



Kol Haverim

The Finger Lakes Community for Humanistic Judaism

Affiliated with the Society for Humanistic Judaism

Newsletter Issue #16

November, 2002

Dear Friends,

The death of Paul Wellstone marks this calendar year with a second death of prominent Jewish partisans of clear thinking and social justice. The other was Steven J. Gould, evolutionary biologist, who died in May.

A favorite Gould line was the exclamation of a relative who upon hearing that Gould intended to become a paleontologist said, "And that's a job for a nice Jewish boy?" That "nice Jewish boy," a friend wrote, "never put pen to paper—actually, he wrote everything on the same, old-fashioned, manual typewriter—but with burning moral concerns. His essays and books were always powered by a hatred of dishonesty and prejudice and hypocrisy." Running through his work was an opposition to ideology that claimed there was scientific evidence showing that racism, sexism, and war were hard-wired in our brains through evolution and, therefore, inevitable.

Gould's work contributed to the secular, humanist view of life that sees humankind and intelligence as arising from a long process of evolution and culture, not from a Deity. In an ACLU legal fight against laws that insisted on teaching "Scientific Creationism," grounded in the "truths" of Genesis, Gould testified on behalf of science and evolutionary theory. Gould saw this work as more than scholarly. "Creation bashing," he once wrote, "was a necessary and noble pursuit." One saying dear to Gould is applicable to the secular reformulation of Judaism: In an essay, he reflected, "I love the wry motto of the Paleontological Society (meant both literally and figuratively, for hammers are the main tool of our trade): Frango ut patefaciam—I break in order to reveal."

A former student of Paul Wellstone recalled sitting in a Wellstone classroom: "I knew, albeit briefly, his warmth, humanity, and commitment to justice. No one who took a course from him will ever forget his challenge to each of us to change the world: with his strong voice, and his preacher's finger outstretched and planted squarely between our eyes, he demand that we answer his entreaty, "What are YOU going to do about it?"

In the Senate, although sometimes he didn't get "it" right, Wellstone overwhelmingly did the "right thing," not what seemed politically expedient, and his commitments were solidly expressed. His vote against the 1991 Gulf War caused Bush the Elder to ask, "Who is that little chickenshit?" Most recently he voted against giving Bush the Younger total power to begin a war against Iraq. Unquestionably and admirably his record was solid on education, labor, women's rights, universal health care, the environment, and other social issues.

An advocate of a just settlement between Israel and the Palestinian people, he said in a speech last April, "We must pursue a courageous approach which seeks both to meet the critical need of the Israeli people to be free from terrorism and violence, and acknowledges the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for their own state, a state which is economically and politically viable."

In a speech titled "If not now, when? America's Unfinished Agenda," Wellstone began with a personal note: "My father was born in the Ukraine, his family tried to stay one step ahead of the Pogroms, and they moved. He lived in Russia and he fled the country when he was seventeen. When my Dad had passed away, my wife, Sheila, and I and our family gave a contribution to an organization called Jewish Fund For Justice and we received a poster that I have both in our home and in my office with a quote from Albert Einstein which says, "the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, the almost passionate love for justice, the strong desire for personal independence, these are the features of the Jewish tradition that make me thank my lucky stars that I belong to it."

Two colleagues of Gould, reflecting on his commitment to make a better world, quoted second-century sage Rabbi Tarfon, whose words apply as well to Wellstone's passion: "It is not your obligation to complete the task of perfecting the world, but neither are you free to desist from doing all you can."

In Peace,

Gerry Coles

Administrative Board

Chairperson: Barbara Behrmann
 Vice Chairperson: David Levitsky
 Secretary: not yet filled
 Treasurer: Carl West
 Holidays/Programs: Maria Coles
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 Newsletter Editor: Gerry Coles
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Social Action Committee

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Community Service Committee

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Membership and Renewal Form

You can find information about joining
 or renewing your membership on the
 Kol Haverim website, www.flchj.org, or
 you can call 800-935-1054 and ask to
 have a membership form mailed to you.

Yiddish Proverb

The truth doesn't die but it lives like a
 poor man.

(Der emess shtarbt nit ober er lebt vi an
 oreman.)

Community Calendar

Hanukkah Party

First Presbyterian Church
 Saturday, December 7, 3-6PM
 Presbyterian Church
 315 N. Cayuga St., Ithaca
 The program will begin with lighting
 the Menorah, songs, and an
 interactive telling of the story of the
 Maccabees. This will be followed by
 dreidle gambling games for the adults
 and young adults, and crafts and
 cookie making for the young children.
 There will be homemade latkes,
 soifganyot and other goodies to eat.

Fourth Friday Shabpot-luck

Celebration of Tu B'shvat
 Friday, January 24, 6PM
 First Baptist Church
 DeWitt Park, Ithaca

Board Meeting

Tuesday, December 3, 7PM
 Location TBA
 All members welcome

Fourth Friday Shabpot-luck

An Evening of Jewish Humor
 Friday, February 28, 6PM
 First Baptist Church
 DeWitt Park, Ithaca

Membership Party

Saturday, February 8 (Rain date
 Saturday, March 8), 7:30PM
 Home of Paula and Mark Eisner
 205 Oak Hill Road, Ithaca

Sunday School

November 17 and 24, December 8
 (January and February dates TBA),
 10:30-12 noon
 Burt House
 277 Willard Way, Ithaca

Board Meeting

Tuesday, January 7, 7pm
 Location TBA
 All members welcome

Newsletter: Print and E-mail Versions

As explained in the last newsletter, in
 order to contain costs, the newsletter
 will now be distributed in print and
 electronic versions. Beginning next
 issue, the print version will be sent
 only to Kol Haverim members and to
 non-members who subscribed last
 summer. However, the electronic
 version will be available without cost

to non-members.

If you are a non-member and wish to
 continue receiving the newsletter in
 the electronic version, please send an
 e-mail to khnewsletter@yahoo.com,
 asking to be put on the distribution
 list.

Members in the News

by **Deirdre Silverman**

Birthdays:

Naomi Raymond 11/4
Jonathan Joseph 11/12
Richie Berg 12/4
Judith Van Allen 12/12
Kate Chason 12/16
Bill Baum 12/21
Kate Forest 12/28
Dee Thaler 12/30
Nancy Grossman 1/18
Hanalei Berg 1/27

Anniversaries:

Gerry & Maria Coles 11/3
Ellen & Michael Wiernicki 11/23

News Bites:

Condolences to Barbara Strupp, for the loss of her brother.

Gerry Coles recently spoke at the University of Houston on how Bush's educational legislation is damaging teaching and learning. The talk was

well-received by an audience keenly aware of the appalling Bush educational and social legacy in Texas.

David Levitsky's three older children—Steven, Sandy, and Susan—along with their partners, organized a 60TH birthday weekend-long celebration in the Catskills this October. They had a terrific time, and he is happy to have the image of all five of his children in one place.

New members:

Joan Joseph recently moved to Ithaca to be closer to her son and daughter-in-law, Jonathan and Beth Joseph, who introduced her to Kol Haverim. Joan has four sons, worked in the field of services for the aging, and is enjoying the variety of cultural activities available in Ithaca.

Donna and Owen Raymond, and their three children: Colin, age 10; Annelise, age 8; and Naomi, age 7.

Donna and Owen both graduated from Cornell and, after living other places, came back to Ithaca.

Alla Lukin, who works for CBORD as a system analyst, and her husband Sergey, a former physicist who now works as a computer consultant. They came to Ithaca from Belarus in 1995, with their son Slava and daughter Irina. Alla is from a secular Jewish family. After decades in a dominant culture with a hostile attitude to everything Jewish, she wants to live as a Jew in an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding. Sergey has no religious affiliation and is an agnostic. Alla and Sergey have joined to find a community of people, in which they could feel a sense of true belonging. With Alla's and Sergey's sometimes very differing views, such a community should encourage diversity, openness, and primacy of humanistic values over any other ideological and theological issues.

Kol Haverim Events: Grand Work, Hard Work

Our Kol Haverim community is exceptionally resourceful and talented. Despite our having to imitate our nomadic ancestors who wandered through Canaan, like them we also have thrived. As the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur gatherings discussed in this newsletter illustrate, we have created deep, reflective, and stimulating programs in various venues that have also helped us engage Judaism in meaningful ways and get to know each other.

Praise of these accomplishments must, however, be accompanied by a strong dose of recognition of considerable work required for these events. There are rooms to reserve; supplies to buy; tables to set-up and take-down; coffee and tea to make; programs to create, write and print; and eventually all the clean-up and put-away, and on and on and on. The results have often been grand, but the

process creating that grandness has required substantial work.

Up until this year, a small number of members—most board members—have done most of the work. And, unfortunately, but understandably, many have reached burn-out.

This year has marked a significant change. A number of events have been undertaken by members who are not on the board and who have not previously participated in creating a program. Hopefully, this participation will continue, because unless it does, Kol Haverim will, frankly, have great difficulty generating events in the future. A community in which ALL members create events is not only desirable, but given the fact that we cannot afford paid staff or a rabbi, it is also essential to our continuance.

The solution is straight-forward and

two-fold. If everyone participates in creating one event a year, that will go a long way toward making “experts” for each event. Second, we need to assess the number of events we have each year and balance the desire for events with a sensible evaluation of whether there will be members available to create these events.

The solution will work itself out as much in practice as in planning. The first step is for members who are not yet helping create a program to consider contacting a board member to express their interest in doing so. Once we all are participating, we will then be able to appraise the number and kinds of events we can have throughout the year.

Keep in mind is that the creation of our events is truly rewarding, creative, and allows for input and outlooks that reflect who we are.

Rosh Hashanah—A Time to Remember, a Time of Renewal

by Mark Silverman

We gathered at the Cayuga Nature Center where Stacia Zabusky and Nancy Grossman organized a wonderful holiday evening.

We gathered together to share our blessings as Kol Haverim.

We gathered with friends and family, to fathom the cycle of life, seek a space of renewal, affirm that the power to change lies within ourselves, reflect on our actions, renew our commitment to improve ourselves and the world we inhabit, reconnect with family, move forward with greater wisdom, celebrate, reaffirm our ties to the community, cleanse ourselves as we take responsibility for mistakes and learn from them, act with compassion and wisdom, give in return as we receive, join hands and look for the way together, blow the shofar as a call to reflection and renewal and wholeness, wholeness in the aftermath of last September 11TH, dream and imagine, share a moment of silence to remember those who have left us, strengthen our connections, honor, share, appreciate, pause and reflect, kindle the candles and light the way, sing with gusto, bring joy to the New Year, cultivate the strength of community, share apples and Challah dipped in honey, build a world of enduring peace and justice.

Three members of our group spoke. The following are portions of their comments

Jonathan Joseph:

"The ten day period of reflection and asking forgiveness that lasts from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur was a special time for me while growing up, because instead of bringing us to temple, my mother would take us out into the woods, into nature, to walk

and reflect. As a result, I have always associated those holidays with nature and the beauty of autumn in the Northeast. I encourage others to take the opportunity on a crisp autumn day

Music Box Waltz

I
No rare spices, no stopwatch timing
but tactile intimacy
we could not explain or measure.
Holiday dinners, familiar kitchen heat,
sounding out names of foods
gadempta chicken, *kreplach*, *koogle*
and mother taught newest daughter-in-law.
Devotion and remembrance
in this handing down. Kitchen alchemy.

II
Ma had created this world of friends
before she had really needed it.
She sat on one sofa,
her dolls rearranging the meaning of the other sofa.
After dozing, she awoke to those perfect smiles,
unperturbed curls, in spite
of recurrent dreams of a ship,
rats, a lady, all the water,
a continued reenactment, the immigration,
the six-year-old, holding the photograph
of the father she had never seen.

V
A small wooden chest topped
by a mirror in a frame encircling,
holding images.
Drawers with turquoise velvet lining.

VI
Bubba's gold watch
had come unwound in these drawers.
Occasionally, the minuscule gold band,
the one bought after she was married,
worn thin and become
part of the bones of her hand,
was placed on the turquoise uneasily.
Ma had kept her wedding rings
in the deepest drawer,
the one that opens to the music box waltz;
it alerted her not to expose darkness
dimming the light of diamonds.

to get away from cars and telephones, etc. and into our beautiful surroundings, and be quiet, and reflect."

Maria Coles read her poetry (inset).

Deirdre Silverman:

"Last year, on September 17, we came together here, filled with sorrow, pain and confusion, in the aftermath of September 11. Some among us had been in New York City that day, others had lost their homes and possessions, and others had lost people they loved. Most of us, safe here in the incredible fall beauty of that week in September, had difficulty reconciling the tranquility of our surroundings with the tragedy that others experienced...

"Bringing these emotions to our Rosh Hashanah observance seemed especially appropriate, because on this holiday we pause to recognize those who have left our lives in the past year... For many of us, it was through that Rosh Hashanah service, and the help it offered us, that the Finger Lakes Community for Humanistic Judaism really grew into its name and became a meaningful community...

"In the Hebrew calendar, a year has passed since our last Rosh Hashanah gathering. It is, again, the 29TH of Elul, the last month of the year. We have come through the cycle of a year since September 11, through the sleep of winter, the rebirth of spring, and the heat of summer. In Jewish tradition, one year after a death is the time for letting go, the end of the period of serious mourning...

"But now there is another kind of pain... A media barrage of nostalgia about September 11, which will be used to feed the march to war... As humanists and

out of concern for the survival of the Jewish people, we can and should resist these specious calls for revenge, and seek positive ways to remember... Our goal can be a commitment to build a peaceful, meaningful future for all, locally and globally."

Yom Kippur

At the Yom Kippur gathering, wonderfully hosted by Jane and Roger Segelkin, Harry Segal opened the discussion of "sin" with the following observations drawn from a commentary on a Jewish website. It is included in the newsletter because its analysis of sinning provides an opportunity for self-reflection every day of the year, not on Yom Kippur alone:

Jewish tradition tells us that we are all born with a clean slate. That is, we are not born sinning (as Christian tradition suggests). As Jews, we must always reach towards a perfect standard of righteousness, as expressed in Leviticus: Righteousness should be pursued. By not reaching righteousness, sin comes in. When we do something wrong, it may be the missed opportunity to do something right—as opposed to the wrong itself—that is the sin.

In Hebrew, this missed opportunity is

called a chet. Often translated simply as "sin," the word is actually an archery term for a miss-shot. "So, a chet, rather than being a sin as we know it from Christian tradition, should be thought of as missing the mark—like an archer who misses the bull's eye of a target," says Wolfson, who is also a vice president of the University of Judaism in Los Angeles. A chet means that we have tried to do right, but that we have fallen short of the mark of righteousness.

Two other categories of sin are considered more grievous than a chet. An aveira, which literally means the crossing of a line, is a conscious action on our part. We have crossed the line between appropriate and inappropriate behavior, and we are fully conscious of doing so.

The most serious category of sin is an avon, literally, an abomination. Committing an avon means that one knows going into the action that it is

the wrong thing to do. In the Bible, examples of this include idolatry and murder.

Each of the three categories constitutes a distancing from God, or, depending on your outlook, from godliness, and the ultimate goal of righteousness. An avon represents the furthest distance. In order to atone for the sin, a Jew must turn back from the distancing—the sin requires a corrective action, rather than a state of being. This action is called t'shuvah—literally, turning—but many would call it repentance.

While most people associate Yom Kippur with fasting, even the prophet Isaiah, whose words we read on Yom Kippur, understands that it is the act of repentance that is the essence of the day. Repentance comes when the person admits he has done something wrong, apologizes for the wrong, and changes his behavior to make the situation right.

News from the Sunday School

by Harry Segal

This month our students at the Kol Haverim Sunday School continued on their journey through the holidays and traditions of Jewish culture. As humanists, we taught them a more contemporary version of Simchat Torah. For religious Jews, this marks the day of the year when the

congregation has finished reading every verse of the Torah aloud. We explained this heritage to our children, but then interpreted the holiday as a celebration of learning and the quest for wisdom. Our class of 8 year olds learned about Ellis Island last week, our youngest class made a family tree "mobile," while our bar mitzvah class wondered about young

David's struggle with Saul and the meaning of "succession". (Notice how "success" and "succeed" derive from the same word, a shared root that brings to light the war between the older king and the young prince destined to "succeed" him.) Despite these serious themes, we are almost having too much fun.

Sunday School Teachers: No Women Wanted!

That's how it was until 1838: women could not teach in a Jewish Sunday School. But Rebecca Gratz (1781-1869) of Philadelphia changed that when she opened a citywide Hebrew Sunday School independent of any synagogue. Only then could women teach the Jewish religion and determine curriculum. The faculty was chosen exclusively from the school's female graduates and the teachers

wrote the textbooks.

Rebecca Gratz was an extraordinary woman. An avid reader of Jewish literature, she collected new Jewish American writings and promoted Jewish authors. Widely read in literature, history, and science, she was a brilliant letter writer and a friend to prominent authors, such as Washington Irving. Legend has it that

Irving described Gratz to Sir Walter Scott, who used her qualities for the Jewish woman Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*.

A flavor of Gratz's writing is in her letter about her brother's grief over his son's death in the Civil War: "[his grief] I share, but cannot measure even by that which fills my heart—all human sympathy are but drops of comfort in his great sorrow."

Study Group Happenings—Reflections on “Community Building”

by Eric Mendelson

Our Kol Haverim Study Group has been meeting for three and a half years. As an adult learning activity, it has predecessors in classes and in book clubs. But our most similar forerunner operates in, of all places, Scandinavia, where there is a huge adult education movement of “Study Circles.” These groups form informally to study whatever subject or skill a small group of people wants to learn, usually weekly for about a semester’s length of time. Our Kol Haverim Study Group has met less often for a considerably longer time and with a more singular subject: Jewish culture, history, and thought. Like Scandinavian study circles, though, we don’t use a teacher, we select our readings by consensus and usually discuss each book across a few months, and we do so informally; also, as leader, I have served as facilitator-coordinator, not in the usual American executive-teacher role. Most enjoyably of all, to me: it has fostered a feeling of mini-community, just as do most Scandinavian study circles.

The largest user of such circles is Sweden, which has been called a “study circle democracy.” Three-quarters of all Swedish adults have participated in a study circle and, remarkably, about 40% join at least one circle each year. In two recent books, public policy scholar Robert

Putnam documents how American society has lost much of its connectedness. This widely recognized decline of community and trust across our nation is linked to the decline in our “social capital,” our active involvement in formally or informally organized ongoing groups—adult clubs, sports groups, unions, civic and cultural groups—even as we also socialize with friends and family less often. Of greatest concern to Putnam is the correlation between social capital and health of any democracy, both of which have declined precipitously in the U.S.

Putnam had colleagues look at the same phenomena in other Western democracies. Sadly, here, too, Putnam’s colleagues found Germany, France, Britain, Australia, Spain, and Japan belatedly following in America’s footsteps. One exception in this initial cross-cultural study was... Sweden. Putnam essentially suggests that study circles have played a role in Sweden’s retention of both social capital and a healthy democracy. Since members then tend to feel empowered to broader civic involvement and knowledge, study circles, regardless of topics studied, function as tiny laboratories of democracy. As a result, fewer Swedish young adults appear to have surrendered to apathetic cynicism and civic ignorance than elsewhere in Europe and America, and fewer feel disconnected, untrusting, and civically impotent.

Certainly, there are other reasons that Swedes still possess a sense of genuine ownership over their body politic and their mutual destinies. Yet Putnam sees little democratic study circles (or study groups) as one vital source of what fuels a national democracy that’s still working. So, I offer to you that our own little study group, operating in a virtual desert of American adult education sensibility, may secretly be doing more than increasing our own understanding of Judaic culture, delightful as this is. It is the place where I most regularly feel a sense of community, where the two hours each meeting almost always gratify me, whether or not I happen to love our latest reading or viewing choice. We have bonded and learned. At the same time, we possibly, just possibly, may also inadvertently be developing one vehicle for a healthier, revived American democracy. I furthermore see various study groups as one potential antidote to the isolation, to the ignorance about affairs outside our paid work specialties, and to the impotence with which many of us in our heart of hearts live. In this, Kol Haverim’s Study Group and others like ours may ultimately perform a service larger than we knew.

I will write much more on this idea elsewhere. I welcome your reactions and thoughts on this far-flung vision!

Yiddish Lesson

Because a number of Kol Haverim members are interested in learning Yiddish, the newsletter will contribute to this educational undertaking.

Lesson One:

An elderly Jewish man approaches a lady at a bus stop in Miami Beach.

He tugs on the sleeve of her coat and asks, “Farshtayn Yiddish?”

The lady answers: “Yes, Ich Farshtay.”

So the man asks, “Vot Time is it?”

Refusnik Dani Vos

On August 25, Dani Vos, an Israeli Army combat reservist and "refusnik" spoke at Cornell University on why he and others in the military are refusing on principle to serve in the West Bank or Gaza Strip, i.e. the occupied territories. The talk was co-sponsored by Kol Haverim, Tikkun v'Or, Cornell Hillel, and several other campus Jewish groups.

In October, The Bookpress, a publication of The Bookery, an Ithaca bookstore, published an interview David Regenspan, former rabbi of Tikkun v'Or, had with Dani. The following excerpt, discussing why Israeli officers, including Dani, decided to "refuse," is the beginning of that interview. The entire article—which is a "must read"—can be found at: www.thebookery.com (click on Bookpress-Archives, click on October, 2002, then click on The Patriotism of Refusal-David Regenspan).

DR: How did ometz l'sarev [Courage to Refuse, the organization of "refusniks"] come about? Was it your group of friends?

DV: Actually, no. The two officers who started it, Yaniv Itzkovitz and David Zonshein, they were both serving in the same unit. They were called for reserve [duty], they did their last reserve in the occupied territories in December 2001. They were called to the Gaza Strip and did their reserve there... they felt that they did terrible things, things that are really wrong and do nothing to protect Israel, and treated the Palestinian population, according to the commands, very brutally. Not that the soldiers under their command did something illegal, or abused more than their commands told them to... The Palestinians were attacking [Jewish] settlements where they were at, and the next day the commanders called [in] bulldozers to

clear the area around these settlements, thus destroying huge areas... and it was a matter of routine. Every day, they had to clear another area, making a kind of terrible desert around the settlements, to make them safer. And you have to let the settlers go in and out of their settlements, so you have to block the Palestinian transportation. For a long time, it's not allowed for Palestinians and Israelis to use the road at the same time, so of course Israelis have the priority.

They [Zonshein and Itzkovitz] felt that all those things are very unjust, but in order to protect their soldiers—they were officers; the first priority is to protect your soldiers, to bring them home safely. In order to protect their soldiers and the settlements, they had to do it; it wasn't something that they could choose...

So they finished their reserve and decided they will not go again; it was a kind of private decision... They knew that things were deteriorating [in the territories] very quickly. They saw... how the Palestinians became more determined and more professional in trying to ambush. And they [the Israelis] had to take more and more extreme measures... They saw something that they had encountered before in Lebanon, that the Hizbollah in Lebanon became more and more professional, quickly; they learned fast...

They [Itzkovitz and Zonshein] were both students at Tel Aviv University, so they put up a sign asking, does anybody feel like us? They were very surprised that in less than a week there were fifteen or twenty people who supported it. I think it led them to understand they have a kind of responsibility. They are in a unique position... First they felt that nobody

knows what really goes on there... they knew they would have a serious advantage over any other group, because when this information comes from B'tzelem [an Israeli human rights organization very critical of the occupation] it's generally pretty reliable, but most of the public don't believe them, because they know that "they love Arabs"... and when it comes from the Palestinians, it's obvious that nobody believes... so they realize that they are in a unique position to shout it out, and people will believe them. With combat soldiers it's obvious that they are committed Zionists, committed to Israel. They have a kind of ticket, very powerful...

So they started thinking about publishing an ad and starting some kind of movement, and started drafting the "combatants' letter"... and then making phone calls... Somebody called me. I asked please send me the letter. They sent me [on e-mail]... I felt uncomfortable with many things in the letter. I thought it was wrong to go to the occupied territories, but I wasn't sure that that's the way it should be done, in a public struggle or something open, challenging the army... I sent it [the e-mail letter] back with some curses. Later, I thought about some change they could put in the letter that I'll feel more comfortable with... so I thought of some minor changes... I'll suggest [them] and say I am signing the letter, and hopefully they'll accept it... that's how I ended up signing the letter. My propositions—no one took them too seriously. The letter was published as is. And I'm very happy that I did it. It created a huge public debate...

The whole power of this struggle is that it's a struggle for Israel, not against...

A Humanistic Judaism Statement on Conversion

On June 5, 2002, The Association of Humanistic Rabbis adopted the following statement on conversion and adoption:

Preamble: The Jewish people began as a nation and evolved into an international family. Over three thousand years this nation/family has been the host to competing religious beliefs and diverse philosophies of life. The heart of Jewish identity has always been a strong sense of membership in the Jewish people and participation in its identification with

its history and participation in its culture.

For most of Jewish history the Jewish people welcomed others to join the Jewish family. Jewish conversion is adoption into the culture and future of the Jewish people.

Statement: We, the members of the Association of Humanistic Rabbis, welcome all individuals into the Jewish people who desire to link their lives with the experience of the Jewish nation/family, to identify with its

historic memories and to participate in its culture and future. Both personal choice and acceptance by a Jewish community to which they belong are necessary to make their adoption significant and valid.

The act of adoption should be preceded by a period of preparation, when the prospective adoptee studies the fundamentals of Jewish history and Jewish culture. The welcoming community may offer a celebration and a certificate of adoption.

The Finger Lakes Community for Humanistic Judaism is an Itaca-based organization that brings people together to explore and celebrate Jewish identity, history, culture and ethics within a secular, humanistic framework.

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