



CSJO Newsletter

“The Voice of Cultural Jews”

Fall 2009

Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations

Regards from the Chairperson

By Karen Knecht, CSJO chairperson

Hi fellow CSJO members,

For those of you who do not know me, my name is Karen Knecht and I have the fortunate pleasure of being the Chairperson of CSJO. We have a lot of things going on in our organization and I would like to share them with you.

First, we are saying good-bye to Larry Schofer, who for more years than I can count has been our newsletter editor. He has been responsible for the fabulous newsletter that you have been receiving. He will be missed. However, lucky for us, we have a new editor. Please let me now introduce you to Terry Waslow. She will be taking over the duties of newsletter editor. She will be looking for submissions, so if you would like to contribute to our newsletter please feel free. Her email address is tcww@comcast.net.

We have had two very important meetings. First our board meeting that was held at our annual conference in May. There, important reports pertaining to the running of our organization were presented. Then we had our annual Executive Committee Retreat. This was held at the home of Paul Shane. This was the first executive retreat that every member was in attendance. We spent the entire day going through information that is important to the members. We will be bringing that information to our board meeting, to be held November 13-15, 2009 in Farmington Hills, MI.

At our Conference in May, which was held in Philadelphia, we honored several people. First, we held a small memorial for Bess Katz, who was one of our founding officers. Bess passed away earlier in the year. We also mentioned the passing of Gerry Revzin, our first Executive Director. Gerry passed away last September. Our honored Member of the Year was Philadelphia's own Fran Kleiner. Fran has been instrumental in education, both for the children of Folkshul and the

members of CSJO who have had the privilege of hearing her speak and sing at our conferences.

CSJO has just purchased 20 more copies of God-Optional Judaism by Judy Seid, and have them ready for sale. We are also in the process of reprinting Judy Seid's wonderful book Understanding Secular Humanistic Judaism. We will notify all of the delegates when it is ready for purchase.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DESK

by Rifke Feinstein

Hello everyone! Again, best wishes for a peaceful and healthy New Year. I hope that all of your endeavors are fruitful!

Before I begin, let me reiterate the CSJO mission statement: The Congress of Secular Jewish Organization's unity of purpose is a secular expression of our Jewish heritage, with particular emphasis on the cultural and ethical aspects of Jewish learning.

Larry Schofer, the CSJO newsletter editor for many, many years, has retired from the editorship. While we are sorry to lose him, we are happy to have had him do this important job for so long. Thanks to Larry from me and, I know, from the entire CSJO. So, what happens now?

Well, I am pleased to let you know that our new CSJO Newsletter editor is Terry Waslow of Philadelphia. Terry has been an active member of CSJO for quite awhile and has been a member of the CSJO board for nine years! Terry knows what's going on, and she will ease into her new role with Larry as her mentor.

One of the roles that the Executive Director plays in CSJO is that of site visitor. This past year has been a busy and active one for me as a CSJO traveler. I visited the Secular Jewish Humanists in South Florida last February. (Continued on next page)

Charles Baron is the leader of this active and involved group and I enjoyed meeting with the

members and talking with them about one of my favorite subjects... the history of Yiddish!

In October I visited the Jewish Cultural School in Suffolk County, New York where I met Marcel Kshensky, the president of the school, and participated in the school's Sukkot/Sukkos program. I enjoyed visiting one of the classes where the teacher did an outstanding job of explaining the true meaning of the holiday to her students.

Again, in October, with Terry Waslow as my tour guide, I made my way to Queens, New York, and we even got a parking space! We met with the Queens Community for Cultural Judaism and Ed Klein, its leader. The members were most interested in learning about the history and roots of Secular Humanistic Judaism and I was so pleased to meet them.

I was also fortunate that I was able to visit, that very same week-end in October and again with Terry Waslow, the Southern Jersey Secular Jews and its leader, Naomi Scher. They, too, enjoyed learning about the roots of our movement and I enjoyed meeting them.

I would love to meet all of our members in our affiliate organizations...invite me and I will come!

Once again, have a fruitful and meaningful year!



Rifke Feinstein, Executive Director, CSJO with Naomi Sher, chair, SJSJ

Jew-pardy with Joan Kurtz

Maybe you think you know all about being a Jew or maybe you'd like to learn a little bit more about being Jewish. Either way, I find that learning can be fun if one incorporates it with a game. So, in each newsletter, I'll post a question dealing with Jewish culture, history, holidays, life cycles, Israel, etc. The questions will not require extensive research nor will they be accompanied by social or political commentary; just a question requiring an

answer. Feel free to use ANY resource to answer the question and the answer doesn't have to be in the form of a question like the TV game. For example, if I ask: What's the name of the ritual of symbolically casting away your "sins" (regretful deeds) on Rosh Hashanah, the answer is: Tashlich (spelling doesn't count). If you know the answer, email it to me. I'll keep track of the first three correct answers. I'll announce them in the next newsletter when I post the next question.

Question: The Israeli national anthem – Hatikvah – translates into what?

Email all answers to yoninajoan@yahoo.com. Be sure to put "Jew-pardy" into the subject line. Good luck!

Rifke Visits Queens CCJ

by Edward J. Klein, President and Madrikh, Queens Community for Cultural Judaism

The Queens Community for Cultural Judaism is one of the newest affiliates of the Congress of Secular Jewish Organization, having joined, effective January 2009. Our community has participated in most every CSJO Conference, going back to 1997, and we appreciate the informality of the conferences as well as the openness of the Board of Directors meetings.

On October 17, Rifke Feinstein, Executive Director of the CSJO, accompanied by Terry Waslow of Philadelphia, told our community about the history and philosophy of the Secular Humanistic Jewish movement and its component parts, including the CSJO, the Society for Humanistic Judaism, the Workmen's Circle (Arbiter Ring) and the educational arm of the movement, the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism. This amounted to a journey thru alphabet soup land, with so many constituent organizations, which is very important, since most members of QCCJ (and other communities) have no idea, or just a vague idea, of what goes on in the movement outside of their communities. While we in Queens have publicized and promoted the conferences, Colloquia and courses, only a handful ever attend. I believe the visit will result in more national participation from Queens.

The talk provoked many questions. One question was: "How do we join the CSJO?" Of course the answer is that membership in each CSJO community includes membership in the CSJO with all of its rights and privileges. As a result of this question, Fay and Marvin Itzkowitz (continued on next page)

joined QCCJ (and CSJO) on the spot. I have known Fay and Marvin (Mani) for many years, but only Rifke, acting as a catalyst, won them over.

A large array of books and tapes produced by the CSJO and its affiliates were on display for perusing and sale. Light refreshments and **Rifke Feinstein, Executive Director, CSJO, presenting at the Queens Community for Cultural Judaism.**

schmoozing was enjoyed by all. All of us at QCCJ look forward to future visits from Rifke and other luminaries of the CSJO.



**You can say it in Yiddish!
Vi zogt men in Yidish
"א שפראך מיט א דאך א גרויסן"
"A shprakh mit a dakh a
groysn"**

By Gerry Kane

"A shprakh mit a dakh a groysn" were the words used by the Yiddish poet Itsik Fefer to describe the depth, breadth and flexibility of Yiddish as a modern language that is as useful in today's world as any other. The English expressions are presented with Yiddish transliteration for all of us who love Yiddish and try to speak it but find it difficult to read the Yiddish alphabet. I've chosen words that are useful (*nutslakh*) to our daily lives.

- E-mail--*blits pos*
- Toner cartridge--*tint kvall*
- Bail Out (financial)--*finantsial ratir plan*
- Contact List-- *kontakt reshime*
- Register on-line--*registriren zikh electronish*

- Multi-Media--*farshidine kunst mitlen*
- Mixed Message--*der stirusdiker signal*
- Carved in stone--*toyrus moyshe*
- Quit Cold Turkey--*zikh opzogn mit a mol*
- Escalator, or moving sidewalk--*shlep rampe*
- Side Dish *di tsushpayz*
- Ready for the Big Time--*greyt far di hoykhe fentster*
- Snail mail--*pavolye post*
- Doctoral Candidate--*der doktorant*
- To educate--*tsu dertsien*
- The circumciser--*mohel or der yiddisher*

Ikh muz dankn a grupe yunge Yidishistn arum der "Vi Zogt Men" proyekt vos hobn oysgeforsh't fil fun di verter un oysdruken vos ir gefint do. Oyb ir hot frages un meynungen vegn di verter, oder ir hot byshpil fun naye verter, shikt zey tsu mir: gerry.kane@sympatico.ca

Freg Bubbe und Zeyde

Readers or lip readers as the case may be: By public acclamation of at least three people this is the initiation of a regular, periodical, irreverent column in the CSJO Newsletter. It will be called “Freg Bubbe und Zeyde” (which means, ask bubbe and zeyde and if you don’t know what that means take a couple of Yiddish lessons) unless you have a better name for it. Much as we hate thinking of ourselves as being old we thought the rest of you have eyes and can see that we are getting there. The CSJO mavens and sibling team of Joanne Shane Plummer and Paul Shane will answer any serious or semi-serious question you send in with an attempt at humor and even maybe some knowledge. Please send any questions or frages that you may have to Terry Waslow the new editor (tcww@comcast.net)and she will promptly forward them to us for our consideration. We hope that this will become high class and popular.

The first question that we will attempt to answer is “Can Secular Jews believe in the supernatural?”

Bubbe: Secular Jews can believe in anything they want to believe in. Including spirits, hobgoblins, witches, fairies, ghosts like Casper, gods or G-d. Just don’t tell me about it. It gives me the heebie-jeebies.

Zeyde: I don’t agree. I’m not sure why people would want to believe in such things. There are enough un-natural things going on that we can see or read about without having a bunch of un-seeable critters adding to our discomfort or comfort. By the way, although I can’t believe in supernatural things I also don’t believe that humans have too much control over what happens in life. However, I like to believe that we can stop war, poverty, homelessness and hunger. So I guess I also believe in un-provable things.

Bubbe: If you say so, but on the other hand I particularly like Casper. At least he brings some levity into our lives.

Zeyde: Levity is in the eyes of the beholder.

Bubbe: Levity, shmevity, it’s good for the soul.

Zeyde: But seriously, the best thing about being a Secular Jew is that no one can tell us in whom or what to believe or disbelieve. Besides that we don’t

all agree on what it means to be Jewish except that it isn’t a disease and for some reason we are attached to it or it to us and want to stay that way. So fellow believers, disbelievers, and assorted other Jews Happy New Year and may the world find its way to sanity, peace and decency for all in 5770 or at least move in that direction. As President Chavez of Venezuela said the other day, the sulfur is gone for now and hope is in the air, just don’t hope for too much.

Bubbe: But I have to get in the last word only I don’t know what it is.



With heartfelt thanks for the following:

Donations

General Fund

In memory of Ken Kipper

Eva Goldfinger

Rifke Feinstein

Marcela Pardes

Elisabeth Ruchkin

Linda Gritz & Michael Katz

Rifke Feinstein

In honor of the marriage of

Leah & Timothy Wright

Larry Schofer

Gales Community Fund

Larry & Marlene Angert

Linda Gritz & Michael Katz

Teen/Young Adult Fund

Larry and Marlene Angert

Linda Gritz & Michael Katz

Revzin Education Fund

Linda Gritz & Michael Katz

West Coast Regional Conference - 2009 Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations

Jerry and I were pleased to attend the first CSJO West Coast Regional Conference held in San Francisco over the Labor Day Weekend. There were people attending from various communities....CSJO, SHJ, Workmen Circle, Jewish Labor Committee.

We were only able to go on Sunday, but it (continued on next page)

was a very full day. We arrived in time to get a nosh at the breakfast buffet....always good to start with food!

Then it was off to the first workshop. Jerry went to "Plays I Search of an Ending: Provocative and Funny Sociodramas on Contemporary Ethical Dilemmas." It was presented by Rabbi Milton Matz, a retired (continued next page) psychologist and liberal rabbi.

I choose to attend a workshop given by three young adults from Vancouver, Ben and Mark Neuman and Kerry Dyson. I always enjoy the crossover of age groups and the discussions it creates.

The second set of workshops came after a short break. This time we both went to "Easy Songs to Sing With Your Community." Linda Fisher and Ruthy Seid discussed the social aspect of singing with your group, and then taught us a few easy to learn songs.

One of the highlights of the day was the Plenary Session. Everyone was asked to attend, and then broke out into regional groups. The conference organizers, Ya`el and Shoshana Seid-Green, hoped this would be a major success of the weekend. The idea was for the various communities in each geographic region to get to know each other by planning an activity. Secular Jewish groups not in attendance should

also be invited. This was received very well. During the banquet dinner, each region shared the plans that were made.

The final workshop of the day that we attended was "Coalition Building Within and Beyond the Jewish Community." Michael Nye from the Jewish Labor Committee presented this workshop. It was very informative.

During the banquet dinner, we had a chance to visit with each other. Everyone agreed the conference was a success. So much so that the group from the Vancouver Peretz Center announced it would host a

Western Region conference next Labor Day Weekend!

As those of you who have attended a CSJO conference know, we always have to have a sing-along to end the weekend. So, Judy, Ruthy, and Linda brought their guitars and about a dozen of us sang from "Rise Up Singing" for the next hour.

Our hats go off to two very ambitious young adults....Ya`el and Shoshana Seid-Green. In a short time, they put together a meaningful conference.... and it was a lot of fun!

I urge everyone to go to a CSJO conference ... Cleveland or Vancouver or Both! It is a rewarding and motivating Secular Jewish experience. **Submitted by Leslie Zwick**
Reprinted from OCT 2009 CHAI-LIGHTS

It was a wonderful weekend and I would like to salute the Valley Community for their efforts to put together, in a few short months, a meaningful, educational and social success.

There were many interesting topics to explore: from Fund Raising ideas to Coalition Building. To Adult Women in Movies, among others.

The presenters included several young adults and their knowledge of their topics and style of delivery indicates a bright future for our movement.

The hotel accommodations were very good; the food was well presented and enjoyable. The whole atmosphere was congenial, the smaller crowd tending to make schmoozing easy; most every one got into the mood. One on one participation dominated.

It was good to spend a weekend with our fellow Secularists, and we made plans to meet with the other CSJO Community in L.A., Sholem, as well as other like minded organizations, i.e., SHJ, Workman's Circle, etc. in our area for a joint program.

All in all, the Conference was a success and plans for the next one are in the works. I only hope that more of our members will plan to attend the next Conference in Vancouver, B.C. in 2010.

One last comment: Bernice and I drove up and back from the Bay Area and we worried about the horrific traffic on Labor Day for our trip home, but it was a breeze. We made record time. **Submitted by Jack Stein**



Certificates of Appreciation to Ya'el and Shoshana

This past weekend (Sept.5-7) I attended the first-ever West Coast Regional Conference for Secular Jews! It was amazing! We had representation from CSJO, SHJ, Workman's Circle/Arbeiter Ring and Gerry Tenney's Kindershule in Oakland. People came from many regions of the West Coast including: Orange County, Los Angeles, the Bay Area, and Vancouver, B.C. (continued on next page)

The workshops were put on by young adult and adult members of CSJO as well as presenters from some of the aforementioned groups. The workshops were thought provoking and enjoyable. One of the most exciting aspects of this conference was the plenary session for geographically close groups to get together to plan events. Hopefully these events will strengthen our ties to the groups we live near. A goal

of these events will be to reach out to all of the secular groups in our areas to start building coalitions, as the Philadelphia Kehilla has done.

At the Sunday dinner, each region excitedly shared their plans. It was wonderful to be able to share the conference experience with members of our local area that aren't able to attend the CSJO Memorial weekend conferences. For me- a conference isn't a conference until we sing all of our favorite folk tunes with the guitars-thanks Judy, Ruthy and Linda!

Ya'el and Shoshanna Seid-Green did a wonderful job bringing it all together and they will pass the reigns on to the Vancouver group who have already started planning next year's Labor Day weekend conference.

Submitted by Jamie Ireland

CSJO at the J Street Conference by Bob Jacobson

In the last week of October, I represented Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations at the first conference of J Street, a relatively new nationwide advocacy organization for peace between Israel and the Palestinians. CSJO was one of twenty "participating organizations," which ranged from American affiliates of Israeli peace groups to Theater J, the theater group at the Washington, D.C. Jewish Community Center. Conference attendance vastly exceeded expectations, with 1,500 participating.

By no means is J Street the only nationwide advocacy group for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Tikkun Community and Brit Tzedek v'Shalom have organized chapters all over the U.S. for several years. But J Street has emerged as the main Washington-based advocacy group, whose purpose for the conference was stated as follows: "To

change the face of pro-Israel advocacy in the United States and the dynamics of American politics when it comes to the Middle East." J Street's slogan is "Pro-Israel, Pro-Peace."

While I never heard the J Street folks refer to themselves as an alternative to AIPAC, the main "Israel Lobby" group, it's obvious to me that that's certainly part of the agenda. I was impressed by the fact that President Obama's national security advisor General James Jones spoke to the conference, reiterating the administration's commitment to the peace process, and those panelists included members of Congress, former ambassadors, leading Palestinian moderates, and that the conference was endorsed by 150 members of Congress, 120 of whom attended a gala dinner on the last night of the conference.

Reprinted from the Shtetl Shtimmeh Nov.

2009

COLLOQUIUM 2009

by

**Edward J. Klein, Madrikh, Vegvayzer Queens
Community for Cultural Judaism, Queens NY**

Colloquium 2009, “Challenging Convention: Secular and Humanistic and Jew” was held in Farmington Hills MI at the Birmingham Temple. This was the eighth Colloquium, the first occurred in 1995 and the second one following the death of Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine.

Rabbi Adam Chalom opened the Colloquium with two observations. “Don’t look to the past for permission; Pursue the truth wherever it leads; and a question: “Is organized religion a force for evil or good?”

The keynote speaker was Jacques Berlinerblau, associate professor at Georgetown University. He finds secular Jews to be broken, unreconstructed and unperfected “deformities in the seed of Abraham.” He sees two types of secular Jews, the organized, those who are linked but not shackled by Judaism and the non-organized, the vast majority of secular Jews. (continued on next page)

His manifesto for us includes: Shock the professors (for visibility, in order to be more than a blip on the screen of Judaism); Learn the techniques from Chabad (whose outreach is so successful); Reject denominationalism (post-denominationalism is inclusive Judaism); Understand and relate to other Jews; Trust secular rabbis and get them out there (again for visibility, to make people aware of our movement); The need for money (No bread, no Torah); The need for buildings (I suggested he use the term “edifice complex, which he liked a lot); and Reclaim the term “secular.”

Lori Lipman Brown, former director of the Secular Coalition for America, said that secular Americans must have a voice to promote secular government. She finds “under God” in the pledge of allegiance to be divisive and urges secularists to work with theists on our shared values.

Ron Aronson, Professor at Wayne State University, asked us to stop being polite to people who pray (for us) and to stop being invisible, noting that the number of atheists in the United States is now 36 million and that the percentage of atheists in Canada is even higher. He likes the term the “new new” atheist (post-atheist), which should have a positive message.

Rabbi Greg Epstein, the Humanist Chaplain of Harvard University spoke about the one billion

people in the world without God. Can one have purpose in life without God? He noted that none of the Golden Rules mentions God, but that reason and science cannot visit you in the hospital, pointing to the need for community. While we should pursue happiness, we should settle for “happyish” and dignity. Unfortunately, Greg’s book: “Good Without God” was released the day following the Colloquium.

Caryn Aviv, Lecturer at the University of Denver spoke about “post-denominationalism,” Jew-Bus, Conservadox, non-halakhic-neo-khasidic, flexidox, much of which is belonging without believing. We must reach out to young Jews as well as the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) which she prefers to call “Queer” Jews. She does find secular Jewish culture “sexy,” noting the large number of websites and publications catering to young and LGBT Jews.

Rabbi Sivan Malkin Maas of Israel told us that Cultural Judaism has become mainstream in Israel and that secular Jews can claim the Bible and tradition as their own. 300,000 Israelis are considered religiousless. Many secular Jews are anti-religious but believe that the “real” Judaism is the religious. She warned us to watch out for Torah idolatry. 22% of Jews in Israel do not use rabbis to marry but go outside the country (Cyprus, etc.) to get married. Many couples live together and there are no statistics for them. She called the Israel Museum, which is a museum of world Jewish culture housed in Israel “The “**Third**” Temple.”

At Colloquium 2009 two women were ordained as Secular Humanistic Rabbis in the movement. Both Rabbi Jodi Kornfeld of Deerfield IL and Rabbi Karen Levy of Toronto ON gave heartfelt ordination messages.

Rabbi Chalom, in wrapping up the Colloquium said that nothing divides Jews more than “God, Torah and Israel.” Respecting **beliefs** is dishonest; rather one should respect the **person**. Secular, humanistic Judaism has an important message, with books, pamphlets, personal testimonies as well as courses given by the Institute all over North America. We should be following traditions with honesty and integrity, but not imitating them. Every generation has told us that this is the “last” generation of Jews and this traditional statement has been wrong every time. In parting, Rabbi Chalom gave us two new terms for us to use to spread the “gospel” of secular, humanistic Judaism: Be a “Humangelical” and “Humangelize.”

CONGRESS OF SECULAR JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS, is a non-profit organization and an affiliate of the North American Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews, s constituent organization of the international Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews.

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| | | | |
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| | Vancouver | Peretz Centre for Secular Jewish Culture | Al Stein |
| Manitoba | Winnipeg | United Jewish People's Order-Branch 16 | Roz Usiskin |
| | | Sholem Aleichem Community | Lissa Donner |
| Ontario | Toronto | United Jewish People's Order (UJPO) | David Abramowitz |
| | | Winchevsky School | Maxine Hermolin |

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| | | | |
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| Illinois | Chicago | Jewish Secular Community and School Of Oak Park | Ben Peck |
| Maryland | Baltimore | Baltimore Jewish Cultural Chavurah | Elisabeth Ruchkin |
| Michigan | Ann Arbor | Jewish Cultural Society and School | Helene Tamarin |
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| | Detroit | Sholem Aleichem Institute | Alva Dworkin |
| New Jersey | South Jersey | South Jersey Secular Jews | Naomi Scher |
| | West Orange | Jewish Cultural School and Society | Lisa Cole |
| New York | Long Island | Long Island Havurah for Humanistic Judaism | Ed Klein |
| | Queens | Queens Community for Cultural Judaism | Cecil Feldman |
| | Suffolk County | Jewish Cultural School | Marcel Kshensky |
| Ohio | Cleveland | Jewish Secular Community | Renee Lipson |
| Pennsylvania | Philadelphia | Philadelphia Jewish Children's Folkshul | www.folkshul.org Terry Waslow |
| | | Philadelphia Secular Jewish Organization | Paul G. Shane |
| | | The Sholem Aleichem Club | Sol Glassberg |



CSJO NEWSLETTER

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