



Kol Haverim

The Finger Lakes Community for Humanistic Judaism

Affiliated with the Society for Humanistic Judaism

Newsletter #25

Fall 2006

Dear Friends,

As our community for Humanistic Judaism begins its 8th year, I am excited to become the 4th Chair of Kol Haverim. The combination of our vibrant Sunday School and invigorating new and returning members creates a community with a common purpose, a sense of belonging, and support for our ideals and ethics.

This year I encourage you all to "Come Out of the Closet" with your non-theistic perspectives. I've always suspected that the definitive "there is no Zeus, Thor, or Holy Trinity" atheist stance was frightening to the average American. Yet I've decided to give up trying to appease people of faith with a non-committal "I'm not sure" pseudo-agnostic outlook.

There is no appeasing when it comes to the supernatural. A recent survey by researchers at the University of Minnesota found that atheists are the most distrusted minority in the US - ranked below Muslims, immigrants, and gays and lesbians. Atheists are the minority group that most Americans are least willing to allow their children to marry! The researchers concluded that atheists are viewed as self-interested individuals who are not concerned with the common good.

And it does not matter if you identify with the term agnostic, freethinker, humanist, or with no label at all. If you lack "faith" and the active participation in prayer to a deity...any deity...then you are not to be trusted. Attitudes about atheists are attitudes about us, Secular Humanistic Jews.

The only way to break these enormously ironic stereotypes is to come out of the closet about our personal non-theistic viewpoints. Everyone has friends who are atheists, agnostics, non-theists, and humanists, but most are unaware of the secular beliefs of these friends. It is time that non-theists not only come out and unapologetically declare their viewpoint, but also demonstrate that it is a respectable "belief" system. After all, the violent conflict in the world is based on faith in deities expressed in ancient literature! And yet we are seen as a threat to the nation's moral fiber because we decide our behavior without consulting supernatural authority.

Humanistic Judaism can play a role in our lives at many levels, from how we set priorities for our families, interact with our neighbors, to how we view world issues. Countering evangelicals and non-secular intrusions into the public sphere is not done by simply refusing to believe what they preach, but by just as strongly affirming and acting on what we do believe.

There are numerous ways the Kol Haverim community can enrich our lives. The upcoming year offers a diversity of events to appeal to the many interests in our community. We hope the events will make you feel a part of the Kol Haverim community, a part of the larger movement of Humanistic Judaism, and ready to speak out about your non-theistic perspective. Be proud of your unique community, your Humanistic Jewish identity, and share this timely perspective with others - they need to hear it!

Caren Cooper, Chair

Kol Haverim: The Finger Lakes Community of Humanistic Judaism

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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 newsletter@kolhaverim.net , asking to be put on the email list. For more information, email the editor at newsletter@kolhaverim.net . 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, or you can call 607- 257-4231 and ask to have a membership form mailed to you.

UPCOMING KOL HAVERIM HOLIDAY AND PROGRAM EVENTS

Saturday September 9 - Create a **Humanistic Mezuzah** followed by **Dinner**
at Lifelong (119 W. Court St)

4:00pm - Discuss, Learn, Create

Discuss - What makes a home feel like a home? What makes a culturally Jewish home? Come join an interactive discussion about these and similar questions.

Learn - Hear about the tradition of mezuzot and discover both the past religious significance and current humanistic interpretations.

Create - Decorate your own beautiful mezuzah and inscribe a text that is meaningful to you. (these are great house-warming gifts!)

This program is suitable for children age 6 and up accompanied by parents. Child care for 2-5 year olds will be available.

All materials provided, along with sample alternative texts for inserting inside the finished mezuzah (poems, songs and sayings) or you can bring your own samples to share.

5:30 - Havdalah Service and Dinner

We'll enjoy a short Havdalah service, followed by dinner. **Ess! ess! Kol Haverim will provide the main course.** Please bring desserts or side dishes (that can sit at room temperature) to share.

Please contact Abby Cohn <acc4@cornell.edu> if you have questions.

We hope to see you there!

Kol Haverim Open House on Sunday Sept 10, 10:00-12:00 at Lifelong

BRING A FRIEND.

Stop by to learn more about the Kol Haverim community!

Are you culturally Jewish? A secular, non-religious Jew? If you are curious to learn more about Humanistic Judaism or Kol Haverim, then please stop by. Members of our community will be there to talk about our philosophy. We'll introduce you to what our community has to offer, including a humanistic Jewish holiday celebrations, fun and interesting programs, community service and social action events, a book group, and more!

Have kids? Meet our Sunday School Director and our Sunday School teachers. Visit our library and learn about our Sunday School curriculum and philosophy. Sunday, Sept 10, beginning at 10am!

Visit www.kolhaverim.net for more information.

Holiday Celebrations

This year, as in the past, there will be two Rosh Hashanah celebrations: an adult-oriented service on Friday evening, September 22, and a child-oriented family service on Sunday morning, September 24. There will also be two Yom Kippur services and potluck dinners on Oct 2, one for adults only and one more casual to accommodate families.

Rosh Hashanah, Friday evening, September 22 at 7 PM. This will be an adult-oriented humanistic service with a potluck dessert and reception to follow. The service will be held at the Lifelong Center located at 119 W. Court St. Off-street parking is available in front of the building on Court St. as well as behind the building, accessed from Buffalo St. The event is free for members. For non-members the cost is \$5 for adults, \$15 for families.

Child-care will be available for children 18 months to 10 years at no charge. Please contact Jonathan Joseph at holidays@kolhaverim.net or 277-9744 to confirm a childcare space for your child or children.

For our evening Rosh Hashanah reception, we ask everyone to contribute a dessert or snack. We ask people with last names beginning with letters A-M to please bring a savory snack or finger food; those with last names beginning with letters N-Z, to please bring a dessert or fruit. We will provide wine, juice, and ice tea for everyone to enjoy.

For questions or additional information please contact Jonathan Joseph at (607) 277-9744 or e-mail holidays@kolhaverim.net.

Rosh Hashanah Family Service, Sunday, September 24 at 11:00 AM. Kol Haverim invites you to our Rosh Hashanah family service appropriate for children over age 3. This New Year celebration for children too young to attend the adult service will take place on Sunday, September 24, at 11 a.m. in the large pavilion at Stewart Park in Ithaca.

The celebration includes crafts, a brief service, singing, story-telling, a Tashlikh ceremony, honey cake and other traditional holiday foods. The event is free for members. The cost for non-members is \$6 per child (free for accompanying parents).

Please contact Caren Cooper at caren@kolhaverim.net (or 257-4231) for more information.

Yom Kippur, Monday evening, October 2 at 6 PM. This evening will start with a time for reflection and discussion followed by a break-the-fast potluck meal. 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. One event, for adults only, will be hosted at the home of Dee Thaler. A more casual event will be hosted at the home of Caren Cooper, for those who with young children (or those who prefer to reflect among the chaos of meals with children).

Space is limited; please contact Jonathan Joseph at holidays@kolhaverim.net or 277-9744 to reserve a space and/or to get directions or more information.

Sukkot, Sunday October 8 At the Silverman's house, details to be announced.

Chanukah Celebration, Sunday, December 17 at 11:00am at Lifelong

Upcoming Programs and Events

October 13, Friday at 7:30pm, Shabbat Oneg at Lifelong

Join us for a lively discussion with Lori Brown, the DC-based lobbyist from the Secular Coalition of America. The Society for Humanistic Judaism is a member of the Secular Coalition of America. Dessert will follow her talk. See page 12 for more information about the work of the Secular Coalition of America.

November 3, Friday at 7:30pm, Shabbat Oneg at Lifelong

Secular Humanistic Perspectives on Middle East Peace. Discussion followed by dessert.

November 11, Saturday, 10:00am at Boynton Middle School

Community Service at the Family Reading Partnership Bookfest.

November 18, Saturday at 5:00pm, Havdalah Potluck at Lifelong

Discussion on the History of Books, led by John Dean, Preservation and Conservation Librarian, Cornell University.

News and Notes

The **book group** of Kol Haverim will resume its monthly meetings at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 27, when we'll discuss Jewish American Poetry edited by Jonathan Barron and Eric Murphy Seliger. Laura Joseph, who will host the September meeting, can be reached at lje5@cornell.edu for details and directions.

In October we'll resume our regular schedule of meeting on the second Wednesday of the month when we talk about *Slow Motion* by Dani Shapiro. Jane Baker Segelken will host the October 10 meeting beginning at 7 p.m. She can be reached at jsegelke@twcny.rr.com for details and directions.

The book group is run and organized by its members, who each pick one book to read. The meetings are held at the homes of members.

Come join our always-lively conversation. For more information on the group, contact Deirdre Silverman at dsilver@lightlink.com or 277-3345, or Jane Baker Segelken at segelke@twcny.rr.com or 257-9598.

Thanks

Thanks to the Cohn-Manik family for the generous donation to purchase children's books. Kol Haverim donated \$250 to Lifelong to assist in the floor refinishing project.

Thank you to Trovalla for all of the wonderful performances at our holiday events. Members of the group are our own Carol Bloomgarden and Gordon Bonnet.

MEMBER NEWS

On June 24, 2006, Elias Spector-Zabusky became a Bar Mitzvah at a celebration attended by family, friends, and many members of the Kol Haverim community. The celebration took place at the Ramada Inn in Ithaca, and was facilitated by KH Vice Chair Jennifer Orleans, with the active participation of many of those in attendance. The ceremony was compiled and written by Elias's parents Don and Stacia, and included poetry, stories, songs, and readings that honored Jewish tradition, the importance of community, and the enduring value of inquiry. As part of the ceremony, Elias gave a humanistic exegesis of his chosen Torah passage, the story of Babel (Genesis 11), and also offered an extensive presentation exploring the life of Steven Spielberg, and the role of Judaism in Spielberg's life and career. After the ceremony, everyone joined together for a short Kiddush and a delicious buffet brunch. Later that day, Elias, family, and friends danced the night away at a party at the Women's Community Building, as they enjoyed music that ranged from klezmer, to hip hop, to rock and roll. Elias donated 10% of his Bar Mitzvah gifts to Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation.



Like-Minded New Man in Town?

On July 1, 2006 David Skorton assumed the Presidency of Cornell University. Among his first decisions was to bar University investments of its endowment assets in oil companies currently operating in Sudan and in obligations of the Sudanese government. He stated "given that more than half of the Sudanese government's revenues are derived from oil, the Cornell community is sending an unequivocal message about the impact of their own actions in this crisis." He followed up this action with a statement during his inaugural address on September 7th.

"How can the expertise and heart of Cornell be felt in the inner cities of our country and in Darfur? Recently I announced the divestment of Cornell resources in oil companies operating in the Sudan. But as pointed out by wise colleagues in our Board of Trustees and elsewhere, divestment is not enough; Provost Martin and I are pursuing other avenues where Cornell can be a positive force in that and other troubled parts of our world. In the coming months, we will continue to seek the good counsel of our faculty, staff and students as to ways by which the Cornell community can effectively educate itself about this and other areas of Africa; sponsor serious discussions to include Sudanese academics and other knowledgeable colleagues; and contribute, within our capabilities as an educational institution, to the improvement of the educational and related environment in that country. This is a continuation of decades of carefully planned uses of Cornell resources to work with colleagues and neighbors in developing countries to raise the human capital of their societies."

Campus organizations such as the Darfur Action Group and STARS, a holocaust and genocide awareness group, as well as Kol Haverim and its national affiliate SHJ (through the Save Darfur Coalition) have been organizing to prevent a potential human catastrophe in Darfur.

President Skorton was born in Milwaukee the son of Sam Skorton and Viola Moskol. Sam had fled Belarus shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution. Viola's parents, Hyman and Anna Moskol, had immigrated from the Ukraine (Kiev). Sam never graduated public school, but read Hebrew, and owned a shoe store. Hyman was a fruit dealer. David has identified himself as a "humanist" ascribing this philosophical outlook to his family experiences growing up in Milwaukee. Interestingly, he featured secular humanism in his inauguration speech .

"What of those who do not believe, who share the philosophical underpinnings of the major civilizations, but who do not subscribe to a higher power or deity? One representation of this is the secular humanism movement and its seeking to "...develop secular and humanistic alternatives to theistic religion," to quote Paul Kurtz. Whatever one's belief system, the philosophical infrastructure of most societies has as its core the desire to care for one another and to develop a caring community. Can the concept of a mutually caring environment be realized and actualized? A brief perusal of daily headlines casts doubt on the likelihood of this occurring. Yet we in academia, by the nature of our endeavor, are inherently optimistic about our ability to effect a better future."

Kol Haverim Quilt



The idea for the quilt originated with Barbara Behrmann "as a way to represent community and to create something beautiful to personalize our space" It was started probably five years or so ago and set aside because nobody wanted to take on the task of finishing it. Barbara finally did that this past spring. Each square is 12 inches. Figure about 2 inches of sashing between the squares and about 3 inches of border on each side. That makes it about 50 inches or so, square.

The top left and top middle square: Barbara Behrmann

The top right square was done by former member Carol Chaplin: "the square is symbolic of family--my husband, Scott Steelman & our daughter, Alex Steelman"

Second row, left square was done by Donna and Eric Mendelson who were active in the creation of Kol Haverim: "'Kol Chai" is a transliterated reading of the short Hebrew words in our square, translatable to read "All Life." We chose these words because of how we read Humanism. To us,

true Humanism includes all people, as this saying suggest, but it also includes all living things- too often forgotten in our anthropocentric Judeo-Christian culture (the most anthropocentric of religious traditions, we just learned from a theologian). Such a broad and inclusive humanism nevertheless has roots in early Judaism. We also chose the square's overall design, based on a traditional Chicken Foot design; we thought of it instead as a Chicken Soup design. Please pass along greetings from Montana to all in the community!"

Middle row, middle square was done by Pat Karr: "I used the images to represent our family traveling to Russia to complete our family in adopting Hayley Nadia."

The middle right square is from Dee Thaler's daughter Jessie. "Jessie made the bird because I asked her to make something from nature, and we associated a bird with freedom."

Bottom row, left, was done by Marlo Del Toro, daughter-in-law of former member Ellen Wiernicki. Ellen did the middle bottom square.

Elaine and Bill Baum, our occasional summer members, did the bottom right square.

Kol Haverim at Women Swimming'



This is an annual fundraiser for Hospicare and Palliative Care Service of Tompkins County. To learn about the swim check out <http://www.womenswimmin.org/>. Swimmers from our congregation included Barbara Eden, Teresa Galloway, Abby Cohn, and Karen Purcell (not pictured). The morning of the event was beautiful, cool but sunny and calm. Over \$148,000 was raised for Hospicare.

COMMITTEE NEWS

Social Action Committee

Memorial to the Redbud Woods

Several years ago Cornell University announced that they intended to construct a parking lot on West Campus. The plan required the removal of the last remaining forested area in this section of campus. Faculty, staff, students and community members organized themselves to preserve the Redbud Woods and to propose viable alternatives to address the University's parking requirements. Among those who participated in various support activities were members of the Kol Haverim community, including Abby, Barbara, Brian, Elissa and Greg.

Despite the support of many of our elected representatives from the city, county, and state, all alternatives were rejected. The students then moved into tree stands and locked themselves into boxes at ground level. They occupied the Redbud woods for more than 40 days until they were removed by the police on July 20, 2005. Excavators and chain saws quickly eliminated the woods.

Many of us then proposed to erect a memorial to the woods on public land adjacent to the parking lot. After several months of negotiation with the City of Ithaca Board of Public Works, installation of a memorial plaque was approved and reads as follows:

Redbud Woods

The land before you was once home to the extended family of Robert H. Treman, creator of parks and protector of green spaces throughout Tompkins County. The woodland that grew up here was inhabited for decades by diverse fauna and more than fifty plant species, including numerous redbud trees. Redbud Woods was razed on July 20, 2005 by the Cornell administration to build a parking lot. This plaque has been erected by Ithaca community members in memory of this cherished woodland.

“Remember the trees.. Remember all who tried to save them.”



Sunday School

The Sunday School has undergone a lot of development in the last 6 months! Last spring we decided (after soliciting the input of all the parents) that we should add Hebrew to our curriculum. We started by introducing it into the 2-3 class, as well as some Alef-Bet in K-1. This fall all grades 2-7 will add 30 minutes of Hebrew instruction, which means that our school day is half an hour longer than last year so that we can continue teaching music, dance, culture, and history without any loss of time.

In April, I went to the National SHJ conference in Boston. I went to workshops on teaching Bible stories, running a B'nei Mitzvah program, exploring Jewish identity through music and developing engaging family education programs. I was extremely energized and recharged by this experience, and will be using a lot of what I learned to enrich the school curriculum this coming year.

In particular, a subset of the education committee met in the spring to discuss refining and formalizing our B'nei Mitzvah program and providing more guidance to students. We have begun developing a manual for students and families and I will be running an orientation session for all incoming B'nei Mitzvah students in September. We have several B'nei Mitzvah students this year and will be expecting great things from them!

On the last day of Sunday School class in the spring, we were entertained by our 4-7th grade students who had formed a klezmer band under the direction of Robin Seletsky (mother of Sam and Zak). They performed several pieces to rousing applause! We hope we can continue the klezmer band this year.

~Teresa Galloway, Director of the Kol Haverim Sunday School

Sunday School Dates for 2006

All classes are from 9:30am-12:00pm at Lifelong

Sept 17, Oct 1, Oct 15, Oct 22, Oct 29, Nov 5, Nov 19, Dec 3

Summer Picnic



News from the Society for Humanistic Judaism

Congress Graded on Commitment to Separation of Church and State

The Secular Coalition for America, the nation's first lobbying organization for non-theistic viewpoints, recently released a report card on the voting activities of members of Congress in relation to their commitment to issues of separation of church and state. In the House, alone, of 435 representatives, seven Democrats received perfect scores.

The scorecard records votes taken from January, 2005 until August, 2006 and covers the following issues: "allowing organizations that receive federal funds to discriminate based on religion; promoting narrow religious beliefs over secular needs in science, marriage contracts, and the military; the confirmation of judicial appointees who seek to weaken the protections provided by the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment; and, stripping federal courts of their ability to decide constitutional issues." Further information on individual representatives and senators can be found on the Coalition's website, www.secular.org

The Society for Humanistic Judaism was the seventh organization to join the newly-formed Secular Coalition for America. Other members include the American Humanist Association, Atheist Alliance International, Institute for Humanist Studies, Secular Student Alliance, and Secular Web (Internet Infidels).

SHJ asks its individual members to support the Society's membership by sending donations to the SHJ office that are made out to the Secular Coalition for America. They will then be forwarded to the Coalition.

Dear SHJ Teen, Mazel Tov!

The Society for Humanistic Judaism congratulates you on the occasion of your *bar mitsva*, *bat mitsva* or was it confirmation? No matter which it is, we have an important present for you! Inside the gift package with the frisbee, you will find a special offer to help pay a portion of your expenses for the fabulous **2007 SHJ TEEN AND COLLEGE CONCLAVE Friday, March 16-Sunday, March 18, in Chicago** (for more information, contact hujews@comcast.net) **What! You didn't get our present?** Send us your name, address and name and date of your life cycle event **YOUR DISCOUNT COUPON IS WAITING FOR YOU!**

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