

THE ILLUMINATOR

Spring 2008

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 (1928-2007)

Purim Carnival March 16

Or Emet's Purim Carnival will be on Sunday, March 16 at 10 am. at the Friends' School in St. Paul. The Carnival is for children and adults. Non-members are welcome. There will be a morning of *Purim*-themed games and crafts, hamentaschen baking (and eating!), and refreshments. Come and enjoy!

Congregation Seder April 20

Or Emet's Congregation Seder will be on Sunday, April 20 at 5 pm. Details are on the last page of this newsletter. **Note the new location: First Unitarian Society**, 900 Mt. Curve Ave. in Minneapolis. As in previous years, the *seder* is a pot luck, there is a charge for non-members and for members who do not bring food, and everyone must rsvp in advance. This is our largest event and we need conscientiousness on the part of everyone in order to be organized. Set up and clean up help will be much appreciated.

JCS News

Or Emet's Jewish Cultural School (JCS) is having a fantastic year! Teachers Scott Oremland (Middle Class, grades K-3) and Eva Cohen (Juniors Class, grades 4-7) are highly dedicated and continue to find creative ways to engage students in a wide range of Jewish cultural themes. Having stepped into the classrooms on many occasions to snap photos and help out with craft activities, I can assure you that amazing things are going on in both classrooms!

This year there has also been a great deal of interaction with the Sunday program for adults. Muriel Sterne's monthly Hebrew mini-lessons have been a big success in both classrooms. Her lessons are incredibly well-organized and I think JCS parents will be surprised to see how much Hebrew students have learned by the end of the season! In January, students and adults came together for *Or Emet's* second-ever *Tu B'Shevat Seder*. In February, four congregants provided the Juniors Class with a Jewish music sampler. Nearly every month, in fact, one or more congregation members has shared special skills, knowledge or stories with students. These contributions of time and energy to the school are greatly appreciated and help impart a sense of community. I can't tell you how important this is for our JCS students!

On March 16, the Sunday program will consist of a *Purim Carnival* for everyone - students and adults. We will enjoy

an open-ended morning of *Purim*-themed games and crafts, with hamentaschen baking in the background (to be eaten of course!) and other refreshments. Watch your email for details, if you are on *Or Emet's* list.

The April 20 JCS session will focus on Passover and themes of human and civil rights. Since *Or Emet's* Passover *Seder* is that evening, the adult program will take a hiatus and the space will instead be reserved for a discussion among JCS parents and others interested in the school's near-term future.

In May, students will decide where to distribute the *tzedaka* money they started collecting in January. So far, congregants have generously contributed about \$60. Several have also helped bring the concepts of *tzedaka* and *tikkun olam* to life for students by telling them about a favorite charitable organization.

The number of JCS students who regularly attend has more than doubled since last season, from 6 to 14. The drop-in enrollment option (new this season) and trial visits have helped attract new families. We have also launched several outreach and promotion efforts this season to help grow the school, with the help of Laurie Levi, who was hired to help with the JCS newsletter and other administrative tasks this year. In January, Laurie began submitting announcements about upcoming JCS and other *Or Emet* programs to the religion section or community pages of neighborhood newspapers all over the Twin Cities, free of charge. Keep an eye out for announcements in *your* neighborhood newspaper or let us know if we have missed one.



Please continue to help spread the word about everything *Or Emet's* JCS offers to families you think might be interested. I have brochures and information packets ready to send anyone interested, and the JCS page on *Or Emet's* website at www.oremnet.org also provides information about the program.

One change is certain in 2008-09: We know we will need at least one new teacher this fall when Eva returns to complete a degree at Brown University. It will be very hard to fill her shoes . . . but if you know of anyone who might be interested in the job, please have them contact me for details. It's not too early to begin looking!

I welcome any questions or input about the school at any time.
- - Barbara Weisman

The *Illuminator* welcomes:

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

Published quarterly.

Dues:	Individuals	\$260
	Families	\$385
	- w/school	\$475
	- 2 nd child	\$60
	- add. child	no charge

www.oremet.org

Madrikkh

Harold Londer

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

President's Message

Like flowers that turn their heads to catch every sunbeam, we have discovered a simple way to get more from our sun. Daylight Saving Time gives us the opportunity to enjoy sunny summer evenings by moving our clocks an hour forward in the spring.

Spring brings *Or Emet* members and friends several occasions to join in programs, activities and celebrations. From our Friday Sabbath services and speakers and Sunday JCS and adult programs to celebrating Purim and Passover together. You will find information on up-coming events throughout the newsletter.

But before we spring ahead, let us take a moment to bask in the warmth of all that we have experienced, learned and accomplished together this winter. Our Program Committee has once again provided us with wonderful programs featuring both *Or Emet* members and outside presenters. A special event on a *very* cold Sunday morning, hosted by Rollie Langer, brought together more than twenty *Or Emet* members to discuss the interrelation between Humanism and Judaism in Humanistic Judaism. Our Jewish Cultural Sunday School is having a great year and has several new students - special thanks to JCS Education Chair Barbara Weisman, Sara Langer and committee members, and teachers Scott Oremland and Eva Cohen. We are also very happy to have welcomed new members to our congregation!

I will not miss the frigid temperatures of the winter, but spring along with milder weather brings the annual daunting expectation of spring cleaning.

Spring cleaning has value, but it is work. This year I plan to "clear the cobwebs" both figuratively and literally - to take stock and prioritize what is important in my life and try to bring that into line with how I spend my time. It is easy to get caught up in all the important and the mundane tasks that confront us. I am also going to donate, donate, donate things others could use and I no longer need.

As I write this I feel spring fever coming on and am excited about it. Bring it on!
- - Margo Fox

Or Emet extends our deep feelings of loss in the death of Leonard Langer who died of complications of Alzheimer's Disease on Friday, March 7. Len and Rollie Langer have been members of *Or Emet* for many years and a vital part of our community. Their daughters, Sara Monson and Kristen Langer, are also active members of our group. Len was a quiet and thoughtful person. He spent his life working to make the lives of others better through medical research and working on behalf of the Little People of America. We have missed him through the several years of his decline, and thank him for the times we had together.

Or Emet also extends our sympathy to Jean Sonenblum over the shock and grief of unexpected loss. Her youngest sister, Sheila, age 44, died unexpectedly on February 29th from flu-induced cardiac arrest. Sheila is survived by her husband and three adolescent children as well as her extended family.

Or Emet Spring 2008 Schedule

	Time	Location	Program
March			
Sunday 16	10 am.	Friends School	<i>Purim Carnival</i>
April			
Friday 11	7:30 pm.	Minneapolis Sabes JCC	Shabbat Service and Program: "Passover and the Ancient Hebrews." Allan Malkis
Sunday 20	10 am.	Friends School	Cultural School and Future of JCS Discussion led by Barbara Weisman
Sunday 20	5 pm.	First Unitarian Society	Congregation Seder
May			
Friday 9	7:30 pm.	Minneapolis Sabes JCC	Shabbat Service and Program: "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy." Jack Stuart, Prof. Emeritus, Long Beach State University.
Sunday 18	10 am.	Friends School	Cultural School and Adult Program: "Middle East Peace? Creative Thinking Is Necessary." Esther Ouray
June			
Sunday 1	10 am.	Friends School	Cultural School and Annual Meeting
tba			Congregation Picnic

Minneapolis JCC is located at 4330 Cedar Lake Road, St. Louis Park.

Minnesota Friends School is located at 1365 Englewood Avenue, St. Paul.

First Unitarian Society is located at 900 Mt. Curve Avenue, Minneapolis.

All *Or Emet* Programs are free and open to the Public. A Humanistic Jewish Shabbat Service precedes Friday evening programs and an *Oneg* follows.

CONGREGATION

"If you do not know where you are going, any old road will get you there." - - Thomas Carlyle

The Humanistic Experience – A Counterpoint

An article in the last issue of "The Illuminator" – "Why Worship Humanism" - was both troubling and confusing for me. The writer couched all of his opinions, conclusions and accusations in the generic "We." I do not presume to talk for "we" – I talk for me. I suspect that members have individual reasons for choosing *Or Emet*, including those members not of the Jewish faith.

I never thought of my participation as "worshipping" Humanism, as the article states. To worship, tracing the word back to the English interpretation prior to the 12th century, was, according to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, a "reverence paid to a divine being, or supernatural power." The meaning today is more accepted as "a form of religious practice with its creed and ritual." Nor do I accept, as the article opines, that to become a Humanist "we had to be for something and not against something. This thinking came from a sense of inferiority . . . "about what other Jews think about us." I disagree. If you are secure in yourself, you have no reason to feel "inferior."

As one bearded curmudgeon, I quote another – Tevya – I came for "Tradition," and to continue and expand my association with an incredible heritage which has endured through the centuries, through the pogroms, through the Holocaust. Even as a youngster, it occurred to me that there must be something special about being Jewish. Mel Brooks, in the "2000 Year Old Man" talked about "Phil" being the leader of the tribe, primarily because he was bigger and tougher than anyone else. And then, one fateful day, Phil was struck by lightning, and Brooks stated, ". . . and we looked up and we said, 'Uh, oh,' there's something bigger than Phil." I have been a skeptic as long as I can remember, which does not mean that I preclude anyone's beliefs, or have answers to questions which have plagued mankind for centuries. There may be something bigger than the mythical "Phil," but I want the option to hold my personal beliefs.

My mother was raised in an Orthodox household; my father, whose parents fled Russia during the pogroms, was raised with virtually no formal connection to Judaism. I was raised in Conservative Judaism simply because that was what was available in our small Long Island town. I was never comfortable with the liturgy, and moved to Reform. Still not satisfied that my needs were met, I moved to Humanism only a decade ago; here I found a

home.

Neither do I "think of the God Concept all of the time," nor am I "obsessed by it," as the article articulates. I will say, however, that the conduct of some bible-thumping politicians offends me, troubles me, and has made me very conscious of my minority status in a Christian nation. I do not think the founders intended it to be this way.

Can I be a Humanist where there is "no adult Jewish education course or even regular book discussion?" No problem. I read, I discuss - with people of all persuasions, Jews and non-Jews. The article states "that we are not here for the Humanism. We are here to be Jewish." Again, that may be the writer's concept; please, do not speak for me.

I am here because I found a group of intellectually stimulating individuals, who practice - or do not practice – various forms of Judaism and inquiry, wrapped loosely around some traditional songs and concepts adapted to a modern outlook. As the late Rabbi and founder of the Society for Humanistic Judaism, Sherwin T. Wine, stated: "Humanism is not atheism. It is empowerment . . . even if the gods do exist, their authority is open to the same scrutiny that human authority requires."

So the "me" in my Humanism is, in part, *tzedakah*, intellectual curiosity, a desire for dialogue, and personal fulfillment; not, as the article suggests, an "obsession," "self-delusion born out of anxiety" or any other negativity. The elixir in my Humanism comes from within, a hope to enrich my understanding of what is, what was – and, as "we" plod onward in these troubling times, perhaps of what will be.
- - Alan Miller

"A Man of Two Worlds"

Mexican Consul Nathan Wolf's presentation, "A Man of Two Worlds," at Or Emet on Friday, March 7th was well received. Consul Wolf told us about his grandparents who traveled to Mexico from Europe as a result of WW II; growing up Jewish in Mexico City; and his career path which included serving as diplomatic advisor to former Mexican President Vicente Fox. Consul Wolf is returning home to a new position - General Director for International Economic Promotion - after three years in Minnesota establishing the consulate. He says he will miss Minnesota - the people, the communities he has come to know, and even the cold! We learned about the contributions of the Consulate (and they are many). Though much remains to be done, Consul Wolf leaves satisfied that the next consul will be building on a solid foundation. Margo Fox presented Nathan Wolf with our thanks and a special little Mexican bear named "Osito."



Tu B'shevat Seder

How Many *Madrikhs* Does It Take To Change A Light Bulb?

The first clue was many years ago when my wife Jan and I were first dating. We were assembling something we had just purchased, and she asked for a Phillips screwdriver. She could not believe that I did not have one in my apartment. I hesitated to tell her I did not know what a Phillips screwdriver was. I did not want to jeopardize our developing relationship.

Or perhaps it was the time a few years later, after we were married, when we developed a major leak in a tube draining from our washing machine. Water was pouring onto the floor! Jan was running to find a wrench and I was looking up plumbers in the Yellow Pages. By the time I had found the number, she had the leak plugged.

At first Jan thought it was an act - my father, for God's sake, had been an upholsterer! One of my earliest memories of my father is of being amazed and proud that he could hold nails in his mouth so he could work with both hands, spitting out the nails as he needed them to hammer away at a couch or chair. I did not pick up any of this talent from him.

I am sure, there are Jewish men out there somewhere with elaborate workrooms in their basements or garages, building coffee tables and fixing toasters. I have yet to meet one. My daughter and son-in-law proudly display in their South Minneapolis home an absolutely lovely bookcase and CD storage unit that were custom made for them by my son-in-law's South Dakota family. My goodness, it is lovely and covers virtually an entire wall. How in the world did they make such a thing? To be sure, I took a class in seventh grade creatively called "Wood" - do they still have classes like that? - but it was the only D of my junior high school career. Luckily I survived with all ten fingers intact.

The Cochrane-Hardy-Harpending theory (J. of Biologic Sci., 2006) purportedly explains this strange behavioral characteristic. Ashkenazi Jews from approx, 800 to 1600 C.E. were restricted to certain occupations, primarily involving sales, finance and trade. Success in these areas depended on a type of intelligence different than that needed for success in the primary non-Jewish occupations (primarily farming). Over many generations, this particular subset of intellectual skills was selected for the Ashkenazi Jew. As the authors conclude, "The suggested selective process explains the mental abilities in Ashkenazi Jews: high verbal and mathematical ability but relatively low spatio-visual ability." I have no idea if this is true.

Like all generalizations, there are many exceptions to the above characterizations. *Or Emet* members take pride in their individuality and creative abilities. I hope that all of you - male or female, Jewish or non-Jewish, old or young - will have a bit of sympathy for the mechanically handicapped in your life. My wife has learned to suppress her frustration (and laughter) as I struggle figuring out how to work our can opener, or how to refold a map. I hope these insights will help many of you in YOUR relationships.

It is not totally hopeless!! I am thinking of starting an *Or Emet* welding class. Let me know if anyone is interested. I will get back to you when I finish putting up the deck in my back yard.

***Or Emet* Donation Form**

A wonderful way to recognize any occasion and benefit *Or Emet*.

Fill out this form and clip and mail along with your donation:

Please accept our donation of \$ _____ to *Or Emet* Congregation.

This donation is being made In Honor/Memory of: _____

Donation From: _____

Mail Donation acknowledgement to the following person: _____

mail to:
 Sharon Miller
 4316 Aires Court
 Eagan, MN 55123
sharonmiller@comcast.net

SHJ

Rabbi Adam Chalom Named Dean of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism



Rabbi Adam Chalom of *Kol Hadash* Humanistic Congregation in Highland Park, Illinois, has been named Dean of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism (IISHJ), North America, succeeding the late Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine, who was killed

in an automobile accident while vacationing in Morocco this past July. IISHJ also promoted Rabbi Sivan Malkin Maas of Jerusalem, Israel, from Associate Dean to Dean for the Institute's Israel campus. Upon graduating from Yale University with a degree in Judaic studies, Rabbi Chalom earned a doctoral degree in Near Eastern Studies from the University of Michigan. He was ordained a rabbi in October 2001. Rabbi Chalom was affiliated with the Birmingham Temple in Farmington Hills, Michigan, as Rabbinic Intern, Assistant Rabbi, and Co-Rabbi from 1999 through 2004. Rabbi Chalom has served as a faculty member of IISHJ since 2000 and as Assistant Dean since 2004. He became rabbi at *Kol Hadash* Humanistic Congregation in 2004. One of the leading voices of Humanistic Judaism, Rabbi Chalom has written *An Introduction to Jewish History* and *An Introduction to Jewish Culture* as part of his adult education curriculum, *Introduction to Secular Humanistic Judaism*. *Philosophy of Secular Humanistic Judaism* is forthcoming in 2008, as is "Beyond Apikorsut: A Judaism for Secular Jews" in *Judaism and Jewishness: The Evolution of Secular and Religious Jewish Identities*. Rabbi Chalom is the Membership Chair of the Association of Humanistic Rabbis and sits on the editorial board of the quarterly journal *Humanistic Judaism* to which he also contributes. In addition, he has presented workshops and keynote addresses at national conferences. "This is a challenging and exciting time for the IISHJ," said Rabbi Chalom. "We value tremendously the foundational work done by Rabbi Sherwin Wine, and now is our opportunity to take the next steps forward to spread our message, to train more leaders and rabbis, and to become a more valued and valuable part of the Jewish world. I look forward to the work ahead both here in North America and internationally with our partners in Israel and around the world." Established in 1985 in Jerusalem to serve the needs of the growing Secular Humanistic movement, the International Institute is the leadership

and rabbinic training institution of the worldwide movement of Secular Humanistic Judaism.

SHJ Honors Lorraine & Ben Pivnick with Sherwin T. Wine Lifetime Achievement Award

Lorraine and Ben Pivnick of Farmington Hills, Michigan, are this year's recipients of the Society for Humanistic Judaism's **Sherwin T. Wine Lifetime Achievement Award**, honoring years of work exemplified by dedication, devotion, adherence to and activity in the Secular Humanistic Judaism Movement. The award was established by Bert Steinberg, a member of the Society for Humanistic Judaism and San Francisco's *Kol Hadash* congregation, in 2004 in honor of the 75th birthday of the movement's founder, the late Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine. It was presented Saturday, October 20, 2007 at Colloquium 2007, "Jews and the Muslim World: Solving the Puzzle," a weekend-long program sponsored by the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism. Founding members of the Birmingham Temple, the Society for Humanistic Judaism, and the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism, the Pivnicks have generously supported every major project associated with Humanistic Judaism with their time, energy, and commitment. Key among their contributions was securing the parcel of land in Farmington Hills that became the home of the Birmingham Temple. Their challenge grant in 1989 fueled the creation of the Pivnick Center for Humanistic Judaism (dedicated in 1994) - home to the Society for Humanistic Judaism, the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism, and the Birmingham Temple school. In 2005, the couple established the Pivnick Community Development grants. The three-year grants carry an award of \$50,000 that enables qualifying Society-affiliated communities to 1) create a Humanistic Judaism presence in areas with little or no presence compared to the potential market of Humanistic Jews and 2) send trained rabbinic leadership into these communities to legitimate and professionalize the presence of Humanistic Judaism. At Rabbi Wine's 65th birthday in 1994, Ben, in his tribute to Sherwin quipped, "Sherwin founded and I funded." Rabbi Wine was immensely pleased when he learned this past summer of Lorraine and Ben's nomination for the award, commenting that he could not imagine anyone more worthy than his beloved and dedicated sister and brother-in-law.

Filling in the "Empty Shelf" Celebrate Jewish Women's History Month

The fundamental premise of feminism is a full recognition of the equality and dignity of women, and the complete appreciation of the contributions women have made to history and civilization. Feminism seeks to fill the so-called "empty shelf" created by the lack of attention to and documentation of women's achievements too often apparent in other fields of endeavor. As humanists, there is a built-in recognition of the equality of women and the dignity afforded us for all we have done. March has been designated Women's History Month, and in addition, is recognized as Jewish Women's History Month. It gives us the specific opportunity to reflect on the accomplishments, achievements and significance of women in our history, and to secular culture at large.

Join in a weekend of friendship, learning, and inspiration.

SHJ Conference 2008

We've been doing it for more than 40 years. Let's do it for 40 more.

HUMANISTIC JUDAISM: "I DID IT MY WAY!"

Come, contribute, explore!

Friday – Sunday

April 4-6, 2008

Programs for adults, young adults & teens

April 6-8: Tour L.A.

Marriott Warner Center

Woodland Hills (Los Angeles), CA

hosted by Congregation *Adat Chaverim*

Come learn, be inspired by the vision of our leaders across the continent, add your voice to our shared experiences and enjoy the social and cultural programs.

If you have questions about the Conference, contact

Bonnie Cousens

at the SHJ office, 248-478-7610, info@shj.org

The Passover Story

Passover is our great spring celebration. In Minnesota, we are glad to see the snow melted; in the Middle East, spring is linked to the cycle of food. Fertility rites in the spring marked the end of the first of the Middle East's two growing seasons. Passover actually began as two separate such holidays. The first was a grain harvest festival that was celebrated with the making and eating of flat bread made from the unfermented grain and was called *Hag Hamatsot* (holiday of matsas). The second was a shepherd's holiday marking the birthing of new lambs and kids, called *Hag Hapesakh* (holiday of the pascal lamb), and celebrated with a meal of lamb, with the blood being used to ward off evil spirits. King Josiah in the seventh century BCE combined *Hag Hamatsot* and *Hag Hapesakh* into a single holiday, called it *Pesakh*, and attached it to a c. 600 year old story of a deliverance of the Jewish people from oppression in Egypt. Later, the priests who gained control of the stories from the kings made *Pesakh* the central holiday of the entire year, making the priests' ancestor Moses into the star of a miracle, as a sort of middle man between a divine providence and a "chosen" people, the Jews. The rabbis who eventually supplanted the priests came up with the idea of a symbolic feast where the miracle story - the *Haggadah* - was retold and the significance of the special foods was explained. The Seder feast became a fabulously popular and largely family tradition.

The story at the root of the holiday - the exodus story - became gradually less believable and the telling of it more symbolic. Despite the amount of archeological work devoted to this most central of Old Testament stories, there is no evidence that a significant number of Jews even lived in Egypt, much less having passed through a divided Red Sea after a series of providential plagues. Secular Jews began to regard the story as a nostalgic entertainment. Humanistic Jews looked for ways to find modern parallels and new meanings in the exodus story. Rabbi Wine in *Judaism Beyond God* compared the great emigration of Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe to the U.S. to that of the Jews from Egypt. In doing so, Rabbi Wine asserted that the twentieth century story of escaping a "pious" anti-Semitic Pale for personal freedom in a secular America is of greater significance than the biblical story.

However the story is told, secular Jews continue to regard the Passover holiday as central to their individual and communal experience of the Jewish tradition.

- - Mike Persellin



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Program Highlights

December 7 (Friday): Hanukkah Party! At Friends' Meeting House in St. Paul.

December 16 (Sunday): "Jews and the Muslim World." Subject of recent SHJ Colloquium attended by *Or Emet* members.

January 11 (Friday): Barbara Wiener, producer, writer, director and president of **TVbyGIRLS**, a nonprofit organization that works with girls ages 10 to 18 to build leadership, compassionate and collaborative working skills, critical thinking and engagement in social justice and the issues of their communities. The overarching mission of TVbyGIRLS is to create stories and messages that show creative, compassionate, involved and thinking girls and women.

January 20 (Sunday): Rebecca Baumann, Executive Director of **The Minnesota Project**. The Minnesota Project is a non-profit organization that connects people with policy to nurture collaborations. Our programs are focused on clean renewable energy and efficient use of energy; farm practice and policy that promote profitable farms that protect the environment; and the production and consumption of local and sustainably-produced foods.

February 8 (Friday): "Jewish Veterans Remember WWII," with Linda Schloff, Director of the **Nathan and Theresa Berman Upper Midwest Jewish Archives (UMJA)** located at the University of Minnesota's Elmer L. Andersen Library and containing the most important archival holdings of the Jewish Historical

Society of the Upper Midwest (JHSUM).

March 7 (Friday): Mexican Counsel Nathan Wolf.

March 16 (Sunday): Purim Carnival!



JCS students learning Crop Art

For *The Illuminator* online and updates on all our activities, check our website.
Or Emet Online
www.oremnet.org

