



# Humanistic Judaism

*Magazine*

**Hanukkah  
and Heroes**

**The Second Half of  
the First Amendment**

*by Jeff Lipkes*

**Are You A Jew?**

*by Rabbi Miriam Jerris*



**History Lessons**

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**Winter 2017**

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# From the Editors

This issue of *Humanistic Judaism*—the first printed issue of the magazine in its new format—comes to you for Hanukkah. In it we explore the holiday itself and the theme of heroism.

For the first time, the magazine has a set of Hanukkah activity pages intended for kids. It's in the centerfold portion of the magazine, so adults can easily pull the pages out.

Rabbi Jeffrey Falick writes about the real history of Hanukkah and how Humanistic Jews can approach a holiday with a back story in which none of the characters are paragons of virtue, and in which the traditional heroes of the story are religious fundamentalists who make ill-fitting role models for most modern Jews. Rabbi Falick concludes that Hanukkah is still worth celebrating for Humanistic Jews, but despite the Maccabees—not because of them.

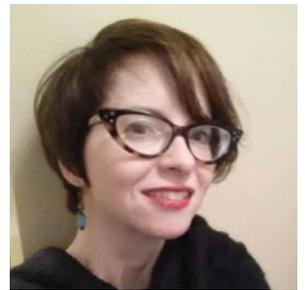
Rabbi Miriam Jerris explores another angle of heroism: those who make the decision to adopt Humanistic Judaism. Rabbi Jerris reviews the ways in which the Society for Humanistic Judaism has made embracing Jewish identity more accessible and less dependent upon being “the right kind” of Jew.

Rabbi Denise Handlarski's article reviews Jonathan Safran Foer's most recent book, *Here I Am*. Foer's book has raised anew issues about modern Jewish identity, Diaspora Jews' relationships with Israel, and the depth of everyday life. Rabbi Handlarski's review explores those themes and how Foer's book addresses them.

Rabbi Jeremy Kridel reviews a different sort of book, Julia Alekseyeva's graphic novel, *Soviet Daughter: A Graphic Revolution*. Alekseyeva's work tracks the parallels in her life in the United States and the life of her great-grandmother in the Soviet Union from the Russian Revolution through World War Two, with Alekseyeva's great-grandmother cast as the hero. (Rabbi Kridel is a co-editor of *Humanistic Judaism*.)

Also in this issue is a new, occasional “Open for Debate” feature. In this first run of the feature, Jeff Lipkes makes an argument that Humanistic Jews should embrace an expansive view of free speech, even in the face of rising antisemitism. And we learn how several Humanistic Jewish communities explore themes about secular and Humanistic Jewish heroes, from innovative school programs to individual members working to bring about positive change in their communities and the world around them.

**J. M. K. and S. A. W.**



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*Humanistic Judaism Magazine* is published quarterly by the Society for Humanistic Judaism, a non-profit organization, 28611 West Twelve Mile Road, Farmington Hills, Michigan 48334, (248) 478-7610, info@shj.org, www.shj.org. Two issues are printed and mailed, and all four are mailed electronically to subscribers and members of the Society for Humanistic Judaism, and later added to the SHJ website's archives.

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Subscription Rates: \$25.00 per year. Canadian Subscriptions \$31.00. Overseas Subscriptions \$43.00 per year (U.S. Dollars). No refunds. Sample copies available at single issue price plus postage. Additional copies of a single issue are available from the Society for Humanistic Judaism at the cover price plus postage. Address all inquiries and subscriptions to *Humanistic Judaism*, 28611 West Twelve Mile Road, Farmington Hills, Michigan 48334. Listed in *Index to Jewish Periodicals*, *American Jewish Yearbook*, *Encyclopedia of Associations*, and *Standard Periodical Directory*.

Manuscripts are welcome and may be sent to shjjournaleditors@gmail.com. Word documents preferred.

ISSN 0441-4195

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# Are You A Jew? Who Decides?

by Rabbi Miriam Jerris

Questions about who is a Jew or what is truly Jewish are not new questions for the Jewish community or for individual Jews. Who is in and who is out? Who decides? What is required? Typically, the leaders of the community or the rulers of an occupying nation set the guidelines and made the decisions.

We often learn about diversity from the condemnation in the Biblical text. The kings were ordered to remove the “high places” (where sacrifices were made outside of Jerusalem), and take



*Ruth swearing her allegiance to Naomi by Jan Victors (1619–76)*

*Public Domain*

down the pillars and the posts (symbols of the goddess Asherah). Multiple ways to observe were a part of the Jewish historical landscape. Questions of the right or only way to be a Jew even feature in the Hanukkah story. There were some Israelites who did not fight against the Greek rules, including giving offerings to the Greek gods in the Jerusalem temple. They felt it was a small price to pay for peace under Greek rule. The Maccabees did not agree. They maintained that they would live or die upholding the one true covenant with Yahweh.

The obsession with the meaning of Jewish identity has not diminished in modern times. Secular Humanistic Judaism makes a significant contribution to the dialogue. In 1988, the members of the International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews issued a resolution called, “Who is a Jew?” It stated that a “Jew is a person of Jewish descent or any person who declares himself or herself to be a Jew and who identifies with the history, ethical values, culture, civilization, community, and fate of

the Jewish people” (<http://www.shj.org/humanistic-jewish-life/issues-and-resolutions/who-is/>). Although most secular Jews behaved as if this were the definition, the Jewish denominations and the State of Israel did not and do not agree. Declaring that Jewish identity is a matter of personal choice and self-identification, as Secular Humanistic Jews do, is a radical alternative to matrilineal or patrilineal descent or religious conversion.

Three years ago, we added a page to the Society for Humanistic Judaism website entitled, “Becoming a Humanistic Jew.” Prior to 2014, there were only a few people who completed the process and who became Jewish through the Society. Following the launch of our new website, forty-five people inquired the first year, and sixty did so in each of the following two years. In a six-month period ending in October 2017, thirty-seven people asked about becoming Humanistic Jews through the Society. Close to thirty people have completed the process in the last couple of years and have received a certificate and a Hebrew name.

You may be wondering what we require of a person to become a Humanistic Jew. Affirming the philosophy of self-identification, we ask individuals to become members of the Society. We agree to engage with those who do not live within a reasonable distance of an existing Secular Humanistic community. And the SHJ will always send a SHJ affiliate member a certificate signed by the SHJ rabbi if there is no rabbi in the local community. Other than SHJ membership, we ask for a three-quarter page reflection stating why they want to become a Secular Humanistic Jew. No reading is required, although a reading list is provided. I've never felt that it was philosophically consistent, or frankly, ethical, to require more from someone not born Jewish than I would from someone who is born Jewish and not well educated. For me, self-identification is self-identification.

Our approach fully welcomes those who are choosing to declare that they are a Jew and they “identify with the history, ethical values, culture, civilization, community, and fate of the Jewish people.” There is no requirement to go to a mikveh (a ritual bath), to be circumcised, or participate in the ritual of *hatafat dam brit* (drawing a drop of blood from an already circumcised man). We do not refer to the process of becoming a Humanistic Jew as conversion. We speak of adoption. The individual “adopts” Judaism and we “adopt” them. Thus, there is no requirement to disconnect from family celebrations of non-Jewish holidays or to abandon a previously-held identity. Individuals have multiple identities. In Secular Humanistic Judaism you can be “Jewish and...”

The most rewarding aspect of this initiative is the outpouring of gratitude from those who become Humanistic Jews. The stories are diverse. Some people discover a Jewish ancestor; others have always “felt Jewish” or been drawn to things “Jewish.” They ask if we accept transgender people. They come to us after studying for multiple years in Reform or Conservative Judaism, only to find that the rabbi decided that they didn't qualify, and thus the rabbi wouldn't convert them. People approach us because, as in so much else in Jewish life, we joyfully welcome those not accepted by other Jewish denominations.

I will share a few case histories so that you can get a sense of some of the feelings of those who have become Jewish through this process. At the beginning of this year, Andrew P. from Oregon joined SHJ and wrote his essay. He took the Hebrew name Adam. In March, I received a letter

from him. He shared, “Enclosed is a picture of me holding the adoption/conversion certificate you sent me. It really means all the world to me. Thank you so much.”

Last month, we welcomed Jordan, age 17, as a Humanistic Jew. When she first wrote to me, we asked her mother for permission. Jordan wrote,

*Growing up...Christianity always left me feeling empty and disenchanting. Ever since I was a child I had been interested in Judaism... Upon learning about my Sephardic heritage a few years ago, I fell into a deep hole of research... While I love the fact that Judaism encourages debate and criticism regarding God, I just don't know if I can get behind worshipping a deity. I had an older cousin [whom] I loved very deeply and I lost her five years ago and that had me angry at God and I questioned if he ever existed at all...This left me very disheartened because I still didn't want to let go of the Jewish culture I had grown to have a deep appreciation and love for. When I found out about the Humanist Secular branch, I had finally*

*found something to identify with and follow... As [Moshe] Katsav puts it, “To be a Jew means to belong to a nation whose people are linked to each other spiritually and emotionally, to belong to a group that shares a common significant past, one tradition, and a common destiny and fate.”*

Jordan chose the Hebrew name Shoshana Atarah.

From still another new Humanistic Jew, James E.:

*I first discovered Judaism sixteen years ago and started learning on my own... Then six years ago I went through cancer treatment... I am happily in remission... I pursued a conversion religiously, without much success. That was for the better though because it wasn't until more self-reflection... that I realized it is the Jewish culture I am most interested in... I look forward to identifying as, and experiencing life as, one of the tribe of Jewish people.*

These are just three examples of those who became Jewish through the SHJ and received a certificate. I am grateful to be able to provide the opportunity for Secular and Humanistic Jews to become Jewish. It is one of the most gratifying aspects of what I do as rabbi for the Society for Humanistic Judaism.

Artwork this page: Naomi and Ruth, Illuminated Manuscript of Old Testament Bible, date of completion, February 2, 1507. Courtesy of Walters Art Museum under the Creative Commons License.



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# History Lessons

by Rabbi Jeffrey Falick

There are so many things that I love about Hanukkah. I love the lights, the food, the songs, the whole joyful shebang. But there is one thing I do not love about Hanukkah, and that's the narrative that goes with it.

I'm not talking about the story that we all grew up with about the magical cruse of oil. By now I hope that Humanistic Jews—who don't believe in magical oil—also know that this is a very late tale created by Talmudic rabbis centuries after the holiday's creation. No, I'm talking about the real story of the civil war that took place in mid-second century B.C.E. Judea between the Maccabees and pretty much everyone else in their country.

A few years ago I prepared a pretty extensive PowerPoint presentation about this war for the Birmingham Temple that asked the question, "Were the Maccabees the good guys?" My conclusion was an unequivocal "No!" They were a bunch of Taliban-like religious zealots fighting a civil war against Hellenizing Jews.



What about those Hellenizers? Were they the real heroes?

With their embrace of philosophy and the arts, there is good reason to see them in a more positive light. They were cosmopolitan, open to secular culture—or to be more historically accurate, to Hellenistic influences—and they just seem to have been more like my kind of people. However, the story is very complicated and their opposition to Maccabean religious fanaticism does not really position them as the good guys.

This is because the war was not a clear-cut battle between fundamentalist Jewish Maccabees and cosmopolitan Jewish Hellenizers. Certainly they had profound religious and philosophical disagreements, but the clash began over power and fortune. To fully appreciate

this we need to understand the politics of mid-second century B.C.E. Judea and the power struggles between two foreign kingdoms that vied to dominate it.

If you think back to your world history classes, you might recall that toward the end of the fourth century B.C.E., a young general burst forth from Macedonia and laid siege to lands from Greece to Asia Minor to Egypt to Persia. This general, of course, was Alexander the Great. Although he might have been great in battle, he was not so great in lifespan. He died in 323 B.C.E. at the age of 32.

Once gone, his generals competed for power, ultimately dividing Alexander's conquests into three kingdoms. The two that struggled over Judea were the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. Judea is where their borders met and where they battled for both each other's territory and the important crossroads of Judea. Judeans took sides, seeking the favor of the victors—favor that came with favors, so to speak.

For decades, the Ptolemies held Judea with the support of a far-flung aristocratic Jewish family known as the Oniads, who paid the Ptolemies tribute. In return, the Oniads were rewarded with substantial power, including control over the Jewish high priesthood and its treasury. The Oniads were no rural pietists. They and their supporters were urban and quite a bit Hellenized. Yet in seeking to placate the masses in the countryside, they never went overboard with it. In the Temple itself, they made sure that they were as scrupulous as possible about Torah law. In this way, Ptolemaic rule worked well for both the Oniads and rural traditionalists—until 198 B.C.E., when Judea again switched hands.

Ptolemies out. Seleucids in.

With them came their own Judean supporters, rivals of the Oniads known as the Tobiads. As more radical Hellenizers, the Tobiads wanted Judea to fully join the rest of the Hellenic world. This included pressing for a more metaphorical and syncretistic take on the Torah. After all, they reasoned, all the good stuff is Greek and if the Greeks don't even really believe in their gods any more—having long ago turned them all into metaphorical representations of natural and spiritual realms—why can't we do the same thing with Yahweh?

So the Tobiads, both to demonstrate their support for the Seleucids and because they really did like this more open Greek approach, began to re-model the Temple and its rituals. Ultimately, they erected a statue of Zeus in the Jewish Temple! They justified it by asserting that Zeus was simply a Greek version of Yahweh (albeit with a very different backstory). For the date of the big reveal they chose the 25th day of the Jewish month of Kislev in honor of the Greek winter solstice festival Dionysia. It would not, however, be a very merry Dionysia for the Tobiads because shortly thereafter, all hell broke loose.

The rival Oniads (remember them?) along with a whole mess of rural pietists known as the Hasidim (not the ones we have today) rose in rebellion, committing acts of terror throughout the land. Before long all-out warfare erupted accompanied by disruptions of trade and, significantly, disruptions of payments to the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The Tobiads informed him that the chaos was the fault of a bunch of pious zealots led by a family of rural priests named Hasmoneus, better known to us by their nom de guerre, the Maccabees. Under the banner of “All Those for the Lord, Follow Us!,” their revolt was inspired by fervent loyalty to the Torah. Upon learning this, King Antiochus naturally thought it would be a swell idea to outlaw loyalty to the Torah.

It was not.

Most of us know how it ended. In 165 B.C.E. the Maccabees won. It was not a clean sweep but the Seleucids were defeated, or at least exhausted enough to withdraw most of their troops. They granted semi-autonomy to Judea even as they retained formal control until 110 B.C.E. But they never messed with Judea again.

With their victory, the Hasmoneus family claimed royal sovereignty and established what we now call the Hasmonean Dynasty. Despite their assertions of steadfast loyalty to the Torah, they actually violated Torah law when they combined the monarchy and priesthood in the hands of one family. Worse yet, while they were definitely priests, they had no claim to Davidic heritage, thus disqualifying their royal claims. The Hasmonean Dynasty would go on to rule viciously, invading their neighbors and even forcibly converting them to Judaism, circumcision and all. Its leaders were also corrupt. Infighting led to their downfall and the imposition of Roman rule in around 63 B.C.E.

Today, of course, we no longer think about all of this. Instead, we remember the Hasmonean Maccabees for the holiday that they created to re-dedicate the Temple to

Yahweh. Early sources lack any mention of miraculous oil, but at least one provides a plausible reason for the eight-day festival:

On the anniversary of the very same day on which the Temple had been defiled, the 25th of Kislev, they now purified the Temple. They celebrated joyfully for eight days, just as on Sukkot, knowing that [a few months before] on Sukkot they had spent the festival [hiding] like wild animals in the mountains and caves.... (II Maccabees 10:1-8).

We don't know if this is any more true than the magical oil. It was likely written in Egypt around 125 B.C.E., so it is not a contemporaneous account.

I, for one, am far more curious about why they selected the date of 25 Kislev. Perhaps they really did choose it out of spite. But this raises the question: Why pick the date of a holiday you hate for a holiday you're creating? The only answer that I can puzzle out is that they actually wished to preserve the holiday and the best way to do that was to erase its Hellenistic associations by offering a new reason to celebrate it.

This should not surprise us. The Christians did the same thing with the Roman solstice festival Saturnalia when they changed its name and declared it to be Jesus's birthday. But Jesus is not really the reason for the season. Nor are the Maccabees. The reason for the season is axial tilt.

In the end, a solstice holiday is a solstice holiday no matter what story you attach to it. Dionysia and Saturnalia were not the only ones. There are solstice festivals of light all over the world. That's why, as Christianity moved into Europe it also soaked up pagan lighted trees, Yule logs, and mythical gift-giving elves. And it's why, when it moved to America, Hanukkah was transformed into a blue and white version of green and red Christmas. In America, where we excel at mixing and matching winter customs, it's not entirely incorrect to think of the whole thing as one big “Chrismukkah” celebration. Even when Hanukkah comes much earlier, it tends to linger on until around December 25.

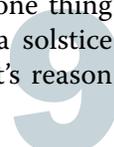
If you are inspired by the story of the Maccabees, by all means celebrate Hanukkah in their memory and honor. I, for one, find them—and their foes—exceptionally uninspiring.

I will, however, give them credit for doing one thing right: They saved Dionysia, bequeathing Jews a solstice festival of light to call their very own. And that's reason enough to celebrate.



*Alexander the Great in the Temple of Jerusalem*  
by Sebastiano Conca (1680–1764)

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# HANUKKAH FUN! WITH SHJ

circle the hanukkah items



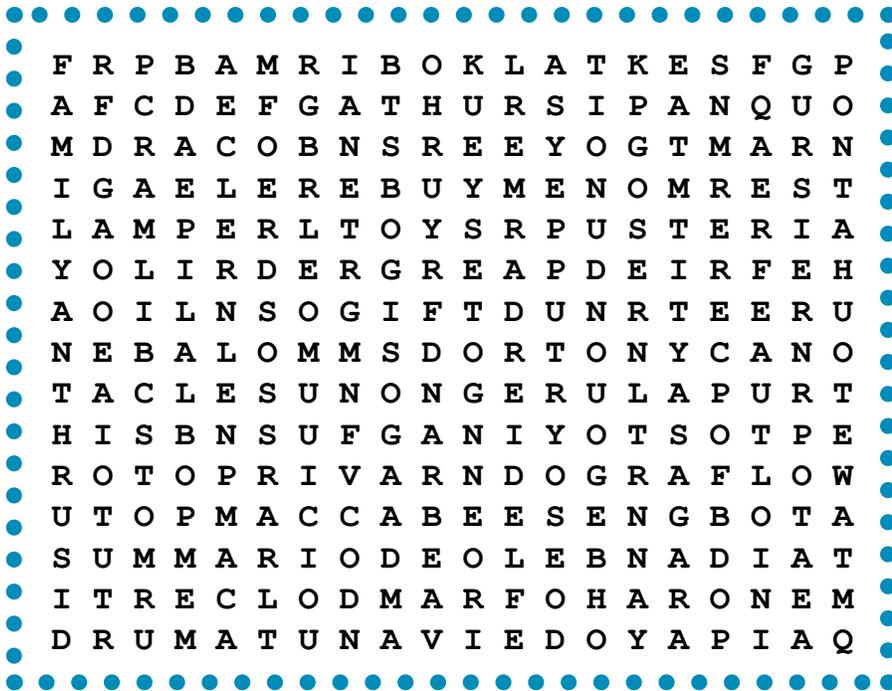
connect the dots and color in

HANUKKAH

(YOU CAN PULL THIS SECTION OUT FOR OUR YOUNGER SHJ MEMBERS!)

# hanukkah word find

Can be down, across, diagonal, or backwards:



oil  
fried  
latkes  
sufganiyot  
candles  
menorah  
maccabees  
freedom  
family  
dreidel



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# Community News

Adat Chaverim

Beth Ami

Birmingham Temple

Oraynu

Machar

## Heroes of American Popular Culture

This year, the cultural school and adult education curricula at Adat Chaverim, Los Angeles, center on Jewish contributions to American popular culture. With immigration very much in the news and ugly questions being raised about the “Americanness” of immigrants, the topics explore how much of what we consider quintessentially American was the creation of Jewish immigrants and their children and grandchildren. Taking our lead from Gene Wilder (Jerome Silberman), whose father and maternal grandparents immigrated from Russia, we are learning how popular entertainment offered unique avenues for addressing anxieties about being Jews in an often-hostile environment, and how Jewish actors, musicians, writers, comic book creators, and toymakers found their home in America by shaping the culture from the inside.

Earlier this year, we visited the Skirball Culture Center to see “Paul Simon: Words & Music,” an exhibit on the intersection of Simon’s music and social concerns. We also visited “Play!” at the Autry Museum of the American West, which examines the role of toys and games in American history, including toy companies founded by children of European Jewish immigrants: Hasbro, Louis Marx & Co., and Remco Industries. Classroom sessions look at Stan Lee (Lieber) and Jack Kirby (Kurtzberg), co-creators of the Avengers, X-Men, and Fantastic Four; Joe Shuster (Shusterowich) and Jerry Siegel (Segalovich), co-creators of Superman; Irving Berlin (Israel Beilin), a father of American popular music; and many other cultural heroes and pioneers.



**Cantor Jonathan L. Friedmann, Ph.D.**

### In the Next Issue:

## Privilege & Disability



## Humanistic Hanukkah Heroes Help Others

Every child should celebrate a birthday, right? Several years ago, the Beth Ami (CO) Jewish Cultural School took on the task of fulfilling a community need.

The students and parents at the time raised funds to purchase and compile Birthday Bags for our local food pantry. The bags were filled with items such as party hats, cake mixes, balloons, paper plates and plastic utensils—anything that might create the fixings for a wonderful, child-aged birthday party. Parents “shopping” at the pantry could grab a bag-o-goodies to create an instant birthday celebration for their child. Our Beth Ami students were heroes, and we’ve filled Birthday Bags several times since. During our High Holiday and Sukkot events this past fall, our *tzedakah* box again filled with contributions. Our upcoming Hanukkah party will offer the next opportunity for our Beth Ami children to be Hanukkah Heroes by again offering the magic of a birthday party to the less fortunate in our community. Second Birthday Bag Bash in 2016. Coming up: the 2017 Hanukkah Party!



**Sheila Malcolm**

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Winter 2017

# Community News

## Birmingham Temple Honors Heroes

The past few months at the Birmingham Temple CHJ have been a time for honoring heroes.

On September 15, we set aside our regular Friday night celebration in order to hold a special “Vigil for Refugees” program, presented by our Social Justice Committee. About 200 people came for an evening of solidarity with refugees, built around the story of German Jews who sailed to the Americas in 1939 on the M.S. St. Louis only to be returned to Germany, where many of them subsequently perished. Congregants and community members of all ages lit candles and read passages that honored past and present refugees from all over the world. The evening also included music and speeches by a Holocaust survivor, a refugee from Uganda, and a young “Dreamer” whose DACA status is now under threat.



Nancy Jones, Rachel Himmelhoch, Fran Shor

Another salute to heroes came on Yom Kippur when Rabbi Falick spoke about the importance of standing up for others in a presentation that featured the stories of two Nazi-era German pastors, Martin Niemöller—famous for his poem, “First They Came for...”—and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who gave his life in the resistance. He spoke about how Niemöller only spoke up when he and his church were endangered, while Bonhoeffer began his opposition early, growing as an activist with each step along the way.

Finally, our entire Youth Education Program was recently reorganized and, in the spirit of Humanistic Jewish heroes, was named for Baruch Spinoza. As a hero of free thought and the first proto-secular and Humanistic Jew, the spirit of his life and teachings now inform our Sunday morning gatherings!

**Rabbi Jeffrey Falick**

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## Transformation at Yom Kippur

The theme of Oraynu’s Yom Kippur Day service was “Stories of Transformation”—stories about people and communities that have made a difference. They comprised the center section of our ceremony, which focused on *tikkun olam*, personal transformation, and remembrance. Rabbi Denise Handlarski said this is “the time of year when we recommit to our values and goals, with a sense of possibility and potential. Any one of us can be a hero, in our own small way.”

We told each story mostly through drama, using the words—real or imagined—of the chosen hero (taken from biographies, Wikipedia and other resources) and other people in his/her life. Members who have excellent acting or presentation skills were the readers, and they really engaged the audience.

For our annual Yom Kippur programming, our heroes are all Jewish and are mostly secular in their beliefs; they might be local or internationally-known, male or female, or we might feature a non-Jewish community that has modified its behavior. We present at least two stories each year with a commentary for each one. They are researched, written and dramatized by our rabbis and members.

In the past we have profiled several amazing Canadian heroes, plus Sherwin Wine, Helen Suzman, Baruch Spinoza, Marc Chagall, Oliver Sacks, Jacobo Timerman, Deborah Lipstadt, Yuvi Tashome, and many others.

This year, we chose the SHJ’s Humanistic Role Model Gene Wilder, and the “Paper Clips” story about the Whitwell, Tennessee, community that collected 6 million paper clips as a way of teaching the students and community about the enormity of the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and racism. It seemed most apropos in view of the Charlottesville incident.

Wilder’s story was “told” by his mother Jeanne Silberman, Mel Brooks, Gilda Radner, and Gene himself. Rabbi Denise’s commentary on him closed with:

Sometimes for these Stories of Transformation we choose people who made big changes in the world. We need heroes and we need to know about them. We aspire to be more like them. Sometimes, however, making big change seems daunting. Sometimes, we need to look to someone who did not necessarily do anything majestic, but simply did his best, even and especially in hard times.

The full text of this story of transformation, part of Oraynu’s 2017 Yom Kippur observation, can be found at [www.shj.org/?p=4531](http://www.shj.org/?p=4531).

**Sandi Horwitz**

**Humanistic Judaism**

## CBA Spread the Word About Humanistic Judaism at the FreeFlo Conference

Congregation Beth Adam (Boca Raton, Florida) members, Robert and Gail Fishman, Charlotte Weingarten, and BJ Saul are spreading the word about Humanistic Judaism. At the Florida Humanist Association FreeFlo Conference in Orlando, October 20–23, they provided information about Humanistic Judaism in general and specifically the Florida congregations: Congregation Beth Adam, Boca Raton; Humanistic Jews of Tampa Bay; Humanistic Jewish Havurah, Naples; Congregation for Humanistic Judaism, Sarasota; and a new group forming in Orlando.

We were thrilled with how many people stopped by to ask questions and pick up literature. Most important, visitors added their names to the various sign-up sheets.

The conference presented speakers from many walks of life including authors, attorneys, educators, social activists, and more. Topics included: “SciBabe’s Guide to Surviving Fake News,” “Future Landscape for Church/State Separation,” and “What is it Like to Teach Evolution in the US?,” as well as speakers stressing social action.



**BJ Saul**

## Humanist Heroes of Machar: Brenda Platt and Nadine Bloch

Brenda Platt and Nadine Bloch, members of Machar, The Washington Congregation for Secular Humanistic Judaism, embody many qualities of humanist heroes—people who live their values and work to make the world a better place.

Brenda is the co-director of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR), a national nonprofit promoting healthy communities through local economic development. In her 31 years with ILSR, she has fought trash burners and also advanced reuse, recycling, and composting. She is the author of several groundbreaking reports including “Stop Trashing the Climate” and “Growing Local Fertility: Guide to Community Composting.”

Brenda’s work has driven the growth in zero-waste planning and recycling nationally. The U.S. now has about 5,000 composting facilities and close to 600 communities that recover residential food waste. Brenda’s local accomplishments include banning Styrofoam foodservice ware in Washington, DC and Montgomery County (MD) public schools and restaurants; passing key pro-composting legislation; and launching a Neighborhood Soil Rebuilders composter training program.

Brenda says Humanistic Judaism and her upbringing in Africa and the Middle East shaped her world view. “I was raised in a secular family,” she said. “Although we were often the only Jewish family in our community abroad, my parents made sure we knew we were part of the Jewish tribe.” She credits her mom, Marlene Platt (also a Machar member), who marched for civil rights in the 1960s, for instilling in her the Jewish values of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, and *tzedakah*, taking care of the poor. “My mantra is human solutions to human problems,” she said. (You can follow her on Twitter [@PlattBrenda](https://twitter.com/PlattBrenda).)



Brenda Platt

The work philosophy of Machar member Nadine Bloch—an innovative artist, nonviolence practitioner, political organizer, direct-action trainer and puppetista—is straightforward. “It’s always been the case: A picture is worth a thousand words, and a puppet is worth a thousand times that... If you can roll it down the street, smash it or set fire to it, it can be worth 1,000 times more.”

**...continued on page 17**

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# Tributes

## To SHJ

In memory and honor of Jane Goldhamer  
From Ardis Sussell

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Questions? Contact Joshua Berg,  
[operations@iishj.org](mailto:operations@iishj.org) or (847) 383-6330

## CHJ Member David Levinson to be Honored

CHJ member Dr. David Levinson will be honored as a Transformational Leader by the Jewish Historical Society of Fairfield County on Sunday, December 10 at 2:00 p.m. at Temple Shalom, 259 Richards Ave., Norwalk. David will receive his award, along with three others, as part of the "Pioneers of Education" honor ceremony.

David has been president of Norwalk Community College since August, 2004. Over the last decade, he brought improvements that provided learning opportunities for the entire community beginning with pre-school to elementary to high school to college to lifetime learners.

Admission is \$60 per person, and includes a Welcome Nosh, Presentations, and Festive Reception.

For more info call (203) 321-1373 x150 or email [info@jhsfc-ct.org](mailto:info@jhsfc-ct.org), or visit <http://www.jhsfc-ct.org/img/programs/pioneers.png>.



Nadine Bloch

In the age of Trump, Nadine is a prominent organizer for developing less-gigantic, more-strategic creative action, which she feels is right for these times. *The Washington Post*, in an October 26, 2017 article, notes that Nadine Bloch of Takoma Park, MD has been "one of Washington's go-to makers of protest puppets since the Reagan era." She started her Washington, DC messaging with the creation for Greenpeace of two fifteen-foot-tall one-breasted women, a protest to our increasingly-toxic environment.

Nadine Bloch is currently Training Director for Beautiful Trouble. Her work explores the potent intersection of art and politics, where creative cultural resistance is not only effective political action, but also a powerful way to reclaim agency over our own lives, fight oppressive systems, and invest in our communities—all while having more fun than the other side!

Nadine and Brenda have another unique connection: they co-facilitated the Young Activists Club of Takoma Park (MD) where their children and others from the local elementary school spoke out at local and county council meetings and successfully got polystyrene banned from Montgomery County's public schools and government offices!

**Marlene Cohen and  
Joyce Rosenthal**

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