



Kol Haverim

The Finger Lakes Community for Humanistic Judaism

Affiliated with the Society for Humanistic Judaism

Newsletter #20

March 2004

Dear Friends,

A couple of Friday nights ago, we celebrated Tu B'Shvat at the Senior Citizen's Center. This was not a typical Tu B'Shvat. It was postponed from the week before because we expected a blizzard that didn't come. The service was written, actually re-written, by our resident author, Gerry Coles, who we expected would conduct the service as brilliantly as he has in the past. But Gerry came down with a severe cold and couldn't even attend. I was called to "moderate" a service that was unfamiliar to me.

Although I do a considerable amount of public speaking, I'll let you in on a secret: I always get a little nervous right before the event, and this was no exception. But I didn't have to be, for I was surrounded by my friends, faces that are becoming so familiar to me that they comforted me. The service went very well, despite small glitches here or there, and the fact that poor Caren, who worked so hard preparing everything, couldn't enjoy the service because of the demands placed on her by her very beautiful young child. But it didn't matter, for we were all absorbing the events together.

But the most glorious part of the service occurred after the service had ended. No, it wasn't the great food that makes the event so memorable in my mind, it was the conversation. Everyone was talking. We were talking to each other. It wasn't the typical "I hate the Ithaca weather talk" but it was how are you doing kind of talk. And we talked and talked and talked much later than ever before. I remember at some point looking around the room, listening to chorus of voices and feeling something stir deep inside me. I realized we are turning our group into a community, a community of Jews who share our common thoughts, our common aspirations. Kol Haverim has ascended from a group of people to become a real congregation of friends.

Best regards,

David Levitsky

Vice-Chairperson

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2003-04

Chairperson: Joan Joseph 257-5225 jejoseph105@yahoo.com	Vice-Chairperson: David Levitsky 272-5122 dal4@cornell.edu
Treasurer: Carl West 273-4879 cgwest@twcny.rr.com	Secretary: Jennifer Orleans Work: 273-5522 jorleans@usa.net
Past Chair: Barb Behrmann 272-5436 blbehrmann@aol.com	Member-at Large Alla Lukina 257-6592 ail@CBord.com
Programming: Caren Cooper 257-4231 cbc25@cornell.edu	Holidays: Mark Silverman 277-3345 dsilver@lightlink.com
Children's Education: Harry Segal Work: 255-6434 hgs2@cornell.edu	Community Services: Jonathan Joseph 277-9744 jj21@cornell.edu
Newsletter Committee Barbara Eden (Editor) 272-8595 beb1@cornell.edu Joan Joseph Alla Lukina	Social Action: Brian Eden 272-8595 bbe2@cornell.edu
Study Group Eric Mendelson 277-2114 mendelson@infoblvd.net	Membership: Deirdre Silverman 277-3345 dsilver@lightlink.com

You can find information about joining Kol Haverim at www.kolhaverim.net, or you can call 607-277-3345 and ask to have a membership form mailed to you.

Kol Haverim publishes a bi-annual newsletter in print and electronic form in August and March. News updates are published quarterly. The electronic version is free. The print version is free to members. To receive the electronic version send an email message to khnewsletter@yahoo.com, asking to be put on the e-mail list. For more information, e-mail the editor at khnewsletter@yahoo.com or leave a message at 607-277-3345.

Holiday Highlights



Harry Segal, Sunday School Director, lights Hanukkah candles as students Elias Zabusky, Emily and Rachel Behrmann and Hayley Segal watch

Passover

THIS PASSOVER join the Kol Haverim community for a great seder! Kol Haverim will host a humanistic family Passover seder, followed by a fully catered dinner on Saturday April 10, at 3 p.m. in the Auditorium at Kendal in Ithaca. Make your reservations NOW!

The Passover celebration includes a participatory family service, including both traditional and non-traditional songs accompanied by the live music of Trovalla. For children there will be supervised crafts, story telling, a dress-up musical parade as the "wandering tribe" and more. For everyone there will be all the traditional foods of the Passover seder, additional symbolic foods that are a part of the Humanistic Passover observance, as well as a gourmet buffet dinner.

Cost for members is \$25 per adult and \$12 for children residing at home (ages 3 and up).

Cost for Kendal residents is \$25 per adult.

Cost of non-members is \$30 per adult and \$15 for children (ages 3-18).

Cost for college students only \$15!

Free for those with individual or family all-inclusive Kol Haverim memberships.

To RESERVE your place at the seder table, send your check to Kol Haverim at P.O. Box 68, Ithaca, NY 14850 by March 27. Since this is a catered dinner, only pre-payment will confirm your reservation. (If you have an all-inclusive membership, please simply RSVP by March 27).

Please contact Mark Silverman at (607) 277-3345 for more information about the event.

Member News

David Levitsky has just become a grandfather for the first time.

Gerry Coles has a new granddaughter.

Kate and Tom Forest had a daughter on February 19. Her name is Leah Ruth.

Mazel Tov to David, Gerry, Kate, and Tom !!!

Sunday School News

This semester our children will explore Jewish cooking (and kosher laws), the different "flavors" of Judaism around the world and in history. The older children will be learning about the Holocaust, and we'll end in the spring taking up the hopes and wishes that Israel represented after World War II. We will consider the ways some hopes have been realized as well as the very difficult problems that have emerged. Although we've added several new students, there's always room for more! If you have a child from age 4 to 11 and you're thinking of our program, send me an email at hgs2@cornell.edu or give me a call at 255-6434.

Harry Segal, Sunday School Director

Caring Committee

By Dee Thaler

Illness, death, injury, moving, birth: these are among the many situations in our lives when help from others would be appreciated. As members of a Community we can assist those who need some special caring at difficult times as well as ask for help for ourselves. Happy occasions also deserve recognition – sending a mazal tov can be a simple way of showing we care.

Please let the Caring Committee know about members of Kol Haverim who we can help or recognize. Simply contact one of us with the information and we will do the rest. Remember, we always call people first to ask if they want our assistance.

We have appreciated the calls over the past few months to inform us about various situations. These calls are the only way that our Committee can function effectively. So please help the Committee show that our Community cares by calling:

Dee Thaler 272-5897

Mark Silverman 277-3345

Nancy Grossman 387-6580

Kate Forest 266-6471

Joan Joseph 257-5225

Social Action Committee

SHALom - Secular Humanist Action League



SHALom was formed to provide secular humanistic Jews with an organization similar to the American Friends Service Committee and the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. It was created as a nonprofit organization to develop community service institutions and to mobilize the progressive advocacy efforts of secular humanist Jewish congregations.

SHALom views its mission as fostering mutual regard and reconciliation, peace and freedom, democracy and equality, along with the development of a just and ecological socio-economic order.

SHALom intends to build upon the inspiration of previous work accomplished by the Society for Humanistic Judaism, Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations, and Arbeter Ring. Its founding Board of Directors is drawn from people in the Washington, D.C. area. The organization values community institutions and services that are operated democratically and cooperatively with all stakeholders, fostering personal and social empowerment, sustainable stewardship of the world's resources, promoting human diversity and multiculturalism, and advocating for progressive changes in the policies and practices of government, schools, and businesses.

Please contact Brian Eden for more detailed information on SHALom's mission statement and social action strategy.

Social Action Committee Report

Committee members have immersed themselves in a series of productive activities in the past several months. Rabbi Ben Biber from Machar in Washington, D. C. visited Kol Haverim in late November. This visit was sponsored by SHJ. Ben presented a talk "Beyond the Crusades: A Jewish Secular Humanist Approach to Peace" that was well attended by members and guests from the community. The following day Ben conducted a consultation with Kol Haverim members. We hoped to draw upon Ben's experience with Machar and SHJ to address some issues of interest to us such as continuing to attract new members while increasing the depth of experience of current members, increasing the sense of community at 4th Friday events, the relationship of cultural rituals to secular spirituality, leadership training, and outreach

to other local community groups. This interaction provided us with useful information for the Kol Haverim Board retreat that was held on January 23rd. Finally Ben met with interested members to discuss the goals and objectives of the soon to be established organization, SHALom (Secular Humanist Action League).

Kol Haverim celebrated a Peace Chanukah on December 21st. We focused our celebration on the grassroots efforts of Jews and Arabs in the Middle East to increase communication and promote trust in the interests of achieving peace in Israel/Palestine. Several members and invited guests spoke briefly on specific programs that fostered co-operation. We focused our discussions at the conclusion of the event on the privately negotiated peace agreement, the Geneva Accord.

During the subsequent 2 months, members have discussed opportunities for Middle East peace with other congregations and community groups in the Ithaca area. We hope to draw upon the interest generated by the initiative of Geneva to promote local community support for this promising co-operative effort. We have provided the membership with basic information and sample letters to our Congressional representatives.

Tu B'Shavat, the "Holiday of the Trees", is dedicated to preserving and advancing nature and life. We made available to members at our celebration of this event a sample letter to President Bush to urge him to reverse his decision to exempt the Tongass National Forest from the protections of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. The Tongass is the largest temperate rainforest in the world. The Roadless Rule prohibits road building and most commercial logging in the forest.

At the request of Machar's Social Action Committee, Kol Haverim passed a Board resolution in opposition to the proposed establishment of a District of Columbia School Voucher Program. Secular Jews have long supported our nation's system of public education and the principle of the separation of church and state. This resolution as well as many letters from individual members were forwarded to our Congressional representatives. Unfortunately this proposal was ultimately folded into the Consolidated Appropriations bill (H.R.2673) that was adopted by Congress on January 22nd and signed into law by President Bush on the following day.

Brian Eden

Membership Committee

We held a meeting for new members in early December. Gerry Coles renewed his membership. We've had good attendance by non-members at several events, and are discussing ways to follow up with people and get them more involved with Kol Haverim.

Deirdre Silverman

Member's Writings

On Community – the Real Anti-Depressant

By Eric Mendelson

Eric Mendelson gave this talk at Kol Haverim's Rosh Hashanah service on September 26, 2003 and offers it here again in print:

Before I started wandering the country, I grew up on Long Island, in Jericho, which is located in the middle of Nassau County 22 miles from Manhattan, just a few towns over from where car-centered suburbia was invented. When my family arrived in 1957, having left N.Y.C. for the frontier according to my grandmother, the only shop in Jericho was a general store and post office. This soon changed, of course, since Nassau was the fastest growing county in the nation during that time. As I look back on that time, my childhood, I don't think I got much sense of community from school, from my tiny cadre of friends, or from our temple, probably some from one of my extracurricular activities: altogether, though, no community feeling I can recall from the town of Jericho, even though it was somewhat smaller than Ithaca.

I realized, in thinking of what to share with you, that I instead got an experience of real community from the block of about 30 houses I grew up on, aptly named Village Drive. There was something that coalesced there that made it unusually neighborly and friendly, especially for bedroom-town-L.I. It was a single-side block on the edge of our "development," as residential areas are called there, whose woods across the street were cleared a few years later to build the Long Island Expressway about two hundred yards away. It was early suburbia, so it wasn't completely car-oriented yet, nor were people then as commonly career-focused as now, and we kids were free to wander as kids usually aren't today.

Adults much more often wandered, too, up and down the block, often visiting neighbors. My Dad spent heaps of time in our garage with its door wide open to the sidewalk and street, knocking around or working at his toolbench. Neighbors wandered by, and his garage became a Tool Loaner Center, although neighbors often had to coax them out of Dad. Mom's kitchen, too, was a meeting place, as were other kitchens. There were at least a couple of different visitors at our house every weekend or one of us visiting a neighbor. Between extended family and neighbors, it seemed somebody much of the time was visiting over coffee or phoning one another—to a degree I've experienced since only as a college student. These neighbors were there, with hardly any flux, my whole youth (and beyond). The Grants, the Shultzes, the O'Brians, the Pollacks, Kaufmans and others. To the last of the 43 years my parents lived there, there were a couple of neighbors who felt hurt if on one of my yearly visits from the West, I didn't visit them, too. I *still* hear news of those who're alive or of their kids.

I don't know just why Village Dr. came to feel like a genuine community—I'm told most other blocks in our development of W. Birchwood didn't—except that these participating Village Drivers wanted it to. Among these residents, among the quiet and the sociable alike, the obnoxious as well as the sweet, Jewish and gentile, all who wanted to were a part of this set, so I suppose I'm one of those children Senator Clinton spoke of villages raising.

Let me tell you *some* of what this memory means to me.

We all have some sense of what community is and the different forms it can take. Donna and I looked for quick etymologies of "community." They spoke of affiliation and helpfulness,

but emphasized a sense of sharing and intimacy with a group of others. Please pay attention to that phrase, “a sense of sharing and intimacy.” To me, those group feelings lead to a payoff: a feeling of belonging.

Many of us have some sense of such belonging with our families. But few Americans share that sense of community with our village of origin anymore, nor anywhere else in their mobile and shifting lives. This contrasts with much of the rest of the world where people still have at least one group that provides them that feeling of home—a home extending beyond their dwelling’s walls.

Contemporary Americans are usually pleased just to have a house that really feels like a home to them. Home ownership, after all, is a key part of most Americans’ definition of The Good Life. Maybe that’s why some of us put so much of ourselves into our houses and so little elsewhere. Still, too many Americans are left with a creeping discomfort with where they belong these days. In their heart of hearts, they yearn for somewhere they belong, a place “where everybody knows your name” as the Cheers song said, plus more, much more, in their connections with people. Deep down, most Americans know our consumption-crazed and individual rights-focused culture leaves them with an emptiness. Our health and mental health care industries have rightly identified depression as epidemic now, but they’ve medicalized it, seeking to quick-fix biochemically and individually what is often a group problem. I believe depression is at least as frequently connected to chronic, hidden feelings of displacement and isolation—a subtle brand of homelessness—as it is due to the medicalized causes we’re told. This condition is so common as to seem normal, but the lasting solutions lie in the group, not solo treatment. (Has anyone noticed any culture-wide *decrease* in depression and anxiety now that antidepressant medications have become America’s most frequently prescribed meds and since we shrinks have grown in number and popularity?) Americans yearn ever more for greater and more stable belonging, another sense of home, even if they don’t know that’s what they’re missing as they keep searching for something to fill their lives. All my experience and intuition tell me that a full experience of community can be a *lasting* healer as well as a teacher, a teacher of a fuller, saner, more humane version of The Good Life. That’s my prescription for a lasting slow fix for what ails us in our quick fix culture.

Robert Putnam documented in his book *Bowling Alone* an American decline of community which he argued was the true source of this democracy’s decline, too. It is not only of a source of broad unease, as I’m suggesting, it’s a source of alienation from our civic lives which is then a source of distrust, cynicism, and disgust. We look to favorite causes as the source of this malaise. For political conservatives, a decline in private morality or safety gets named, and for liberals, a lack of justice and fairness. But declined community? Genuine community’s an experience now so foreign to most Americans, it’s usually felt only fleetingly during crisis, like after 9/11, when people temporarily felt their group’s comfort, strength, and belonging. In this upcoming year of crucial presidential campaigning, when carefully polled, focus-grouped, and strategized appeals will soon fly fast and furiously, it’s worthwhile to consider Putnam’s extensive evidence of a more central source of the sorry state our society’s in.

Americans unknowingly yearn for the embrace of community, which may be the heart of most of our nostalgias and our vulnerability to the current political conservatism. There’s been little effort to rally people around genuine community. Maybe that’s because it’s hard for the Zeitgeist creators to sell products or energize constituencies using the community idea. Too abstract; too un-Horatio Alger; too slow. The popular panaceas—be they family, morality, tax cuts, Viagra, careerism, diversity, or a fatter cellular plan—are misguided cure-alls for this malaise and so, too, are many of our personal searches. I can’t tell you how many lost, neglected,

and lonely people I've sat with in my counseling work, some of them quite interpersonally active, who nonetheless need more than psychotherapeutic insight or catalysts. They need people *significantly* in their lives, and I don't mean only the one partner we usually search for: people meaningfully and securely in their lives, including people they don't happen to share an address with.

Someone who used to live in Ithaca with a good life niche here came back from a year of living in a Latin culture, where he'd lived with little material comfort yet with a wealth of personal community. When asked to summarize his experience abroad at a small gathering, he surprised us by sighing longingly, saying, "There's *got* to be a better way that'll work here than how we're living."

I'm convinced that whatever genuine ethical instincts I may have or skills for coexisting well with others and much of whatever internal security I may possess--I learned these from Village Drive as much as from my family or peers or therapists or teachers.

David Suzuki said, "How you imagine the world becomes how you live in it." I imagine Americans learning a deep, internalized sense of responsibility to one another, even those people they don't meet, an America where group health and societal health are as precious to us as is our individual health. I imagine a culture where Americans decide to trade some of our prosperity and much of our material consumption plus some of our compulsive individualism for belonging, really belonging, through committed action in behalf of their communities. Groups they perceive as their personal communities. I see local little communities not only as beneficiaries but as teachers of this new balance—we might call it a humanistic balance—that would be like those in some other cultures where communal behavior is valued and rewarded as much as is individual accomplishment. I dream of more of my neighbors, wherever I live, imagining community prominently, with Americans waking up to this ancient, yet hardly simple, solution.

Maybe you're wondering "What's this all have to do with me and to us tonight?" I'd be kidding myself if I claimed to know what each of you'll take from this schpiel, if anything. Bear in mind, though, that there's a reason people have been flocking toward religion in the U.S. and it isn't what they usually report; it is usually to find a meaningful-feeling connectedness to other people. We've been building one such community right here in Kol Haverim, which is intentionally aimed toward the best elements of community. Let's remember along the way that it really can only happen gradually and with communal effort. And that we have reasons to feel proud of this group and even lofty about its potential value.

I'll finish by saying that Village Drives can happen in lots of different places and ways. But it takes each of us *choosing* a community to belong to, *working* for it, and *nurturing* it ... plus making room in our all-too-busy lives to enjoy it, including making time to get loose and have fun together. Some time after choosing and nurturing community, I believe we'll wake up one day and find we have something unexpected, something mighty satisfying, which just may spread to other arenas of our lives and our society, too.

Caren Cooper on Community

Caren Cooper gave her talk at Kol Haverim's Rosh Hashanah service on Sept. 26, 2003.

I was very happy to be asked to speak here and to share my thoughts on community and connection as a relatively new member of KH. As I was thinking of what community means to me, I ran across a South African expression ... No, not the one about needing a village to raise a child ... I mean one that is less well known and more relevant to community. It is frequently translated as - "I am because we are."

I am because we are. To me that means that our existence as individuals only takes on meaning through our connections with others. To explain what this means to me, I'd like to tell you about growing up Jewish in the South - below the Mason-Dixon line.

When I was growing up, I was part of an imaginary, invisible Jewish community. This was in Chapel Hill, NC (which now has many, diverse Jewish communities) in the 70s and early 80s. My family is not from the South. I was born on Long Island, but we left when I was 5. So, the only Jewish community I knew was that which my parents and 3 older brothers would describe to me from when we lived in NY. In Chapel Hill, only on Rosh Hashana did we have a Rabbi come to our town and hold a service, in the high school auditorium, and then I saw Jews doing Jewish things ... and it was not quite how we did things at home, but close (at home I insisted on wearing a yarmulke on holidays just like my brothers). So, mostly my Jewish community was imaginary, and, like all imagined things, "my" Jewish community was terrific. It was ideal and provided a useful identity: an identify to help me and my brothers get through adolescence in a Southern Baptist, very hypocritical and conservative culture. With our "Jewish identity" came the message "it's OK to be different here, because you are different. THIS is NOT your community. Don't waste energy trying to fit in." This is an empowering message to any teen, because, I think all teens benefit by the realization that they don't need to fit in.

But, what was my community? When I left home, I was very hesitant to join any real (non-imaginary) Jewish community ... largely because I'd only seen "Jewishness" in my home and I had the nagging fear that my parents "made it all up." (Now that I've seen Seinfeld, I know they were totally honest). Sadly, when I have explored other Jewish communities, they have not been as great as my imagined one of childhood ... because there was always a narrow definition of what it meant to be Jewish and of what were or were not appropriate beliefs for a Jewish person ... or intolerance of my marriage to someone not Jewish. But, KH is like I imagined (except full of real people!). KH is like I imagined because in KH, I can explore and interpret my Jewish identity, culture, and history without losing (or worse, without hiding) my secular values. Also, I can give my children the option of a healthy secular Jewish identity, which they might find useful in life.

My point is this - only recently have I come to see that people best realize their individual potential through connecting with others, through identifying with a group, and by being an active part of a community - a community being an extension of family, where members have different opinions but still respect, care about, and nurture one another's potential as individuals. I see now that community does not destroy individuality; it makes it possible. Hence, the simple African expression, "I am because we are." At Rosh Hashana, when we each consider ways to improve ourselves as individuals, we should think hard about how much we benefit from our connections to those around us and what we can do to strengthen and support those connections

so that everyone reaches their potential. And we benefit as a group from that too because there is more to this African expression - it is not just "I am because we are." It concludes the other way: "We are because I am."



*The study group has been reading and actively discussing **NOTHING SACRED: The Truth About Judaism** by **Douglas Rushkoff**. This column is from his Web Site.*

Remember the Sabbath

An Argument in Favor of A Day Off

December 1999

I saw a television advertisement the other day, in which a young executive conducts a business meeting over a cellular phone - while standing at a urinal. When it comes time to zip up, he cradles his cell-phone on his shoulder and goes on talking. But then the phone slips out from under his chin, and tumbles - splash - you guess where. The answer to this dilemma, according to the ad, is a new "hands-free" cellular phone service.

The real answer, of course, is not to bring one's business into the bathroom.

But today, no place, and - more importantly - no time is sacred. In an internet-enhanced freemarket society, we are to be available to our business associates - through our mediating technologies - at any hour, day or night. We are "on call" 24/7, and consider ourselves to be beating the game if we've programmed our cell phone to ring with a unique melody, so that we don't reach into our coat pockets when someone *else's* phone happens to ring in the same restaurant.

Thanks to the way that technology accelerates and exacerbates nearly every cultural and economic trend, an increasing number of people, including me, are coming to the conclusion that our time, and by inference our lives, are no longer our own. We work six-days or more, usually answering work-related email well into the night, and then use our nominal "day off" to go to the mall and shop - or, if we're feeling particularly guilty, take our kids to a historic shopping center like New York's SouthStreet Seaport or Boston's Quincy Market instead. There, we buy products at a store with a name like "Ye Olde Kite Shop" instead of Toys-R-us, and rationalize that it's an educational, family activity.

We live in an age when online marketers measure human attention in quantities called "eyeball hours." Any moment spent thinking instead of spending, or laughing instead of working

is an opportunity missed. And the more time we sacrifice to production and consumption, the less any alternative seems available to us.

My radical proposal to combat the contraction of personal time has been borrowed from the book of Exodus, and it's called the Sabbath. What if we all decided that for one day each week, we would refrain from buying or selling anything. Maybe the ancients didn't pick the number seven out of a hat. Perhaps they understood that human beings can only immerse themselves in commerce for six days at a stretch before losing touch with anything approaching a civic, social, or spiritual reality.

Sabbath is a way to reclaim one's time and, as kiddie-television hero Mr. Rogers might tell us, celebrate that we are special, even sacred, just the way we are. We don't need to do anything to justify our existence. Not answer the phone, not go online, and not pull out the Visa card. It doesn't require that we retreat to the back woods, purchase generators, and live off the land - only that we find something to do with our friends or family that's not about money.

No, the ball game and movies don't count. Try playing ball in the park, or telling your own stories, instead. You might notice just how few public parks and community activities we have left.

If the Sabbath's religious overtones offend your secular humanist sensibilities, then call it the "one-seventh rule." Take back just one-seventh of your time.

I imagine it would throw America into a recession - as well as any other nation that has decided to adopt free market capitalism as its sole cultural imperative. It's not as if we'll get all that buying and selling done during the other six days. We already spend every waking minute doing that as it is. No, it would mean we would buy and sell one-seventh less stuff. And worse, once we get a taste of what that's like, shopping and spending might even lose some of its appeal. I can't imagine what that would do to the NASDAQ index. They'd call it a bloody revolution!

Is a whole day too much to ask? Okay, okay, then. Do it one step at a time. Just promise not to take the telephone into the bathroom.

News from the Society for Humanistic Judaism

SHJ, AHR Join in Support of Newdow Brief to Strike "Under God" from Pledge

In support of Dr. Michael Newdow's effort to have the phrase "under God" removed from the Pledge of Allegiance, The Society for Humanistic Judaism and The Association of Humanist Rabbis have co-sponsored one of seven amicus curiae briefs currently being submitted to the Supreme Court

"We are joining," said Rabbi David Oler, president of the AHR, "with The American Humanist Association, The Americans for Religious Liberty, The Humanist Society, The HUUmanists and others for what is essentially the Humanist Brief."

The case, Elk Grove Unified School District v. Michael A. Newdow (02-1624), is scheduled to be heard on Wednesday, March 24, 2004 at 11a.m. Cary Shaw, community relations co-chair for the CHJ of Fairfield County, Connecticut, expects to be in attendance.

"This event is the oral argument," said Shaw, "to see how the judges, having read the submitted documents from the parties, choose to quiz the various participants. Later they write their opinions (decision)."

According to Shaw, there are 119 seats for the press, 50 for the public. Whereas the press seats will be determined in advance, going first to the Washington press corps and then to other members of the press in the order their reservations are received, the public seats will be determined by a waiting line. "I'm told that people may line up two days in advance for a very interesting case," said Shaw, who will be attending on behalf of the *Westport News*.

What is needed to attend as press is a letter from the editor of a paper, on letterhead, saying:

To Edward Turner
Deputy Public Information Officer
United States Supreme Court

Please reserve a press seat for (name) for Docket Number 02-1624 Elk Grove Unified School District v. Newdow on Wednesday, March 24 at 11 a.m. The phone for contact is-----.

Fax it to 202-479-3388 and Mr. Turner will call back the same or next day. For further information, contact Shaw at Fresser25@aol.com or call the Court Public Information Office 202 479 3211 or check www.supremecourtus.gov.

Association of Humanistic Rabbis Takes Position in Support of Sexual Minorities

According to its president, Rabbi David Oler, The Association of Humanistic Rabbis (AHR), this past December, developed the following position statement in support of diverse sexualities and gender identities:

The Association of Humanistic Rabbis promotes the freedom, equality, and empowerment of all people, including those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). As human beings and as Jews, we are keenly aware of the injustices done by religious and secular laws that discriminate against minorities.

Because sexual minorities are widely denied equal protection under law, the Association of Humanistic Rabbis advocates for the full and equal legal status of LGBT people and families, in particular, civil rights and liberties, privacy, employment, residency, and citizenship rights, as well as familial rights relating to marriage or domestic unions and their dissolution, child custody and adoption, family insurance coverage, medical decisions and visitation, and inheritance and survivor benefits.

Because sexual minorities have been and are now subject to violence and bigotry - as have Jews and many other groups in various times and places - the Association of Humanistic Rabbis supports efforts to reduce and end all types of discrimination, harassment, and hate crimes. Thus, we promote legal reform linked to crime prevention and enforcement, as well as progressive educational and social change in both the public and private spheres.

Because the Association's members strive to serve all the couples that seek out our services with a sensitive, open-minded, and respectful approach to human diversity, we therefore resolve that each member of the Association of Humanistic Rabbis is free and encouraged to perform weddings or commitment ceremonies for same-sex couples, as well as to sign legal marriage licenses or civil union registrations for them wherever such legal documents are available.

Because the Association of Humanistic Rabbis celebrates the range of contributions that LGBT persons make to our movement, as lay members and leaders as well as teachers and rabbis, we invite all lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and their families who are

attracted to Humanistic Judaism to become active members in our communities and our movement.

SHJ Announcements

HELP WANTED

Counselors for Camp Keshet

Must be 18 years or older, knowledgeable about Humanistic Judaism, and love spending time with children.

When: July 9-20, 2004

Where: Port Huron, Michigan Contact Rabbi Tamara Kolton
rabbikolton@birminghamtemple.org

**BE SAFE, NOT SORRY: DON'T BE LEFT OUT
REGISTER NOW BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE
FOR THE TEEN CONCLAVE
OR THE YOUNG ADULT PROGRAM**

Friday-Sunday, April 16-18, 2004 in Toronto, Ontario

Renew old friendships. Kindle new ones.

SEE info@shj.org FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

SHJ Conference 2004*Humanistic Judaism:**Balancing Creativity and Continuity*

Friday-Sunday

April 16-18, 2004

in Toronto, Ontario

Questions? Contact SHJ at 248-478-7610

or info@shj.org

SHJ Conference 2004 — Conference-at-A-Glance

Humanistic Judaism: Balancing Continuity and Creativity

April 16-18, 2004

Ramada Hotel and Conference Centre – Toronto, Don Valley

185 Yorkland Blvd., Toronto, ON, Canada M2J 4R2

Time	Event	Speaker/s
Friday, April 16th		
6:00-7:30pm	KABBALAT SHABBAT DINNER	Rabbi Kai Eckstein
7:30-8:00pm	SHJ Board Installation followed by dessert	
8:00-8:40pm	Shabbat Program	Rabbi Adam Chalom & Karen Levy
8:40-9:30pm	Keynote Speeches	Cantor: Deborah Davis Rabbi Peter Schweitzer Teen: Lanny Mandel
9:30-?pm	Socializing, Kumzits	

Saturday April 17th		
6:55-7:45am	Walk with the Founding Rabbi	Rabbi Sherwin Wine
7:00-8:45am	BUFFET BREAKFAST and Book Sale	
7:00-8:45am	Association of Humanistic Rabbis Breakfast Meeting	
9:00-10:30am	Modern Midrash: The Red Tent and Beyond	Rabbi Adam Chalom
	Intermarriage: Threat or Opportunity?	Rabbi Miriam Jerris

	Inside the Media	Bob Rosenblatt ??
	Enriching Discussions in Book Clubs and Classrooms	Harriet Maza
10:45am- 12:15pm	Literary Approaches to Biblical Narrative	Barry Olshen
	Curses, Catchwords and Claptrap - Yiddish for the Heart	Gloria Brumer
	Adapting/Adopting Traditional Resources for Our Schools	Karen Levy
	Focusing on Local Fundraising	Bert Steinberg
12:15- 1:15pm	BUFFET LUNCH and Book Sale + Educators' Round Table + Grassroots discussion table: "Enhancing the sense of personal meaning and inspiration in congregational life," moderated by Cary Shaw	
1:30-3:00pm	Classical Text Study for Humanistic Jews: The Midrash	Rabbi David Oler
	Setting up a Complete Music Program for a Full Service Congregation	Deborah Davis
	Teaching the Holocaust	Barry Swan
	Volunteers: The Loneliest People in the World	Rabbi Miriam Jerris

Saturday April 17th Continued

3:15-4:45pm	Use of Poetry in HJ Celebrations	Rabbi Kai Eckstein
	If Not Now When? The Years After 65	Act II Studio
	Grant Writing	Bonnie Cousens
	Performance-based Learning	Harriet Maza
4:45-6:30pm	Time for nap, swim, break, book table sales	
5:00-6:00pm	Food for Thought: Conversation with Rabbi Wine	Rabbi Sherwin Wine
6:30-7:00pm	HAVDALA CELEBRATION	Deb Godden
7:00-8:00pm	DINNER	
8:30-9:30pm	CONCERT – Aelita	
9:30pm -	Kumzits, socializing, NOSH	

Sunday April 18th

6:55-7:45am	Walk with the Founding Rabbi	Rabbi Sherwin Wine
9:00-10:30am	Guide for the Perplexed: Was Maimonides an Atheist?	Eva Goldfinger
	How a Congregation Can Use a Website to Further Its Goals	Bob Cherniak
	Getting and Keeping Members	Panel – Bob Ginsberg with Cary Shaw and Bert Moldow

	Creating a Model for an Activist Caring Community	Rabbi Ben Biber
10:45-12:45pm	Public Plenary: "The Middle East: Is There a Humanistic Jewish Response?"	Rabbi Sherwin Wine
12:45-2:00pm	Lunch, Farewells	
5:00pm	Second City Dinner and Show (\$40 US – Optional)	

Monday April 19th		
9:00am-5:00pm	Toronto Tour (\$75 US – Optional)	

Full details are now available on the SHJ website: www.shj.org

Conference Fees:

Adults: \$295 or \$250 early bird (hotel accommodations not included)

Young adults: \$185 or \$165 early bird (includes shared hotel accommodations)

Teens: \$185 or \$165 early bird (includes shared hotel accommodations)

Conference Hotel:

Ramada Hotel and Conference Centre, Toronto - Don Valley, 185 Yorkland Blvd., 1-800-567-8500, www.ramadadonvalley.com. Contact the Ramada Hotel directly for room reservations and ask for the SHJ Conference.

The special conference discounted nightly room rate (in Canadian Dollars) is \$110 CAN/room/night (single or double) (about \$88 US). Suites are available at a higher rate (\$195/CAN/night).

Make your reservations early. This special conference rate is available for any seven days including the conference dates. Hotel room rates and availability are guaranteed through March 25, 2004. After March 25, rooms are on a space available basis.

Discussion within Kol Haverim

Editors note: At the March 2004 Board meeting the KH Board voted on three letters to send out to our representatives in the State and National Government.

- 1. Increase the living wage in New York State: Letters sent to our State senators.*
- 2. Resolution supporting the Geneva Accord: Letters sent to our US Senators*
- 3. Protecting Tongass National Forest: Letters sent to our US Senators and Congressional Representative*

The letter supporting the living wage and Tongass will be signed by our membership

The letter supporting the Geneva Accord will only have signatures of those in favor of as members of Kol Haverim.

Hi Everyone,

By now most of you probably know that Elaine and I seem to be the only ones who disapprove of a proposition using the name of Kol Haverim to approve of the Geneva Accords. It is my contention that while we are a humanist group and should support humanist goals. I feel that the Geneva Accord is POLITICAL and so I most strongly oppose lending Kol Haverim's name to it. But more to the point. In principal, Kol Haverim's name should only be used if EVERYONE in the group approves. It is perfectly acceptable, indeed proper, for members to express their personal feelings, but it is not acceptable to use the name of the organization if anyone in the organization disapproves. If a group, any group, decides that the majority can use the name of the group for what they feel is correct, then they will lose their minority. The group will become a tight knit group of like minded people. That does not sound to me like a humanistic value.

If you want to know why I disapprove, I would be glad to discuss it with you. My e-mail address appears at the end of this message.

As for the proposition concerning minimum wage, while I feel that raising the minimum wage will not do anything for those on minimum wage, except increase unemployment by sending even more jobs overseas, I am not against raising the minimum wage. If the organization wishes to use our name to support it, I would go along and would lend my name to it if there is no other opposition but mine. However, I think that a better approach than raising the M.W. would be to pressure Congress to repeal Bush's tax cut, raise the maximum income for people paying into Social Security from \$87,000 to \$500,000 and to exempt any family earning less than \$25,000 from paying any income tax.

As for the proposition concerning roads through the forest. While I agree with the proposition, I would only want it sent out in the name of Kol Haverim if there is no opposition to it by any member.

Regards to the congregation,

Bill Baum billbaum@mindspring.com

Response from the Social Action Committee

In response to the concerns of Kol Haverim members Bill and Elaine Baum, the Social Action Committee would like to share with everyone its previously defined purpose and goals. Last year, the Board unanimously approved the mission statement for the Social Action Committee, which explains that we “actively seek positive social change and justice for all communities. The Social Action Committee tries to identify and propose specific actions to affirm our intrinsic responsibilities as Jews and as Humanists. The committee undertakes efforts of community building, educational outreach activities, and drafting advocacy/position statements for the Board.” (You can view the complete mission statement as well as some of our past and upcoming activities on the web at www.kolhaverim.net).

Recently, the Social Action Committee has worked in the areas of separation of church and state (e.g., opposing school voucher programs), human rights (e.g., supporting the Living Wage Coalition, sponsoring the up-coming anti-Semitism workshop), and peace and justice (e.g., supporting Middle East peace efforts). We have received feedback from the membership to expand Kol Haverim’s involvement in immigrant issues and reproductive rights. We intend to follow suggestions from the membership and encourage members to attend our monthly Social Action meetings.

Article VI of the Kol Haverim By-Laws explains the purpose and functioning of the Social Action Committee (though it is called Ethical Action in the By-Laws, and at the time they were written, the organization was called the Finger Lakes Community for Humanistic Judaism, or FLCHJ). Rabbi Sherwin Wine helped the founding Kol Haverim members draft these By-Laws. The relevant By-Laws consist of the following 3 sections:

Section 1: For purposes of this Article, "political action" or "ethical statement" shall mean any effort to urge public officials or the general public to a particular course of action relating to issues as explained below. Any action or statement made will focus on these issues, not on a political party or official.

Section 2: FLCHJ may take ethical and political positions relating to issues that concern Humanistic Judaism. For example, FLCHJ may take positions on issues involving human rights and the separation of church and state.

Section 3: Any member of FLCHJ may bring an issue to the ethical action committee. Any political action or ethical statement representing FLCHJ shall be proposed by the ethical action committee and taken to the Board of Directors for discussion. Such political actions or statements shall be voted on by the board and approved by a two-thirds majority vote of the board.

While the Social Action Committee makes its recommendation in accordance with the majority sentiment expressed in member feedback, the Board can consider other factors in its decision of whether or not Kol Haverim should endorse a position statement. For example, the Board may decide to vote against endorsements that are divisive for the group, despite an overwhelming majority in favor. The Social Action Committee has a firm commitment to democratic principles and would like the membership to support democratic values. We encourage members to express their views, but hope that members will not attempt to exert disproportionate influence on the Board in order to prevent the wishes of the majority from being realized. One of the most important aspects of a Humanistic Jewish community is our potential to be effective by expressing our solidarity through group effort.

Calendar of Events

What	When	Where	Notes
Panel discussion on intermarriage	Friday March 26, 6pm	Tompkins County Senior Council (119 W.Court St, Ithaca)	Dish-to-pass dinner
Passover Seder	April 10, 3pm	Auditorium at Kendal in Ithaca	More info on page 3
Introduction to Humanistic Judaism program	April, date TBA	TBD	
Yom Hashoah	April 23	Tompkins County Senior Council	
Visitor from NYC-based Jews For Racial and Economic Justice to speak about the Immigrant Justice Campaign and to hold an anti-Semitism/anti-racism workshop	May, date TBA	Tompkins County Senior Council	
Annual membership meeting	June 13, 5:30pm	Tompkins County Senior Council	Light dinner provided
Summer socials	June, July, August		