



# Kol Haverim

**The Finger Lakes Community for Humanistic Judaism**

Affiliated with the Society for Humanistic Judaism

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Newsletter #21

September 2004

Dear Friends,

As I write this, it is a breezy Ithaca afternoon, and the sun is shining on the trees, illuminating the deep green leaves but also catching the first highlights of red that herald the start of autumn. It is a time for fresh beginnings for all of us — the new school year is underway, Rosh Hashanah has marked the renewal of another cycle of Jewish celebrations, and I have entered in to my first year as Chairperson of Kol Haverim. I look forward to helping our Community grow and thrive this year, in whatever ways that you, members of Kol Haverim and participants in Kol Haverim programs, would like to see.

I believe strongly in our group and what we have to offer. Kol Haverim is a community which has offered me the opportunity to find connection to people who share a commitment to a humanistic Jewish identity, to explore the multiple meanings of that identity, and to experiment with different ways to share that identity with others. Importantly, Kol Haverim has also provided a community in which my children have been able to develop a strong identity as Jews; it made it possible for my son Antal to begin his journey to adulthood through a humanist Bar Mitzvah that could only have happened in the context of a group like ours. For that, I am deeply grateful, and it is in part to return that debt that I agreed to serve as Chairperson this year.

As many of you know, I was away for most of the summer, traveling with my family in Japan, but everyone on the Board here in Ithaca kept things going so that we can all jump right in to a year of exciting events, including holiday celebrations and many fascinating programs. I hope you will all take the time to look over this Newsletter to see the range of things we are trying to do — it is truly an amazing array of activities for a community as small as ours!

Many of you have already spent so much time and energy making things happen in our Community, whether through organizing community service outings, educational programs, social action events, or holiday celebrations, and I invite those of you who have not yet taken a leadership role to try it! I hope you will consider joining us in planning and implementing events and activities; by working together, we deepen our understanding of and connection to others, and we become stronger as a community. Let's spread the word, too, about what we are doing and what we have to offer — invite people you know to join us at our events and activities, let families know about our wonderful Sunday School program, and encourage others to become members of our Community so that Kol Haverim can continue to flourish.

I look forward to seeing you soon at our upcoming fall programs, and throughout the year at all our activities and events.

Shalom Haverim,

Stacia Zabusky

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2004-05**

<b>Chairperson:</b> Stacia Zabusky 277-7949 stacia@clarityconnect.com	<b>Vice-Chairperson:</b> Jennifer Orleans 273-5522 jorleans@usa.net
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<b>SHJ Rep:</b> Barb Behrmann 272-5436 Blbehrmann@aol.com	<b>Membership:</b> Open seat
<b>Programming:</b> Caren Cooper 257-4231 cbc25@cornell.edu	<b>Holidays:</b> Mark Silverman 277-3345 psy4510000@yahoo.com
<b>Children's Education:</b> Harry Segal 255-6434 hgs2@cornell.edu	<b>Community Services:</b> Kate Forest 266-6471 Kforest@mindspring.com
<b>Newsletter:</b> Barbara Eden (Editor) 272-8595 beb1@cornell.edu	<b>Social Action:</b> Brian Eden 272-8595 bbe2@cornell.edu

Kol Haverim publishes a bi-annual newsletter in print and electronic form in September and March. 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](mailto:khnewsletter@yahoo.com), asking to be put on the email list. For more information, email the editor at [khnewsletter@yahoo.com](mailto:khnewsletter@yahoo.com). Our mailing address is Kol Haverim, P.O. Box 4972, Ithaca, NY 14852-4972.

You can find information about joining Kol Haverim at [www.kolhaverim.net](http://www.kolhaverim.net), or you can call 607- 277-7949 and ask to have a membership form mailed to you.

### **Don't Forget...**

to get those Membership forms and dues in to our Treasurer as soon as possible. We've established a deadline of October 1 this year for membership renewals for the 2004-2005 year. If we don't hear from you by that date, we'll have to take you off our Member e-mail list, and the national Society for Humanistic Judaism will also remove you from their roster. Don't let this happen to you! Stay connected to us and have a voice in important group decisions, get the benefit of discounted admission prices at

many of our events, and continue to receive the *Humanorah*. If you have misplaced your form, you can find one on our website, [www.kolhaverim.net](http://www.kolhaverim.net) - and note that we have a new mailing address, too!

## **UPCOMING KOL HAVERIM Holiday and Program Events**

### **September 2004**

Saturday, September 25 - Yom Kippur Break-Fast Potluck

### **October 2004**

Saturday, October 2 – Sukkot Celebration at Little Tree

Monday, October 4 – Jewish and Muslim Israeli Women Speak Out for Peace at Ithaca College

Friday, October 15 – Potluck Program: Secular Humanism in Different Traditions

Sunday, October 17 – Welcome luncheon for new and prospective members

Friday, October 29 – Potluck Program: A Secular Jew in Austria on the Eve of WWII

### **November 2004**

Friday, November 12 – Community Sharing Evening

### **December 2004**

Sunday, December 12 - Peace Chanukah

#### **Yom Kippur, Saturday evening, September 25 at 7 PM**

This evening will start with a time for reflection and discussion followed by a break-the-fast potluck meal at a member's home. You don't need to fast in order to come eat with us, however! This event is free for members and there is a \$3 charge for non-members. Space is limited; please contact Harry Segal at [hgs2@cornell.edu](mailto:hgs2@cornell.edu) to reserve a space and/or to get more information.

#### **Sukkot Celebration, Saturday, October 2, at 11am**

The Jewish holiday of Sukkot is a traditional celebration of the harvest. As in years past, Kol Haverim will observe this ancient holiday at the beautiful, bucolic Little Tree Apple Orchard where the entire orchard can be our Sukka. Come gather with us. We will meet at the picnic area for a brief service together, and then enjoy a brown bag picnic lunch and pick apples. If it's a cold day, we can even have a camp fire. Friends and guests are welcome!

Little Tree is located at 345 Shaffer Road in Newfield. Stop at the main building, tell them you're with Kol Haverim, and ask where the picnic area is. (Pick up an empty bag or two while you're there to use for apple-picking.) For directions to Little Tree, please call them at 564-9246.

There is a rain date of Sunday, October 3, at 12:30.

Any questions, please contact Barb Behrmann at 272-5436 ([Blbehrmann@aol.com](mailto:Blbehrmann@aol.com)). We hope to see you there!

### **Jewish and Muslim Israeli Women Speak out for Peace at Ithaca College, Monday, Oct. 4**

Kol Haverim is pleased to be joining with the Jewish Studies program at Ithaca College to co-sponsor this educational program, a joint lecture by two female Israeli academics and peace activists. The visit is part of a speaking tour put together by the international group Faculty For Israeli Palestinian Peace (FFIPP). Both speakers — Safa Abu-Rabia, a Palestinian-Arab and Bedouin, and Hannah Safran, a Jewish Israeli — are actively engaged in struggles for women's equality, coalition-building, and peaceful coexistence in Israel.

At 4 pm (in Emerson A) -- the two women will speak on their respective experiences as Jewish and Muslim women in Israel during an open session of Prof. Barbara Johnson's class "Israel: Ethnicity, Politics, and Culture"

At 7:30 pm (in Emerson B) -- A larger public lecture by both women on women's coalition-building for peace in Israel-Palestine.

Both events are free and open to the public. For more information, please contact Aron Gutman, IC Hillel, 277-0573 agutman@ithaca.edu

### **Shabbat Program: Secular Humanism in Different Cultures, Friday Oct 15**

Panel members include human-rights and women's-rights activist fatemolla (his pen name), who works to spread Secular Humanism in the Islamic world; and secular humanists from other traditions. The program will be held at Life Long Center (formerly the Senior Council) 119 W. Court St, Ithaca. Potluck dinner at 6pm; panel begins at 7:30pm followed by a dessert reception.

### **Fall Luncheon Planned to Welcome New and Prospective Members, Sunday, October 17 at 12:15pm**

A small committee is pulling together a special event to introduce Kol Haverim and Humanistic Judaism to new members and to people who have expressed interest in our community. Over a catered lunch, we will talk about our group and all its activities (from Sunday School to Shabbat programs, holidays, social justice and community service activities, and more). We invite our current members to join us at this orientation, to welcome and meet prospective and new members. The event will be held at Life Long Center in downtown Ithaca. For more information contact Barb Behrmann at 272-5436, or Blbehrmann@aol.com.

### **Shabbat Program: A Secular Jew in Austria on the Eve of WWII, Friday Oct 29**

Following a potluck dinner, Cornell Astronomy professor Ed Salpeter will talk about growing up as a secular Jew in Austria during the Nazi era; he will also give his views on a range of current topics including Israel, Bush, and fascism today. The program will be held at Life Long Center (formerly the Senior Council) 119 W. Court St, Ithaca. Potluck dinner at 6pm; presentation begins at 7:30.

### **Shabbat Program: Community Sharing, Friday Nov 12**

Starting at 7pm, several Kol Haverim members will briefly share their hobbies, skills, and interest. Currently the list includes Deirdre and Mark Silverman talking about their recent trip to Cuba; Barb Behrmann discussing her new book, *The Breastfeeding Cafe*; Harry Segal and daughter Haley playing jazz; and Carol Bloomgarden and Gordon Bonnet showing why they were recently added to the Ithaca Art Trail. The program will be held at Life Long Center (formerly the Senior Council) 119 W. Court St, Ithaca. Pot-luck dinner at 6pm, followed by presentations.

## **Peace Chanukah Sunday Dec. 12**

We'll again have an event fun for kids and of interest to adults. We'll light the candles to celebrate Chanukah, and to honor the important theme of co-existence; we'll hear the kids share stories about their connections with the bilingual, multicultural school in Israel; and we also hope to feature some local speakers with recent first-hand accounts of peace efforts in Israel. The event will begin at 2pm at the Unitarian Church in Ithaca.

For information on non-holiday Programs, contact Caren Cooper at [cbc25@cornell.edu](mailto:cbc25@cornell.edu). For information on holiday Programs, contact Mark Silverman at [psy4510000@yahoo.com](mailto:psy4510000@yahoo.com).

## ***COMMITTEE NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS***

### **Adult Study Group**

Our little group, which meets on weekday evenings every 2-3 weeks, is quite open to new people. Come check out our informal, free-ranging discussion (based on a couple of chapters read at a time on our own & discussed at our meetings) and see if you might like to read, gab, & shmooze with us! Our learning is casual and follows wherever our curiosities take us. Our next book to read is: *The new anti-semitism : the current crisis and what we must do about it* by Phyllis Chesler. If you are interested in more information and possibly joining, call Barbara Eden in the evening until 9pm at 272-8595.

### **Children's Education Committee**

Kol Haverim's Sunday School has just begun its fifth year! We offer education in Jewish culture, history, literature, and music while helping children to develop ethical values and critical thinking. Beginning this fall, we are starting a new Sunday School project, as our older children become pen-pal correspondents with students at the Galil School in Israel. This project will give our Sunday School students the opportunity to correspond with Arab and Israeli students attending a school which operates according to values of peaceful coexistence. (For more information on the Galil School and this project, see the article by Caren Cooper below.)

The Sunday School welcomes children from 4 years to 10 years old in our regular classes, and children 11-14 in our Bar/Bat Mitzvah classes. We meet biweekly at the Lifelong Center, 119 Court Street (between Cayuga and Geneva), from 10:15am - 12:00noon. Tuition is \$100.00 per semester per child for Member families, and \$140.00 per semester for Non-member families.

For more information, email Sunday School Director Harry Segal, [hgs2@cornell.edu](mailto:hgs2@cornell.edu), or leave a message at 255-6434.

### **Community Service Committee**

The Community Service Committee of Kol Haverim is organizing a group to walk together in the annual Ithaca Crop Walk this year. Both adults and children are welcome to join us. This event is organized to "Defeat" Hunger, locally and globally. By collecting sponsors and participating in the walk, we can help raise funds for local food pantries and food assistance programs throughout the U.S.; about 25% of the money we raise is put to use right here in Tompkins County. Please plan to join or sponsor our group; contact Kate Forest at 266-6471 or [kforest@mindspring.com](mailto:kforest@mindspring.com).

Walk date: Sunday October 24th, 2004 at 2:00 p.m. from DeWitt Park, Downtown Ithaca  
Mini-Concert by Jan Nigro & the Vitamin L Chorus

### **Holiday Committee**

Our committee is charged with organizing meaningful holiday events so that we can share our Jewish heritage together. The fall's holidays include: Rosh Hashanah (adult and family service), Yom Kippur, Sukkot (October 2), and our Peace Chanukah celebration (December 12). In the spring, we hope to have celebrations of Tu B'Shevat (celebrated on January 28), Purim (celebrated on March 25), our annual Passover seder (celebrated on April 30), and Yom Hashoah (celebrated May 6). But to do this, we need help! At the moment, we still need organizers and/or committee members to pull together each of these spring holiday celebrations. Without your help, we cannot make this happen. To get involved, please contact Mark Silverman at 277-3345, psy4510000@yahoo.com.

### **Social Action Committee**



The Social Action Committee held a planning retreat at the Silverman's on August 7<sup>th</sup>. We decided to focus our efforts on supporting those Israelis and Palestinians committed to coexistence. Two educational programs have been scheduled and are discussed elsewhere in this newsletter.

The Ad-Hoc Committee on Social Action is meeting on Tuesday October 12<sup>th</sup>. The Committee is developing guidelines for the taking of political positions as an organization (see the Annual Meeting Highlights for more information on this Committee).

We received a letter from Harvey Fireside of the Tikkun v'Or Social Action Committee suggesting that our congregations more effectively communicate to maximize joint participation in future progressive events. We encourage your participation in our committee and in the planning of social justice programs. Please contact me at bbe2@cornell.edu.

### **Sunday School Creates Links with Multicultural School in Israel by Caren Cooper**

*This piece was published in the Ithaca Journal on September 11, 2004*

This year, the children in our Sunday School are making new friends with the sixth- and seventh-graders at the Galil School in northern Israel. At the Galil School, Jewish- and Arab-Israeli students are taught together, learning each others' languages and cultures. Our students will become pen pals with the students at the Galil School; they will exchange pictures, share poetry and art on our website, and possibly work on a joint project on a theme that emerges as a common interest among the students.

Multicultural education in Israel is a learning strategy that has sprung from the enduring co-existence movement. The Galil school provides public education to Arab- and Jewish-Israeli elementary students. The faculty is comprised of both Muslim and Jewish teachers. All students learn Arabic and Hebrew. All students learn about Muslim and Jewish traditions and culture. The school days are Sunday through Thursday in order to accommodate the Sabbath of both religions. The most important thing about the school is that it provides an opportunity for Muslim and Jewish kids to become friends. They become real, complex, multi-dimensional people to each other ... so that each can never be reduced to a stereotype or de-humanized enemy.

The first and most well known multicultural school in Israel is at Oasis of Peace, a co-existence community where Jewish- and Arab-Israelis live and work together. Unlike the school at Oasis of Peace, the families who send their children to the Galil school are not necessarily neighbors. To make it more complex, they all live close to the 1967 Green Line, the proposed boundary for a Palestinian state. But what really makes the Galil school in Israel so remarkable is that it ought not be remarkable. Unfortunately, this type of school is one of a handful like it in Israel. The uniqueness of the Galil school demonstrates how far there is to go on the path toward peace in the Middle East. Its uniqueness can also remind us to not abandon those who work toward co-existence, especially while extremists attempt to destroy that future.

We hope that forging these connections between the Kol Haverim and Galil students will teach our kids to think beyond stereotypes and to become committed to peace efforts in Israel and the rest of the world.

## *Recent Events*

### **Rosh Hashanah Observance**

Wednesday evening, September 15, at the Cayuga Nature Center  
submitted by Stacia Zabusky

On a warm and clear fall evening, about 35 members and friends of Kol Haverim gathered together for our 6<sup>th</sup> annual observance of Rosh Hashanah, organized for the third year in a row by Nancy Grossman and Stacia Zabusky. We were especially pleased to welcome several new people to our celebration this year. The service included shared reading, poetry, singing, eating apples, challah and honey, and of course the stellar shofar-blowing of Don Swanson. The evening's service — and especially the group singing — was further enhanced by the musical accompaniment of members Carol Bloomgarden and Gordon Bonnet, along with their musical colleague Mia Boynton (a well-known local musician based in Spencer). Two Kol Haverim members also provided personal commentary and reflection during the service on the theme of Community and Connection: long-time member Harry Segal reminisced about some important personal connections he has to past and present neighbors in his community, and member Federica Manetti reflected on the complexities involved in finding and sustaining community in America as a child of immigrants and a partner in an interfaith marriage (Federica's commentary is included in the Member's Forum section of the newsletter). Following the service, everyone enjoyed lively conversation and a delicious spread of sweets and savories — there was everything from stuffed grape leaves to honey cake, coleslaw to rugelach. As usual, we ran out of time (although we didn't run out of food!), and even as a small crew started putting away chairs and cleaning up, many people clustered together, clearly reluctant for their conversations to come to an end. It was a wonderful start to the new year, and we look forward to connecting with our members and friends at future Kol Haverim events.





### **Rosh Hashanah Family Service**

Saturday morning, September 18, at the Cayuga Nature Center  
submitted by Caren Cooper

On September 18, twenty children and their parents celebrated Rosh Hashanah at a family service held at the Cayuga Nature Center. Caren Cooper and Mark Silverman collaborated in organizing this event. As people were arriving, children decorated their plates in anticipation of the symbolic foods to come. The service was very lively thanks to Emily and Rachel's mom, Barb Behrmann, and Bronwyn Galloway's aunt Karen leading the songs. Young Sarah Skrovan lit the candles. All the children tossed bird seed outside as part of the Tashlikh ceremony...and some of the more mischievous kids threw extra seeds out to toss away all their extra bad deeds! Mark Silverman read — performed, really! — several interactive stories that had the kids following along with everything from pretending to make challah dough to blowing different sounds from the shofar. Sarah Swanson's dad, Don, did a tremendous job blowing the real shofar. Abby's mom, Caren Cooper, baked a big round challah and chocolate velvet honey cake for everyone to enjoy (and Matthew Skrovan picked up every last crumb from that tray). Of course, everyone ate apples dipped in honey and munched carrots and pomegranates. Special thanks to Abby Cohn and John Skrovan for helping clean up while the kids explored the eight-story tree house (thanks to all the parents watching the children out there!). We're all ready for a great new year!



## Summer Picnic at Stewart Park, August 22, 2004

We gathered at the small pavilion and enjoyed a sunny day!!



## Social Action Events

submitted by Brian Eden

On May 7<sup>th</sup> several members participated in a Community Unity Walk. The objective of this event was to demonstrate unity in response to several recent race-related events in Ithaca. It was also an opportunity for Kol Haverim to establish better communications with local individuals and groups across lines of race and religion.

Jews for Racial and Economic Justice is a group organizing to address racial and ethnic tensions in New York City. JFREJ has worked to improve working conditions, to establish a living wage, and to support a more fair criminal justice system. It facilitated two workshops for Kol Haverim. On Friday, May 14<sup>th</sup> there was a presentation on the Campaign for Immigrant Rights. We compared the treatment of immigrants from the Middle East and South Asia since September 11<sup>th</sup> with that of our grandparents and great-grandparents in the early twentieth century. On Sunday, May 16<sup>th</sup>, JFREJ facilitated an anti-racism workshop; Power, Racism and Making Change. Participants included members of local Jewish congregations, a representative of the Multi-cultural Resource Center, and a Muslim family. We concluded the workshop by committing ourselves to developing better relationships between Jews and other local ethnic groups. In this regard several of the participants met on September 21<sup>st</sup> to develop an action plan to facilitate this commitment.

August 31<sup>st</sup> several of us joined a Progressive Jewish contingent in a feeder march from Workman's Circle to the Republican National Convention. Half a million people gathered for an inspirational march supporting peace in Iraq and social justice at home.

### **Annual Meeting Highlights, Sunday evening, June 13, 2004**

submitted by Jennifer Orleans

The Kol Haverim Annual Meeting was held June 13 at Life Long Center in downtown Ithaca. Attendance was excellent, and we were very pleased to have so many of our Members present and providing valuable input on important KH issues. And good food and good company was enjoyed by all!

It was Chairperson Joan Joseph's final KH meeting, and a fond farewell was said. Joan offered us some highlights of her year as Chair:

- KH now has a location for Board Meetings, Sunday School, and many of our programs—Life Long Center. Having a centrally-located and consistent space for KH activities has been a very positive development for the Organization. Our relationship with Life Long has also resulted in having our own storage space in the building, and space for a KH Library (Alla Lukina is currently overseeing the Library)!
- An ad-hoc "Ritual Committee" developed a basic Shabbat ritual to be used consistently at Friday night programs. This ritual can be embellished if desired, but provides a basic structure that will become familiar to members. The ritual can be taught to the Sunday School children to develop their familiarity and comfort with the celebration. We have begun a KH tradition!
- We held our first fully-catered Passover Seder at Kendal. Prior to this year, the event was pot-luck, or partially catered. Members enjoyed the simplicity of attending without needing to provide food themselves. Planning will soon be underway for next year's celebration.
- KH applied and was granted Incorporation as a Non-Profit Organization!
- Joan worked hard to encourage the development of codified KH procedures, and this process continues. Joan also emphasized the importance of committee work, and the benefits of working together in groups.

The KH budget for next year was approved, with a small increase in dues for Members participating in the "All-Inclusive" Membership package, and with a budget line approved for advertising.

We heard reports from several of our active committees:

- Sunday School enrollment was up to 16 children ages 4 – 13. Parents became more involved this past year, which was very helpful. There is a wish to develop the connection between the Sunday School and other KH activities, and there will be a move towards having post-Bar- and Bat Mitzvah students help teach younger students.

- The Social Action Committee sponsored a number of events, which included a workshop on immigration, a multicultural anti-racism workshop, a "separation of church and state" program, and a visit

from Rabbi Ben Biber, a Humanistic Rabbi who leads a Humanistic Jewish congregation in Washington, DC (*Machar*).

- The Community Service Committee collaborated with the Sunday School on a visit to the Reconstruction Home. Sunday School children made placemats for Reconstruction Home residents, talked with them and sang songs. We also organized the provision of an impressive number of care packages for the Red Cross! A clean-up or service project with the Parks Department is in the planning stages.

- The Program Committee organized wonderful programs that ranged from Israeli folk dancing, to a speaker and discussion related to the concept of Free Will, to a panel discussion on intermarriage, to a Peace Chanukah program that combined fun story-telling for kids with more serious adult discussion about efforts to build peace in Israel/Palestine. Plus, there were four articles published in the Ithaca Journal this past year related to KH programs!

At the end of the meeting, there was an important and lively discussion among members regarding the expression of political opinions through KH. There were a variety of feelings voiced about this complex issue, and it was clear that there are differences in perspective in terms of what Members want and need from KH in this regard. It was decided that an ad-hoc committee would convene to formulate different options of how to approach this issue; they will bring these ideas to the Membership next year.

## ***Member Forum***

### ***Member News***

We extend our deepest sympathies to Gordon Bonnet and Carol Bloomgarden, on the death of Gordon's father. Gordon Sr. passed away on July 4<sup>th</sup>. An 84 year old retired marine and postal worker, he was quite a character and will be missed by all who knew him.

On March 21 at Lifelong in Ithaca, many Kol Haverim members joined with the family and friends of the Forest family to honor them and most especially to welcome the newest arrival, Leah. Among those in attendance were Jennifer Orleans, who led the parent-child ceremony, and Carol Bloomgarden and Gordon Bonnet who, along with their musical colleague Rosa Fernandez provided beautiful musical accompaniment. Our own Harry Segal gave Leah and big brother Ben their first college lecture with his usual humor and wit. All of the Kol Haverim members who were present welcomed Leah to the community and pledged to help in the development of her Jewish identity.

Congratulations to Don Swanson and Nancy Grossman on the birth of their son Jayden Ellis Swanson. Jayden was welcomed into the world by his parents and big sister Sarah at the Cayuga Medical Center on April 2.

Congratulations to Jonathan and Beth Joseph on adopting their daughter Lily Elana Joseph (born August 7, 2003). Beth and Jonathan traveled to China and became proud parents on April 4.

We extend a warm welcome to new members Abby Cohn and Wilson Manik, their twin daughters Hannah Cohn-Manik and Sarah Cohn-Manik (age 7), and Wilson's daughter Tamara Manik-Perlman (age 23).

## *Personal Reflections*

### **Thinking Inside the Box by Bill Baum**

We like to think that because we are Humanists, we are capable of thinking outside the box. But are we really that capable? Let's look at two hypothetical scenarios. Scenario number 1. Aliens come down to earth and announce that they are from a planet that is 10,000 years ahead of us. They have solved the mysteries of the universe. They know how the universe began and how it will end. They've solved the mysteries of quantum mechanics including both string theory and entanglement. They even know whether Shroedinger's Cat is dead or alive. And they know for a fact that THERE IS NO GOD. Will the Pope and the Catholic church accept it? Will the ultra orthodox Hasidim accept it? Will the fundamentalist Muslims accept it?

Scenario number 2. Same as scenario number one, except that THERE REALLY IS A GOD, and he likes to be called Allah. Do we, as Humanists accept it?

### **On the importance of social action, by Caren Cooper**

*Imagine...no religions too. -J. Lennon*

*Quote me as saying I was mis-quoted. - G. Marx*

As a secular Jew living in what many claim to be a Christian Nation, I like to imagine no religions. In his recent book, Nothing Sacred, Ruskoff wrote (a slight mis-quote here, but something like) "Religions are a great thing as long as we don't believe in them."

Yeah, religions are great; they can offer community, a connection to history, traditions as a way to pass along that history, and for some they can offer comforting answers to questions about existence and death.

But believe in them? That brings the down-side. Religious "thinking" (I use that term lightly) can account for much of the fear, hatred, wars, and evils of the world. Politicians and other leaders use religions to manipulate people.

Clearly, there are more reasons to be in a secular "religion" like ours than not feeling the need to wonder about God. But the secular still get a bad rap. To be religious is to be a "believer," which means believing in a divinely inspired ethic. Of course, that clever language implies that we, humanistic Jews, are without beliefs and therefore without ethics. As Sherwin Wine emphasizes, we should remember that secular folks are merely a different type of believer ... the humanist believes in the ability of people to create a better world. Instead of praying for changes, we should use our abilities to create the changes.

### **Reflections on Community and Connection by Federica Manetti**

Offered during the Rosh Hashanah service on Wednesday evening, September 15

My name is Federica Manetti, for those who may not know me. I joined Kol Haverim last year, with my spouse, Michael Lax, and my two children, Salamo, who is 14, and Natalia, who is 11, almost 12. We live in Syracuse.

What community means in this society, what it meant for the generations before us, what it meant in my own childhood where community consisted, pretty much, of the six members of my immediate family, and how it impacts on choices I make today. What it meant for Michael's family as they, in their own unique way, sought to transmit Jewish culture and identity from one generation to the next. What it means in our present family, as an intermarried couple, and as we seek to transmit some notion of community, of values, and of culture to our children. These questions have been of great interest to me over the years.

The immigrant experience is common to both Michael's and my backgrounds. While Michael's mother was from Cleveland, Michael's father was born in, and lived in, Transylvania from childhood to young adulthood before the war. My mother is Italian, born in Libya and living there till the age of nine. My father is half Eritrean, half Italian, and lived in Eritrea till the age of 18 when he went to study in Italy for several years, met and married my mother, had me, and moved to the United States.

Our immigrant backgrounds shaped Michael's and my experiences and outlook in ways that were sometimes similar. We remained attached, through our parents, to the places they left behind and this impacted on our ability to immerse ourselves in the society our parents strove to become a part of. Because of our experience of straddling two cultures, there was no ready made community that we automatically were a part of in growing up — no group that we unreservedly came together with, on the basis of shared values, beliefs, and friendship.

One characteristic of our society, from the immigrant perspective, is that it is in flux, and traditional norms, expectations, and ways of life are disrupted. This was especially true in the 60's and 70's when we were growing up. Our parents were quite ambivalent in their reaction to this culture. On the one hand, they wanted us, and strove themselves, to fit in and be American. On the other hand, they remained tied, in many ways, to their own backgrounds, and wanted us to preserve, and not forget them. This conflict in expectations was viscerally experienced by Michael and me, as we grew up into our own selves, and integrated, sometimes intentionally, and sometimes through passive osmosis, the norms, attitudes, and expectations of our parents' adopted country, the U.S.

At times our parents were relieved at our blending in, and at other times were dismayed — left with feelings of betrayal and abandonment the more we "Americanized" and brought outside norms into the home sphere.

When we look back, we see that our parents' cultures of origin are a "mixed bag," or "double edged sword," as is our own. In the cultures our parents came from, there is an intimacy, a warmth, a security with people who share common world views, expectations, interpretations of reality, and values. They "knew" who they were and had a "place." Much insecurity dissipates with just this.

On the other hand, in those communities, they were defined by their community, and their survival depended on that community. They were defined as to gender roles, marital partners, social status, course of study or lack of it, occupation, sexual preference, and decisions about childbearing and childrearing practices. For our parents, for us, and for our siblings, reactions to our cultures of origin have run the gamut of emotion from wholehearted embracing, and at times, idealization of the memory of those cultures and all that is familiar in them, to feelings bordering on rejection of a culture that is seen as confining, constricting, dominating, archaic, and impinging on the most fundamental and non-negotiable of lifestyle choices and self-expression: choice of partner, of work, of worldview, of mobility, of everyday habits, and preferences. At times, this has resulted in a severing of connection with that culture, both physically and psychologically, either in order to blend into the adopted culture, or simply in order to think clearly, without the weight of the past, the guilt at the detachment...in order to move on.

In our society, community is in many ways optional and difficult to maintain. In fact, an argument could be made that this society is actively destructive of attempts to build and maintain long term communities. One can survive economically on one's own, and one often needs to relocate away from family of origin to do so. One can opt not to marry and not to have children. We have an unprecedented freedom from traditional culture in lifestyle choices. On the other hand, there is loss of connectedness with others, a loss of feeling grounded, or rather immersed, in a myriad of tangible and intangible ways, in the intricate web of a traditional, ethno-cultural community.

For our present Syracuse family, community building has involved putting energy and effort into connections that are consistent with our cultural, humanistic, and Jewish values. This has meant connecting within our family and connecting with extended family who live out of town. Much of Jewish tradition centers around the home, with festivities and holidays having particular familial rituals, many of

which revolve around food. At these holidays we transmit priorities, identity, and a sense of our own community as well as an awareness of the community at large. Before becoming part of Kol Haverim, we celebrated holidays either in Cleveland with Michael's family or at home, occasionally participating in temple services. Holidays involved ritual food preparation and either reading or discussing some topic pertinent to the holiday at the dinner table. High Holy Days were days of reflection in our adult lives and they continue to be with our children and may involve taking a walk in nature, with or without kids.

Kol Haverim has been a wonderful opportunity to re-affirm a tradition which we celebrate throughout the year and a past with which we connect. It has given us a place to develop our Jewish identity beyond the confines of family. At the same time it offers a space for us to construct a Jewish identity that includes acceptance of intermarriage and other departures from the 'norm' and a focus on humanistic values.

It offers the children more faces, options, perspectives than those they come to know so well in family life. It makes Judaism more tangible by providing other experiences of Judaism in their lives and by giving them a sense of Jewish community that they can call their own.

It is a place for discussion of values, for stimulating and engaging conversation on a variety of issues, and for our children to experience a community of Judaism that we as parents feel we can embrace as consistent with our identities as Jews, as pluralists, as secular humanists, within the context of an ethics of inquisitiveness and social commitment from a Jewish perspective.

### ***News from the Society for Humanistic Judaism***

#### ***SHJ Signs Unity Statement in Defense of Darfur***

In response to what has been called a genocide emergency, the SHJ, together with more than 100 other organizations, has signed the Save Darfur unity statement, calling for an end to the atrocities that threaten the lives of two million people in Sudan's western region of Darfur.

The Save Darfur Coalition, which sponsored the unity statement, began as a result of a summit conference convened by the Committee on Conscience of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. It was the first time in its history that the Committee declared a "genocide emergency." Speaking of the suffering of Darfurians was Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize-winner Elie Wiesel. "How can I hope to move people from indifference," he asked, "if I remain indifferent to the plight of others? I cannot stand idly by."

For further information about the issue and/or social action suggestions for individual communities, see [SaveDarfur.org](http://SaveDarfur.org).