



# Kol Haverim

**The Finger Lakes Community for Humanistic Judaism**

Affiliated with the Society for Humanistic Judaism

**Newsletter Issue #17**

**March, 2003**

Dear Friends,

If we Jews have learned anything from history, it is that silence on issues of life and death is never that—never the neutrality of the bystander. Whether individual, institutional, or national, silence in the face of immorality is a muted response sanctioning that immorality.

By the time this newsletter appears, countless innocent Iraqis might already be dead or maimed, or just a brief time away from that fate. Thousands of bombs will be about to fall or will have fallen not only on the military but on civilians, half of whom are under the age of 15. And in imperial double-speak, “shock and awe” instead of “dead” is how this down-pouring of death is described.

Even in the U.S., with its almost uniformly cheerleading media, the nation is divided over supporting the war, with a majority advocating a diplomatic solution through inspections, rather than a military attack unsupported in the United Nations.

Also opposing military action and supporting U.N. inspections and a policy of containment are prominent religious denominations, such as the Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches, and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. Addressing the issue of “silence,” the Methodist Church—Bush's church—has stated in its opposition to a war on Iraq, “Preemptive strike does not reflect restraint and does not allow for the adequate pursuit of peaceful means for resolving conflict. To be silent in the face of such a prospect is not an option for the followers of Christ.”

Regrettably, no such statement and concern about “silence” has come from comparable Jewish groups. They have either been silent or, like Reform Judaism, have, with faint qualification, supported the Bush position, saying that after the U.S. has made a “reasonable effort” to gain U.N. support, it can undertake unilateral military action. In his appeal to American Jewish leaders to speak out against the Iraq war, Rabbi Arthur Waskow quoted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who said with respect to speaking out on the Vietnam War, “A time comes when silence is betrayal.”

Sadly, silence has been the response of the national board of Secular, Humanistic Judaism. Many in Kol Haverim had hoped that the national board would have taken a strong position opposing an attack on Iraq—had hoped for a board resolution derived from a stated core principle of Humanistic Judaism: “We seek solutions to human conflicts that respect the freedom, dignity, and self-esteem of every human being.” All we have heard is silence.

What can explain a silence that has continued over many months, since the emergence of this era-defining issue? Certainly the answer cannot be a lack of time or opportunity. The board, to its credit, has issued a number of position statements on a variety of national issues during these months.

Perhaps the reason lies in the preposterous assumption driving Jewish religious organizational support that a U.S. attack on Iraq will be good for Israel's security. I call this assumption “preposterous” for the reasons Stephen Zunes discusses in March/April issue of Tikkun ([www.tikkun.org](http://www.tikkun.org)). With respect to military safety, Israel is superior militarily to Iraq, a superiority that includes the “best regional missile defense system in the world.” More critically, Israel's ties with the Bush madness plays a dangerous game; in the geopolitical equation in which Israel is a “strategic asset” for the United States, history shows how Jews who have served as “visible agents of oppressive social orders” have invariably served as “convenient scapegoats” reaping the wrath of other exploited people. Even now, Israel has been blamed for the problems in the Middle East, “rather than the United States or the broader exploitative global economic system and their own elites who benefit from and help perpetuate such a system.” Zunes quotes the late Israeli intellectual Yeshayahu Leibowitz's observation that Israelis have become “mercenaries of America to fight the wars of what the ruling persons in America consider to be American interests.”

The status of junior partner will “further isolate Israel, lessen the likelihood that Arab states will seek to normalize relations (at least willingly), encourage extremist attacks against Israel and Jews elsewhere, and leave Israel vulnerable to the whims of U.S. foreign policy.”

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## Administrative Board

Chairperson: Barbara Behrmann  
 Vice Chairperson: David Levitsky  
 Secretary: Barbara Eden  
 Treasurer: Carl West  
 Holidays/Programs: Maria Coles  
 Membership: Deirdre Silverman  
 Social Action: Gerry Coles\*  
 Adult Education: Eric Mendelson  
 Children's Education: Harry Segal  
 Community Service: Jonathan Joseph  
 Members-at-Large: Carol Bloomgarden  
 and Dee Thaler

National Board Rep.: Gerry Coles  
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### Social Action Committee

Contact Mark Silverman at 277-3345 or  
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### Community Service Committee

Contact Jonathan Joseph at 277-9744 or  
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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

When brains are needed, brawn won't help.

(Ven men darf hoben moi'ach, helft nit kain koi'ach.)

# Community Calendar

## Fourth Friday Shabpot-luck

Celebration of Jewish Food  
 Friday, March 28, 6PM  
 First Baptist Church  
 DeWitt Park, Ithaca

## Annual Passover Seder

Saturday, April 19, time TBA  
 Cayuga Nature Center  
 Taughannock Blvd.

## Observance of Yom Hashoah

Tuesday, April 29  
 Location TBA

## SHJ Conference 2003

Humanistic Judaism:  
 Transforming Judaism for Our Times  
 Friday through Sunday, May 2-4  
 Toronto, Canada  
 For more information on the conference or to register, see  
 www.shj.org.

## New Board Secretary

Barbara Eden, equipped with a speedy laptop, is the new Board secretary, thereby filling the Board's single vacancy. From the one meeting in

which Barbara participated, it's clear that the membership will be well-served by her ideas and initiative.

## Membership Noshing and Schmoozing

Thanks to Paula and Mark Eisner for hosting a membership get-together at their home in February. It was a delightful, informal evening for

members to get to know one another better while noshing on delicious Middle Eastern finger foods.

## Newsletter: Print and Electronic

This newsletter is available in both print and electronic form. Kol Haverim members receive the print version as part of their membership. Non-member subscriptions for the print version will be available once-a-

year, beginning with the September issue (due to bookkeeping constraints). Both members and non-members can receive free electronic versions by writing the editor at the newsletter e-mail address above.

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The silence of the SHJ leadership raises grave questions about its commitment to humanistic Jewish values. The silence also raises profound questions that we in Kol Haverim must address. How should Kol Haverim address the Bush war on Iraq and similar moral issues? What is the meaning and value of the connections (or disconnections) between the moral positions of a significant portion of the Kol Haverim membership and those of the national SHJ? What are the

implications of contributing to the financial and collective sustenance to a national organization that chooses silence in the face of profound, long-lasting implications for the entire world?

The Kol Haverim membership must address these issues. One way to do so is through this newsletter. Please write and express your views. None of us should be silent.

Peace,

Gerry

## Members in the News

by **Deirdre Silverman**

Condolences to Eric and Donna Mendelson on the death of Donna's father.

### New members:

Caren Cooper is the newest member of Kol Haverim. Caren and her family (husband Greg Sloan, 4-1/2 year old Abby and 10 month old Zoe) moved to Ithaca in 2000. Both Caren and Greg work at Cornell, Caren as an ornithologist and Greg as an astronomer. They like to trek in the woods and play ultimate Frisbee. Caren says that "Ithaca seems to be a great, progressive town, so we hope to raise semi-normal kids here." Caren joined Kol Haverim for historical and cultural meaning, as well as looking for ways to celebrate holidays as non-commercially as possible.

*Editor's note: In the last issue, Alla and Sergey's autobiographical sketch was reduced a bit because of newsletter space limitations. Here, it is printed in full:*

Alla is a lifelong software developer, working for a local software company CBORD as a system analyst. Sergey is a former physicist, who works as a computer consultant.

They came to Ithaca from Belarus at the beginning of 1995 with their son Slava and daughter Irina. Since then the children have grown-up, graduated from their colleges and now pursue their own lives: Slava as a Ph.D. student at Princeton and Irina at her first job at the Boyce Thompson Institute in Ithaca.

Alla is from a secular Jewish family. After decades spent in the former USSR, with its hostile attitude toward

everything openly Jewish, she wants to be just a Jew in an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding. Sergey has never had any religious affiliation and most accurately could be defined as an agnostic.

Since their arrival in Ithaca, Alla and Sergey have wanted to find a small community of people in which they could feel a sense of true belonging. With Alla's and Sergey's sometimes very different views of multiple facets of the today's world, such a community should not simply tolerate, but encourage diversity, openness, and primacy of humanistic values over any other ideological and theological issues.

Alla and Sergey live in the Northeast corner of the Town of Ithaca. They look forward to seeing their community friends in their welcoming house.

## Observance of Yom Hashoah

by **Deirdre Silverman**

This year, Kol Haverim will commemorate the Holocaust on the evening of Yom Hashoah, Tuesday, April 29. We'll have a humanistic

service, followed with a talk by Maura Stephens, who recently returned from a trip to Iraq. Maura's experiences will give us the opportunity to discuss humanistic responses to oppression, and the relationship between the

genocide of the Nazi era and those of the present. Our Yom Hashoah service will begin at 7PM, at a location to be announced. (We'll send out an e-mail letting you all know) Please bring a dessert or fruit to share.

## Passover

by **Maria Tova Coles**

On April 19<sup>TH</sup> we will once again be celebrating Passover. This year I conducted an informal poll to see if our membership wanted to continue having Passover as in all previous years; if we wanted to celebrate at the downtown Holiday Inn (this was the least expensive banquet facility); if we wanted to be at the Nature Center but with a hired group to set-up and clean-up.

The result was that only one couple wanted to continue arrangements as they had been and the rest of the votes were evenly split between the other two options. Since I have gotten reports that the food at the Holiday Inn is not very good and since food is so key in this magical celebration, after some conversations with board members, I decided to make arrangements at the very beautiful Nature Center, hiring a group to set-up and clean-up. I have also arranged to have Ithaca Bakery provide a

vegetarian matzo ball soup.

We have continued to refine our haggadah with poetry. Our Sunday School children will again be participating. And this year, Carol and Gordon and their group will provide the music.

Our food will be delectable, the music inspirational, the kids delightful and this will be an important time to thinking about and toasting to freedom.

## People and Plants at the Reconstruction Home

by **Jonathan Joseph**

In honor of Tu b'Shevat, the Community Service committee organized an activity to bring plants to and spend time talking with residents of the Reconstruction Home—a nursing home in downtown Ithaca. We collected donations from local flower shops and members of our group and brought them to the Reconstruction Home on Sunday, February 9. We spent an hour talking with residents of the home, and then let each of the participants choose a plant to bring back to their room.

Thanks to many people, the activity was a huge success. Both residents of the Reconstruction Home and

members of Kol Haverim enjoyed the discussion and we had many beautiful plants to give to the participants and enough extra plants for common areas and for residents who could not attend the activity.

The members of Kol Haverim who participated were Kate Forest, Alla Lukina, Eric Mendelson, Beth Joseph, Joan Joseph and Jonathan Joseph. I would like to specially thank Kate Forest for contacting all of the flower shops, Joan Joseph for her expertise in helping organize the activity with the residents and Alla Lukina and Dee Thaler for donating plants of their own. Though Dee could not attend, the plant she donated in a beautiful ceramic pot and the friendly letter she

wrote were very highly appreciated.

Kol Haverim would like to thank these local stores for their generous contributions: Agway on Route 13 in Ithaca, Arnold's Flower Shop in Dryden, Bool's Flower Shop on Aurora Street, Cayuga Landscape on Triphammer Road, Flower Fashions at Community Corners and The Plantations on the Commons.

Because of the wonderful reception this program received at the Reconstruction Home, we hope that it will become an annual event and that we may schedule other community service activities that involve the Reconstruction Home.

## Kol Haverim Supports a Living Wage

Through a resolution passed at the Board's January meeting, Kol Haverim joins 36 other local organizations in the Living Wage Coalition that advocates at least a living wage for all working people in Tompkins County. Other members of the coalition are the Catholic Charities

of Tompkins County, Center for Religion, Ethics Social Policy (CRESP), Drop-In Children's Center, Ithaca Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, Jesus Only Apostolic Church of God, Planned Parenthood of Tompkins County, the Service Employees International Union

(SEIU)1199 Upstate, Tompkins County Democratic Party, Tompkins County Human Rights Commission, Tompkins County Green Party, UAW Local 2300, and the Working Families Party.

## Study Group Happenings

by **Eric Mendelson**

From Irving Howe's *World of Our Fathers*:

"An old man remembering his East Side childhood would say that on coming home from school he had a recurrent fear that his cot in the dining room would again be occupied by a relative just off the boat from Europe. How many other Americans could share, even grasp, this order of experience? Space was the stuff of desire; a room to oneself, a luxury beyond reach. [And] privacy in the home practically unknown.

"Richer in morals than manners,

stronger in ideals than amenities [was] the world of the immigrant Jews.

"Poor families were known to subsist for days on herring, bread, and tea, with potatoes and cheap meats like lung among the other staples. Except for horseradish, carrots, cabbage, and beets, the early immigrants had little fondness for vegetables, though fruit was greatly liked. With time, lettuce and tomatoes came to be 'good for the children.'"

The flavor of life of Russian Jewish immigrants to the U.S., specifically to New York City, at the turn of the twentieth century, is pictured like no

place else I have encountered in this classic work from 1976. Whether painting images of the life many of our parents or grandparents (or for some of us, great-grandparents) lived on the Lower East Side or specifying the details of tenement, sweatshop, family, political or artistic life, Howe's masterpiece has our Adult Study Group of nine people agog with answers and new questions. These pictures of little privacy and stark non-vegetarianism are just two from the 600 stunningly researched and written pages from Howe. At this writing in mid-February, we are one-quarter through the book.

## Inspiration for the Coming Membership Year

As editor of the newsletter, I receive copies of newsletters from other congregations containing many interesting articles. As a member of the board, I am constantly thinking about improving the richness of our congregation. The convergence of this work inspired this special issue of our newsletter. The following are excerpts from other newsletters about ideas and activities that could enhance Kol Haverim. Some we have already pursued; others we should consider pursuing. The forthcoming membership meeting will provide an opportunity to discuss these and other areas. Please think about the following suggestions and plan to offer your views at that time.

### Havurah

Havurah, Hebrew for “fellowship,” is loosely defined as a group of Jews who come together to share an experience, discuss a topic—and eat. Within a congregation, Havurahs usually mean a smaller grouping that allows people to get to know each other better. Havurahs help build community, as well as a deeper understanding of Humanistic Judaism.

When a member of the SHJ Birmingham Temple was here a couple of years ago, she said that when she first joined, it was the havurah get-togethers, in which various aspects of humanistic Judaism were discussed, that was the most important experience influencing her to become an involved member. The friendships she formed through the Havurahs have endured for many years. Kol Haverim has had some havurahs but they have not yet become part of the congregation's culture.

The following, from the Orange County Society of Humanistic Judaism, describes a havurah they held.

*Our December Havurah was held at the home of Rosabelle and Nat.*

*Considering the unexpected deluge that descended on us, we had a good attendance. Two topics were discussed: The nature of Humanism as described by Isaac Asimov and others; and examples of Yiddish expressions that we remember our parents using. The evening ended with a feasting of panettone and other goodies.*

The KH/FLCHJ board is considering including Havurahs as part of next year's programming to advance our understanding of Humanistic Judaism by discussing particular topics, such as what humanistic Judaism means for our lives. In addition, meeting more informally, we could get to know one another better.

### Adult Sunday School— Drawing on Local Expertise

A number of congregations offer adult education programs on Sunday mornings, usually accompanied by bagels and coffee. The length of the programs vary, but most often there is a defined time period—“modules”—such as four weeks, in which a specific topic is discussed. The programs might continue throughout the school year, but participants have the option of attending only those modules that interest them. There are obvious advantages and disadvantages to Sunday morning programs, but other congregations appear to be filling a need for many of their members by offering them at that time.

The following, from Beth Chai, the Greater Washington Jewish Humanist Congregation, provides not only an example of a representative program, but also the use some congregations have made of experts in their areas. In this instance, a “Yiddishist and professor” from a local university led the program (she has a Ph.D. from Cornell). We need to consider drawing on similar expertise in the Ithaca area (especially before they graduate).

*Yiddish Language,  
History and Culture*

*On our next four Sunday School dates, Beth Chai will present a series on Yiddish. This series will focus on the linguistic, literary, and cultural aspects of Yiddish, and will open with a discussion of the sanctity of Hebrew and its alef bet and will also provide background about other Jewish languages. It will include a brief overview of the origins of Yiddish and a discussion of Yiddish dialects, illustrated by Yiddish folk songs and video, giving examples of both spoken and sung Yiddish. A review of several important writers, including Sholem Aleichem, I.B. Singer, and Rachel Korn, will be provided, including an excerpt from the film *The Singing Blacksmith*. The series will end with a discussion of the social contexts of Jewish life in the present day, including the role of Yiddish in Hasidic communities in America, Israel, and Europe today, with illustrations provided from both poetry and music.*

*The series will be taught by Miram Isaacs, a noted Yiddishist and professor at the University of Maryland in the Jewish Studies program. Dr. Isaacs has a Ph.D. from Cornell University and is a native speaker of Yiddish.*

*Recommended reading: Yiddish: A Nation of Words by Miriam Weinstein.*

### Fourth Friday Programs

Our Fourth Friday programs have served the congregation well, but we need to continue to think of creative ways both to keep them fresh and deepen our understanding of and delight in Jewish culture, history and philosophy. One way to do this, which we have not tried, is through biography.

The following is a biographical sketch of Arthur Garfield Hayes (born in our neck of the woods), taken from a column, “Jewry's Role in Human

**Continued on next page**

Advancement,” in the newsletter of the Society for Humanistic Judaism in Encino, California (I've added some additional information<sup>7</sup>). Hayes's life reveals deep values of social justice, as well as some contradictions—all part of Jewish history—and certainly is an example of biography worth presenting and discussing. The books he wrote could also be used in our adult study group.

Again, this is one example; at the membership meeting we should discuss others.

*Arthur Garfield Hays (1881-1954) was born in Rochester, New York. As co-counsel at the epochal Scopes “Monkey Trial,” he stood beside the eminent Clarence Darrow, together defending the right to teach Darwinian evolution in Tennessee's public high schools.*

*During his long career as a civil rights attorney, the Columbia Law School graduate was also at the epicenter of many of America's most turbulent legal storms. The personal fortune he earlier amassed representing major corporations later helped fund the numerous cases he litigated without charge.*

*From 1912 on, as general counsel of the American Civil Liberties Union, Hays tirelessly pressed legal action against bigotry, news censorship and other violations of freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. A major segregation-violence trial held in Detroit (1925) teamed him, once again, with Clarence Darrow. He vigorously, though vainly, defended two Italian immigrants in the notorious Sacco and Venzetti murder case (1921-27), falsely accused of a robbery and murder. And in 1931, he successfully argued against death penalties for the “Scottsboro Negroes” who were condemned to die in 1931 for allegedly attacking two white women.*

*Hays also participated in one of the most dramatic pre-World War II dramas: defending anti-Hitler activists against trumped-up charges against Georgi Dmitrov, a Bulgarian*

*Communist tried by Nazis in 1933 for burning the Reichstag. As a Jew forbidden to appear, Hays addressed the court through a German attorney, but his indirect presence shed light on the malice of Nazism. In a fitting postscript to the war's end, Hays worked with allies to rebuild Germany's democratic institutions.*

*He authored two novels, *Let Freedom Ring* and *Trial by Prejudice*, as well as an autobiography, *City Lawyer*.*

### **Israel and the Middle East**

Ah, Israel! The knotty issue there and throughout the Diaspora! As you can imagine, responses among SHJ congregations to this topic are vast—from silence to explicit statements that vary in support of Israel and an insistence on a withdrawal of the settlements and a just, two-state solution.

For Kol Haverim, as for other congregations within all forms of Judaism, the issue has been perceived as a potentially divisive, and any time it emerges, one can almost feel a tension emerging and the need to tread carefully. Nevertheless, although we do not speak in one voice, we must find a way to speak about Israel, to address its implications for our humanistic Judaic values, and not have differences damage our congregation.

One congregation that began dealing explicitly with the issue is The New York City Congregation for Humanistic Judaism. The Board's “Statement on the Middle East” is copied here as an example, rather than as an exemplary view. In making the statement, the Board noted that difficult as it was to devise, the Board believed “that the price of silence far outweighs the cost of healthy, ongoing debate.”

*We are all deeply concerned and affected by the current situation in the Middle East. Our emotional reactions run the gamut and include sorrow, rage, fear, confusion and hopelessness. Our thoughts go out especially to those members who are*

*particularly anxious about the safety of immediate relatives and friends who live in Israel. We are no less concerned about the lives of all people whose existence is in danger.*

*As a congregation, we face a challenge. Our individual political responses vary widely and defy expression in one voice. Nonetheless, the Board has wanted to issue a statement to the membership which, we hope, reflects fairly our various views on the situation.*

*First, we assert that Israel, no less and no more than any other nation-state, has the inalienable right to live in security and peace with its neighbors.*

*Second, we support the establishment of a free and independent Palestinian state alongside Israel with the same right to security and peace for the Palestinian people as for the Israelis.*

*Third, we condemn categorically all acts of terror perpetrated against Israeli civilians. We deplore any efforts to characterize terrorists as freedom fighters or martyrs. We regard these people as murderers.*

*Fourth, Israel's policy of constantly expanding Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza is a serious impediment to peace. We support the dismantling of settlements, to the extent necessary, in the effort of bringing peace to the region.*

*Fifth, we sympathize with Israel's rage at the terrorist attacks and we are conflicted about Israel's policy to respond militarily to these attacks with its own incursions into the Palestinian-governed territories. We worry that violence only begets more violence and breeds more hatred. We believe that only negotiations between honest brokers for peace will yield a just and lasting settlement.*

*Finally, as a congregation, we are committed to providing a forum for our members to express their divergent views on these matters and to engage in a respectful exchange of ideas. Most important, we believe*

that despite our differences we can draw strength from the fellowship of community and the comfort we bring to one another in these very difficult times.

### **A Madrikh(a) for Us Nomads?**

Kol Haverim, like our ancestors of old and most SHJ congregations, is at this time without a permanent home (i.e., shul). And unlike our ancestors who wandered the desert for decades, we have no Moses, nor any kind of rabbi. Nonetheless, although leader-less, we are an incredibly resourceful and creative group.

On the other hand, wouldn't it be nice to have someone who served as a rabbi-of-sorts? Someone, who had taken upon him- or herself to become deeply steeped in Judaism, who could lead key ceremonies, who could help us attain a better understanding of Judaism and what it means to live a life that expresses that heritage?

One option to consider is a Madrikh or Madrikha, someone who has studied humanistic Judaism and through the Secular Humanistic Judaism organization has become a Secular Humanistic Jewish "Leader."

The following is taken from the website of the International Institute for SHJ and provides an outline of the program to become a Madrikh(a). Anyone interested?

*The purpose of the Leadership Program is to develop professional leaders who serve the needs of the Secular Humanistic Jewish movement. The first program created by the Institute, graduates of the Leadership Program earn the title of Madrikh(a)/Vegvayzer/Leader, a Jewish professional who serves as a community guide, ceremonial officiant, philosophic counselor, educator, and movement spokesperson. Leaders serve the needs of their communities and the Jewish community in general in their area.*

*The required weekend seminars of*

*the Leadership Program are: Roots of Secular Humanistic Judaism, Basic Ideas of Secular Humanistic Judaism, Celebration of Jewish Calendar and Holidays, and Celebration of the Jewish Life Cycle. The required graduate seminars, offered during the summer, are: Jewish Education and Curriculum Planning, Leadership, Management, and Community, and Philosophic Guidance and Counseling. The elective seminars are any 100-level seminars in Jewish Culture, Jewish History, or Jewish Music.*

### **Deeper Connections with Our Communities**

Congregations differ in the extent to which they practice Tikkun Olam, healing the world, in their communities. Most, as far as one can tell from the newsletters, focus almost exclusively on ceremonies and events within the congregation, with minor participation in community events. But some appear to have taken steps toward involving the congregation in basic community issues such as affordable health care and housing. How should Kol Haverim participate in our community? Our Community Service Committee, chaired by Jonathan Joseph, has organized our participation in community marches and services (see Jonathan's report in this newsletter). How can we build on this?

An example of a step toward more extensive involvement is that of Kol Shalom in the Portland, Oregon area. Portland has a Metro Alliance for Common Good, and recently the Kol Shalom board recommended that congregation become an "observer with the Alliance." The following describes the Alliance and the present and possible future involvement of Kol Shalom.

*As an observer in the Alliance we can watch, listen and visit other groups, as well as train our individuals to help us decide whether to join the Alliance in its efforts toward more PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY and an enhanced CIVIL SOCIETY.*

*In last month's newsletter, Muriel Adler wrote about how the Alliance rose out of Saul Alinsky's Chicago based Industrial Areas Foundation. There are now 65 groups in the United States.*

*The Portland Metro Alliance began four years ago as an affiliation of churches with social concerns in the wider community. After two years, they hired a professional director with community organization experience, and membership was opened to secular groups.*

*Now the Alliance has over 40 organizations (including a mosque), having added unions, schools, and non-profit social organizations. Groups besides Kol Shalom that "observe" include the Rainbow Coalition, Jobs with Justice, and the Portland Association of Teachers.*

*Focus of the Alliance is on:*

- *Access to quality, affordable health care*
- *Public school funding*
- *Affordable housing*
- *Living wage jobs that sustain our environment*
- *A revised tax structure, adequate and equitable*

*So far, the Alliance's approach to the issues it has entered has appeared deliberate, savvy, and pretty effective.*

*Any Kol Shalom member may participate.*

### **Toward the Membership Meeting**

The suggestions in this special issue of the newsletter are, as I said, only some of what we will be discussing at our membership meeting. Please bring this newsletter with you—and please bring other ideas as well.

## A Closing Tale from Chelm (the Mythical Town of Yiddish Foolishness): A Moral for Our Time

A great calamity befell Chelm one day. The town cobbler murdered one of his customers. So he was brought before the judge who sentenced him to die by hanging.

When the verdict was read a townsman arose and cried out, "If your Honor pleases—you have

sentenced to death the town cobbler! He's the only one we've got. If you hang him who will mend our shoes?"

"Who? Who?" cried all the people of Chelm with one voice.

The judge nodded in agreement and reconsidered his verdict.

"Good people of Chelm," he said, "what you say is true. Since we have only one cobbler it would be a great wrong against the community to let him die. As there are two roofers in town let one of them be hanged instead."

The Finger Lakes Community for Humanistic Judaism is an Ithaca-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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