

# THE ILLUMINATOR

Winter/Spring 2003-2004

*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. - Rabbi Sherwin Wine*

## December 5 Program

Carol Logan will present **The Former USSR Preserved on Film: The Gorbachev Era and Beyond: 1987-1995** at the Minneapolis (Sabes) JCC on Friday, December 5, following the Shabbat service which begins at 7:15 pm. Carol has been a professor of Russian History at several Wisconsin universities. The story of her personal arrival at *Or Emet* is found at p. of this newsletter.

## Adult Education

Allan Malkis and Mike Persellin will teach "Topics in Jewish History" beginning January 6. The course will be taught in 8 sessions to be held on Tuesday evenings from 6:30-8:30 pm. Pending formal acceptance of our permit application, classes will be held at South Community Center, in Minneapolis. South is conveniently accessed from I-94 by taking Hiawatha south to Lake Street.

The course is not a survey course and assumes a grasp of basic Jewish history. Participants are strongly recommended to acquire (in order of preference) *A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People* (Eli Barnavi, ed.), available at [www.half.com](http://www.half.com) and [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) at \$18.95 and up, *The Sacred Chain* (Norman Cantor), or another survey of Jewish history.

There is no charge for the course. There will be a small materials charge. Participants may choose to attend all or some of the sessions. Please indicate your interest in attending by contacting Mike Persellin ([mperse@spacestar.com](mailto:mperse@spacestar.com)) before December 20.

**January 6.** Why is Jewish History important to Humanistic Jews? Politics and History in Ancient and Modern Jewish Life. The Exodus and King David as History and Politics.

**January 20.** Radical Transformation: the Creation of Rabbinic Judaism Discards Centuries of Jewish Tradition

**January 13.** One, Two, Many Judaisms: Turmoil and Conflict in the Greco-Roman Era (Maccabees through Christianity)

**January 20** Radical Transformation: the Creation of Rabbinic Judaism Discards Centuries of Jewish Tradition

**January 27.** A Golden Age? Jews and Muslims in Spain

**February 3.** Ashkenazic Jewry: Jews and Christians in Central Europe/Survival by Negotiation and the Roots of Modern Jewish Institutions.

**February 10.** *Haskala* (Enlightenment): Freedom and Consequences.

**February 17.** Modern Antisemitism and the Rise of the Jews.

**February 24.** Jewish Nationalism and More Internal Debate: People or Faith?

## Thoughts on Hanukkah

It sometimes seems as if no one holiday has generated so much critical excitement among humanistic Jews as has Hanukkah. Some of this is easy to understand. Humanistic Judaism takes pains (some may say pleasure) in debunking the mythological texts of the more familiar stories. Hanukkah - culturally an imitation Christmas and with a magical story at its center - is an easy target. We also know that the holiday is an afterthought in Talmudic terms. References to the folk festival of *Nayrot* (Lights), the winter solstice holiday upon which Hanukkah is based, exist as late as 79 C.E. Hanukkah itself makes no appearance in the *Mishnah*, the first part of the Talmud which was completed about 215 C.E. But it is discussed in the *G'marah*, the second part, completed about 500 C.E.

We also know that the Macabees were reactionaries. Their revolt and the bloody repression that followed was as much against urban Hellenistic Judaism and its more liberal religious practices as against the local Seleucid generals who controlled Judea.

The story belongs, then, to rabbinical Judaism, opposes more liberal religious practices, and is clearly a contrived piece of self-aggrandizing mythology. What great, smug fodder for the humanists!

A case can be made, nonetheless, that Hanukkah is the most interesting of the Jewish holidays and that great insight can come from examining it more closely. We know more about the story behind the holiday than with any other of the major holidays. This is because the period of the Maccabees was between about 166 to 63

(cont. on p. 6)

The *Illuminator* welcomes:

Letters to the editor; essays; poems; humor; announcements of Bar/Bat Mitzpahs, weddings, graduations, anniversaries, etc.; articles; photographs (black and white), if relevant to an article; and appropriate paid advertisements.

Published quarterly, upon a schedule that is entirely at the whim of the editor.

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<b>Dues:</b>	<b>Individuals</b>	<b>\$175</b>
	<b>Families</b>	<b>\$240</b>

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[www.oremet.org](http://www.oremet.org)

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Or Emet is affiliated with the Society of Humanistic Judaism (SHJ) and the International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews .

## Executive Committee Actions since September include:

1. Formation of a B'nai Mitzpah Committee.
2. Changing the name of the school to Or Emet Jewish Cultural School.
3. Authorize a newsletter for the Cultural School (for members and staff).
4. Adopted plan of B'nai Mitzpah Committee, including curricula, concept of mentoring, and schedule.
5. Discussion of SHJ field trip to Or Emet in 2003-4.
6. Report of B'nai Mitzpah Committee: 5 potential candidates for Spring B'nai Mitzvot.

## Programming

We are making some program changes in the new year. Beginning in January, there will be only one Friday evening program at the JCC each month. A **shabbat or havdalah pot luck dinner** will be held on a second weekend. The first will be a *havdalah* event on Saturday, January 24 at the home of Jan Withers/Harold Londer, 2120 Spruce Trail in Golden Valley. There will be a *shabbat* pot luck on Friday, February 27 at the Friends Meeting House, 1725 Grand Ave. in St. Paul. There will be another shabbat pot luck on Friday, March 26 at the Friends School, 1365 Englewood Av., St. Paul. The hope is that we will get a better mix of our "Friday night group" and "Sunday morning group" by providing a family atmosphere and more events in St. Paul.

Harold Londer spoke to the Minnesota Humanists at the Unitarian Society on November 5. Harold gave an overview of Jewish history and fielded questions on subjects such as the Middle East, antisemitism, and the history of the Jews in Minneapolis.

## High Holidays

The Holidays are over; but the good feelings from the celebrations linger. We are grateful to our hard-working High Holidays Committee under the leadership of Faith Oremland, which creates the wonderful programs and make them better every year. It is one of the high points of any year to hear the *Or Emet* Choir in full voice. Next year, we will find some better microphones for the Choir and turn them to full volume! Thanks also to all those who participated as readers and greeters, and who helped with facilities. Special thanks to Amy Stubenhaus, who brought prodigious wind power to the blowing of the *shofar*, and to Jan and Harold for again opening their home for the break the fast.

## Program alerts/Email Addresses

The newsletter is published four times yearly. Program alerts, changes, etc. that occur between newsletters are sent via email. If you have changed your address recently or have not received a program alert in some time, please send your email address to Mike Persellin at [mperse@spacestar.com](mailto:mperse@spacestar.com).

## Dues Reminder

Or Emet dues are: Individual - \$175; Family - \$240; Family with children in the Cultural School - \$290. Payment plans and adjustments for low-income are available. Dues are payable on September 1. If you have not already paid, please send your dues to Steve Oremland, Treasurer, 1350 Waterford Dr., Golden Valley, MN 55422. Your dues pay for all of the activities and programs of the congregation, including our seder, and include a subscription to the important journal *Humanistic Judaism*.

### **Or Emet Winter 2003-4 Schedule**

	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Event</u>
<b>December</b>			
Friday 5	7:15 pm.	Minneapolis. Sabes JCC	Shabbat Service. The Former USSR Preserved on Film: The Gorbachev Era and Beyond: 1987-1995 with Carol Logan
Sunday 7	10 am.	Hillel House	Cultural School. The Elephants and the Jews: A Secular Jewish Perspective on Israel with Zev Aelony
Saturday 20	5 pm.	Friend's School	Chanukah Play/Pot luck. 1365 Englewood Ave., St. Paul
<b>January</b>			
Sunday 4	10 am.	Hillel House	UJFC - Kinneret Region in Northern Israel: A Community Partnership with Howard Schneider
Tuesday 6	6:30 pm.	3131 – 13 <sup>th</sup> Av. S	Adult Education: Topics in Jewish History
Friday 9	7:15 pm.	Minneapolis. Sabes JCC	Spiritual Eldering: A Multifaith Program Teaching Individuals How to Have an Impact on Future Generations with Marian Eisner and Rich Kessler
Tuesday 13	6:30 pm.	3131 – 13 <sup>th</sup> Av. S	Adult Education: Topics in Jewish History
Tuesday 20	6:30 pm.	3131 – 13 <sup>th</sup> Av. S	Adult Education: Topics in Jewish History
Saturday 24	6:30 pm.	Home of Harold Londer	Havdalah Pot Luck dinner 2120 Spruce Trail, Golden Valley
Tuesday 27	6:30 pm.	3131 – 13 <sup>th</sup> Av. S	Adult Education: Topics in Jewish History
<b>February</b>			
Sunday 1	10 - noon	Hillel House	The Ewe African tribe and Its Relation to Judaism: Similar and Yet Different with Kojo Amegashie and Kathryn Geurts, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Hamline University
Tuesday 3	6:30 pm.	3131 – 13 <sup>th</sup> Av. S	Adult Education: Topics in Jewish History
Tuesday 10	6:30 pm.	3131 – 13 <sup>th</sup> Av. S	Adult Education: Topics in Jewish History
Friday 13	7:15 pm.	Minneapolis. Sabes JCC	Democracy in Time of War," with Hafed Bouassida, filmmaker and educator, member of Minnesota Film Bd.
Tuesday 17	6:30 pm.	3131 – 13 <sup>th</sup> Av. S	Adult Education: Topics in Jewish History
Tuesday 24	6:30 pm.	3131 – 13 <sup>th</sup> Av. S	Adult Education: Topics in Jewish History
Friday 27	6:30 pm.	Friends Meeting House	Shabbat Pot Luck dinner 1725 Grand Ave., St. Paul
<b>March</b>			
tba			Purim program
Friday 12	7:15 pm.	Minneapolis. Sabes JCC	The Role of Rituals: Why We Cling to Some and Vehemently Reject Others with Edith and Lionel Davis
Friday 26	6:30 pm.	Friends School	Shabbat potluck dinner 1365 Englewood Av., St. Paul
<b>April</b>			
Sunday 4	10 - noon	Hillel House	Results of Jewish Population Study with Howard Schneider
Friday 9	5:30 pm.	Friends Meeting House	Congregation Seder 1725 Grand Ave., St. Paul
Saturday 24	6:30 pm.	Home of Faith & Steve Oremland	Havdalah Pot Luck Dinner 1350 Waterford Dr., Golden Valley

The Minneapolis Sabes JCC is located at 4330 Cedar Lake Rd. in St. Louis Park.

Hillel House is located at 1521 University Avenue S.E. on the University of Minnesota Campus.

## Sukkot Celebration

We had a wonderful time celebrating *Sukkot* on October 12. It was a beautiful fall day and we arrived at the home of Bob and Bambi Marcus in Eagan to find the sukkah frame and a table of refreshments waiting for us. Mark Dahlager built a tall and handsome wood frame that can be taken apart and used in future years. The young people saw to the walls by finger- and foot-painting the linen walls in harvest themes. We jammed into the sukkah and had a short ceremony keyed to the passing seasons and reflecting on the agrarian culture of the early Jewish inhabitants of Israel. Thanks especially to the Marcus' for their warm hospitality and to Mark for his engineering skill and effort. We'll do it again next year!

### River's Edge Playback Theater Onstage at *Or Emet*

The River's Edge Playback Theater presents an innovative form of improvisational theater which is gaining acceptance in schools and other settings nationwide. *Or Emet* member Harry Greenberg brought his five members of his company to *Or Emet* on Oct. 24. Playback Theater, like its cousin psycho-drama, helps people deal with life-transforming experiences and builds community. Playback actors set the stage by telling their own stories, and then asking the audience to suggest stories for the cast to interpret - and so we did.

I told of an encounter with a wine bottle opener which devoured my skin, and the actors mimed the scene. Bodies morphed into claws, a savage mouth, an inert bottle, and a patient husband who appeared just in time to rescue me. It was fun being part of the act, and laughing at my own techno-phobia.

Gaia Ramsdell, a ten year-old violinist, told of hearing violinist Sarah Chang play on television when Gaia was just 10 months-old, and somehow conveying to her mother that she wanted to play the violin. Janelle Bohrad shared an emotional experience she had on a trip to Germany where a man described Hitler as "a great man for ordinary people," and his wife added, in German, "but not for Jews."

Phillip Griffin told of an experience he had as a young man eventually resulting in his leaving the South. A black boy falsely accused of stealing tried to exonerate himself at his trial. He was not permitted to testify on his own behalf, and went to jail. As the cast staged the scene, the courtroom came to life, and I understood Phillip's anger over this miscarriage of justice, and disgust with a system that denied a black boy his humanity.

The cast of the River's Edge Playback Theater is animated and talented. Because they rely so heavily on audience participation, the results tend to be uneven; but I really enjoyed being part of the creative process, and found it a rewarding experience. - *jane katz*

A small city had three synagogues, all with squirrel problems in their buildings. Each congregation held a meeting to deal with the problem. The Orthodox held that it was predestined that squirrels be in the shul and that they would just have to live with them. The Conservatives decided they would handle the squirrels in the movement's style of Community Responsibility and Social Action. They trapped the squirrels and released them in a park at the edge of town. The Reform temple had

several lengthy meetings in which all members voiced their opinions. Finally they decided to vote the squirrels in as members of the temple. Now they only see them at High Holidays.

### The Young Men by Alan Miller

Let's send the young men,  
Let's send them to war,  
Let's send them to fight and to die.  
Let's send the young men,  
And then send some more  
'Til their souls of the pointless waste cry.

War's not begin by the young men,  
Oh, no!  
It's begun generations ahead.  
War's not begun by the young men,  
We know.  
But it's they who must fight 'til they're dead.

Why, why the young men  
Who must pay the price,  
Why is it their lives we burn?  
Why, why the young men  
Who are sacrificed,  
Why can't we just ever learn?

Let's leave the young men,  
So lean and so strong,  
Let's leave them to love and embrace.  
Call on the old men  
To go fight the wars,  
They started them in the first place.

But we don't -- we send young men,  
We send them to war,  
We teach them to play a new game.  
We teach them to bomb,  
And to shoot and to kill,  
We teach them to knife and to maim.

How long must it last,  
Our young men at war,  
How long will we kindle this waste?  
How long will it last?  
'Til we send out some more,  
And when they die, with more they're replaced.

Let's not send the young men,  
Any longer to war,  
In the boxes they come home so wan.  
For when you send young men,  
And keep sending more,  
Who will you send when they're gone?

A Jew is someone who identifies with the history, culture, struggle, triumphs, and future of the Jewish people.

## President's Column

Humanistic Jews affirm that ours is a human-centered philosophy that relies on rational thinking to celebrate our Jewish identity. The SHJ credo goes on to say this philosophy is "independent of supernatural authority." This apposition – rational thinking vs. supernatural authority – is, in my opinion, unfortunate. My reliance on rationality is without regard to whether there is or is not a (or 20 or 100) god(s).

I have heard it said that rationalism is arrogant, that it assumes it has the answer to everything. Nothing could be further than the truth. On the contrary, rationalism is the most humbling way through the world of all the possible paths. Rationality at once accepts the limitations of senses and cortex, the approximateness of language, the memory of seemingly infinite failure, and the certainty that whosoever succeeds us will know more than us but not enough. The humanist/rationalist knows that "human-centered" means "human-limited." She knows that almost all questions will not be answered – in this life or some other.

This is also why it is misleading to say that humanists are "non-believers." We believe that flawed rationality is the best way to navigate this complicated and dangerous world. Rabbi Sherwin Wine uses the word "courage" rather than belief, and I agree. It takes courage to step out the door with only habit, experience, and what I think I have learned to guide me.

## My Path to *Or Emet*

Last spring I moved to Minneapolis from Milwaukee. Perhaps readers of the *Illuminator* will be interested in this description of the path that brought me to *Or Emet*. To begin with, I was raised by Jewish atheists, who rejected organized religion. The only "religious" teaching I remember was my father's statement that "anyone who believes in God is a fool, but any Jew who denies he's a Jew is a traitor." That attitude came from his secular upbringing, the anti-Semitism he experienced in Chicago and at college and law school, and his horror at the Holocaust.

I grew up in the 1950's in a Christian neighborhood in Arlington, VA, where I only knew two other Jewish children. None of my teachers were Jewish until I went to college. Since we did not observe any Jewish customs, I attended the Methodist Youth Fellowship meetings, just to feel I "belonged" to something. My mother's mother, devoutly Orthodox, always had a Passover *seder*, but I didn't understand the holiday, or what the Hebrew prayers meant. I received Chanukah *gelt* from my grandmothers, but we never lit our *menorah*. My mother often expressed her disdain for her mother's observances, which she thought were primitive and demeaning, and spoke of her own unpleasant childhood memories of St. Paul and Faribault, where they were the only Jewish family. She feared the Orthodox men in long beards and black coats,

who thanked God every day that they hadn't been born a woman, and the Hebrew school classes her mother made her attend. She became a radical feminist.

By high school, I was attending school in DC, but I still only knew a few other Jewish students. I dated one non-observant Jew. My mother took me to the Ethical Culture Society, but I remember nothing. I attended Oberlin College and the University of Chicago, which had many Jewish students, but I only had one close Jewish friend, also non-observant. I never heard of Campus Hillel. In graduate school I married a fellow student, who was the son of a Methodist minister, also not religious. My father-in-law married us, quoting passages from Shakespeare and Kahlil Gibran and making no mention of God.

After I had children of my own, I wanted them to learn about Judaism, so I asked the only synagogue in Green Bay to allow them to attend its religious school. Only if I joined, they said. I offered to pay any amount of money, but they still refused. I was unwilling to join the synagogue, so my children attended the Union Congregational Church Sunday school, where we were not required to be members. My sons had no Jewish education (except what they learned in college and from Jewish friends) and do not really think of themselves as Jewish, although by Jewish tradition they are, since I am Jewish.

Over the past ten years several experiences have stimulated my interest in learning about my Jewish roots. In 1994 I found the house in Ukraine where my paternal grandmother was born. I also became fascinated by my cousins, who have become *Baalei teshuva* (Jews who return to the devoutly observant practice of Judaism). In 2000 I attended a "Jewish Day of Discovery" at the Milwaukee JCC. Never before had I been among so many Jewish people (except in Israel), and I learned about Jewish history, customs and values. I also heard about a small Reconstructionist congregation, *Shir Hadash*, which I started attending. I joined a Conservative synagogue in Appleton and began taking Hebrew lessons. In June 2000 I went to Israel and studied in the Orthodox women's *yeshiva* where my cousin had spent a year learning Torah. In September of 2000 I moved to Milwaukee and enrolled in adult education classes on Jewish history, culture, food and religious practices. I then realized that my parents had had strong Jewish values, such as their dedication to justice and *Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world), although they themselves didn't know where their own values came from. But I was uncomfortable with the prayers, kissing the Torah scroll (I never did), bowing to the Torah (I never did), and the dancing.

In January 2003, after I had decided to move to Minneapolis, I was attending a service at *Mayim Rabim*, Minneapolis's Reconstructionist congregation, and a casual remark led to my e-mailing *Or Emet*. I had never before heard of Humanistic Judaism, but when I learned it was a movement that kept some aspects of Jewish tradition, culture and values, but not the God-oriented religious part, I said to myself, "Well, that sounds like the Place for me!" And so I met with Mike Persellin, we talked about *Or Emet*, and, as they say, the rest is history . . .

-- Carol Logan

## SHJ

### First Israeli Humanistic Rabbi Ordained

Sivan Maas, the first Humanistic rabbi to live and work in Israel, was ordained at a ceremony on October 24 at the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism. Rabbi Maas has already organized a new rabbinic education program in Israel, for which 11 Israeli Master's level students have been admitted.

Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine, founder of Humanistic Judaism and Dean of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism, stated, "This ordination is an historical moment for the Secular Humanistic Jewish movement. We are confident in the success of our rabbinic leaders and understand that the time has come to introduce serious rabbinic leadership in Israel for the secular majority that is otherwise un-served by the current rabbinic authority. As the first Humanistic rabbi in Israel, Sivan Maas is a trailblazer prepared to undertake an important endeavor in modern Jewish life."

Ms. Maas, who holds a Master's degree in Judaic Studies from Jewish Theological Seminary in Jerusalem, completed the rigorous four-year Rabbinic Program of the Institute while concurrently completing her Master's degree. Ms. Maas' Rabbinic Program thesis was "How to build and develop a Secular Humanistic Jewish community in Israel." Her research will prove helpful as she begins to organize congregations and communities in Israel, offering secular Israelis humanistic communities in which they can celebrate life-cycle events, rites of passage, and holidays from the perspective of Judaism as a culture.

first certified leader of the Institute, and also is certified in its Musician/Cantorial

program. Her other books include *We Rejoice in Our Heritage: Home Rituals for Secular and Humanistic Jews*, and the songbook *Kumzitz*, both from Kopinvant Press.

Secular Humanistic rabbis are spiritual leaders and philosophic and cultural mentors for Secular Humanistic Jews. They serve as teachers, counselors, pastors, ceremonialists (celebration and ceremonial guides), and experts in Judaism.

The new Israeli rabbinic program of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism has already received commitments from leading Israeli scholars who will serve as faculty, including Rachel Elior, Avi Ravitsky, Eliezer Shweid, Yair Tzaban, Yedidia Yitzhaki, Ezer Kahanov, Naftali Rotenberg and Yotam Benziman, who will be among the first lecturers in the course of 180 academic hours beginning in January 2004. Tel Aviv University Professor Yaakov Malkin, founder and academic director of Meitar College of Judaism as Culture in Jerusalem, and co-dean of the International Institute, will serve as academic director.

Ms. Maas is impressed with the candidates for the new Jewish Leadership Secular Humanistic Rabbinate, most of whom hold Master's degrees from esteemed universities in Israel. All are committed to the idea of serving the community as secular rabbis in Israel.

The International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism is the intellectual and educational arm of the Secular Humanistic Jewish movement. It was established in 1985 to train Humanistic rabbinic and non-rabbinic clerical leaders and teachers and to provide philosophic and cultural guidance to all its members. The International Institute ordained its first Humanistic Rabbi in 1999, three rabbis in 2001, and two rabbis in 2003. There are currently 43 certified non-rabbinic leaders, called *madrikhim* and *madrikhot*, in addition to the rabbis, educators, spokespeople and music directors, serving communities throughout North America.

### SHJ Young Adult Membership

SHJ has established a special membership category for ages 18-25. The hope is to attract and retain young adults. For \$25, a child or grandchild may be gifted a membership that includes a subscription to Humanistic Judaism, newsletters, and other information.

#### 2004 SHJ Conference

*Join in a weekend of friendship, learning and inspiration at SHJ Conference 2004, April 16-18, in the beautiful city of Toronto. The theme of the conference is "Humanistic Judaism: Balancing Continuity and Creativity."*

*There will be programs for teens and city tours and theater trips available. For information, contact Bonnie Cousens at SHJ (248-478-4610).*

## SHJ Proposed Policy Statement

Feedback is asked for on the following policy statement that SHJ plans to ratify and publish in the near future. Send your comments to our SHJ Board member Mike Persellin at [mperse@spacestar.com](mailto:mperse@spacestar.com).

***Because SHJ affirms the inherent worth and dignity of every person,***

***Because SHJ supports the right and responsibility of adults to choose their marriage partners,***

***Whereas the SHJ philosophy is supportive of equal rights and responsibilities for all in the matters of marriage and divorce,***

***Whereas gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people have been denied the social, economic and political benefits and consequences of marriage and divorce,***

***Be it resolved that:***

- 1. SHJ adopt a position of support for the legal recognition of marriage and divorce between adults of the same sex,***
- 2. SHJ takes an affirmative position in support of the value of marriage between committed adults with the sense of obligations, responsibilities and consequences thereof.***

(Hanukkah, cont. from p.1)

B.C.E. - extremely recent compared to the events or supposed events at the origins of the other holidays. The first two books of the Maccabees were themselves written in about 100 - contemporaneous with their subjects. We also know quite a bit about the period from other extant accounts and from intense archeological and socio-historical investigation.

The Maccabean era is in the middle of an extremely fluid period of eastern Mediterranean history. The revolt and the period of the dynasty comprise roughly the transitional border between the waning Hellenist and the growing Roman powers. The Maccabees defeated the Seleucids, allied with and were eventually conquered by the Romans. The Maccabees period of rule included suppression of the more liberal religious practices, rededication of the Temple, drove out the Seleucids, gained control over the priests, forced circumcision on their Galilean and Transjordanian neighbors, destroyed the Samaritan's temple (in Sh'khem), crucified 800 participants of a popular revolt, and ended in civil war.

Just another century in ancient history. But it is a background that unfortunately kills the rabbinic treatment of the story: that the Maccabees were heroes who fought boldly against religious intolerance and imperialism. Some humanistic Jews today continue to laud the Maccabees despite the baggage. They argue that the

Maccabees were less tyrannical than other nearby regimes. They stress that Maccabean nationalism and an independent state of Judea put the Jews on the map everywhere in the Greco-Roman world.

Perhaps the best humanistic insight to be derived is that inventing history for religious purposes is best served when the inventing references times comparatively devoid of other accounts not motivated by the same religious agenda. But how could the Talmudic authors have known?

### Maybe Canada is Not the 51<sup>st</sup> State

A recent poll found that only 30% of Canadians said religion was important, compared with 59% of Americans. 21% of Canadians attend religious services regularly, about half the rate of Americans. A leading Canadian theology professor wrote, "This is a society where religion no longer wields cultural authority." He pointed out that in contrast to American presidents, Canadian prime ministers rarely, if ever, speak in religious terms. They avoid being photographed in church. They never say "God Bless Canada." They avoid religious issues, like abortion. The Canadian press reports that politicians regard religion as a divisive issue not part of the Canadian tradition.

(from the Orange County SHJ newsletter)

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**David Grossman** is a famous Israeli author (*See: Under Love*), who has been called a "happy warrior among doves." His most recent book, *Death as a Way of Life* finishes with these two pieces of information. One: More than a quarter of Palestinian children suffer from malnutrition. Two: Israeli children are given training in early identification of suicide bombers. Grossman writes, "Israelis and Palestinians who refuse to see the connection between these two facts ensure that for many years to come we will all be each other's hostages, agents of gratuitous and pointless death."

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An **Adult Bar/Bat Mitzvah** Committee has been formed to design a program of study. The tentative plan is to for one or more students to be ready for ceremony by May of 2005.

It is expected that participants in the course will be members of the congregation.

If interested, contact Mike Persellin at [mperse@spacestar.com](mailto:mperse@spacestar.com).