!**

This is a POTLUCK event on  
Sunday, December 18th from 5:30 to 8:00pm  
at  
Newell Park Recreation Center  
900 North Fairview Avenue; St. Paul  
(Corner of N. Fairview Ave and Pierce Butler Route)

Please bring a menorah  
and sign up to bring a dish to share!

Contact Joan Barnett at  
[assistant-to-president@oremet.org](mailto:assistant-to-president@oremet.org)  
for more information.

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