



CSJO NEWSLETTER

Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations

FALL 2002

“Tekeeyah” on going to college

By Jessica Anne Miller

Jessica, a graduate of the Philadelphia Jewish Children’s Folkshul, wrote this essay for her college applications. For a number of years she has blown the shofar at Rosh Hashona celebrations.

“Tekeeyah!” One of the leaders of our congregation stands next to me as we face our Secular Jewish community. He shouts the familiar shofar command and I look out at the audience sitting on the surrounding Quaker Meeting House benches. I have blown the shofar at the Jewish Children’s Folkshul since I was eight, and I have watched the faces grow older each year, as I suppose they have watched me. I am now seventeen years old, and my cheeks bashfully redden like they have at every Rosh Hashanah celebration. I sound my first note of the year, and the shofar lets out a brief, steady pitch. Slight grins of approval form on the faces of the newer members of the congregation.

The second command is given, “Shevarim-Truah.” The family before me looks like any proud parents whose child has already succeeded just by trying, with wrinkles at the edges of their mouths and a look in their eyes that just “knows.” Among them I notice my third grade Folkshul



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Report from Brussels meeting of IFSHJ

Personal comments of the CSJO representative to that meeting, Jeff Zolitor, former chairperson. The proclamation of the International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews is displayed below.



Jeff Zolitor

Secular Humanistic Jews, held at the Centre Communautaire Laïc Juif (CCLF) in Brussels on September 19-22, 2002. Membership in the IFSHJ is one of the most important affiliations that CSJO has with regard to our particular place in the progressive Jewish movement.

On Thursday, September 19, I attended

This past June, the Executive Committee of CSJO asked me to represent our organization at the 8th biennial conference of the International Federation of

the Executive Committee meeting of the IFSHJ and was nominated to the position of VP for North America. (This position usually goes to the outgoing chair of CSJO.) Sherwin Wine acted as chairman at the various meetings.

One of the more controversial issues pertained to the approval of the conference statement on anti-Semitism, drafted in first form prior to the beginning of the conference. On instruction from our Board, I went with a separate draft that reflected the philosophy of CSJO. When it came time to move and discuss the statement, I asked to speak, albeit as an observer, because I had not yet been elected to my position on the Executive Committee. I commented on the wording of the statement, and much to my surprise, others did as well.

Writing the text

The outcome was that I was asked to serve on a drafting committee with Yair Tzaban —Chair, Meitar College; Dovid Susskind—leader of CCLF and IFSHJ

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INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF SECULAR HUMANISTIC JEWS

Ninth Biennial Conference—Brussels / 2002: The Challenge of the Diaspora

Declaration: The New Antisemitism

Preamble

In modern times, anti-Semitism grows in the corrupt soil of social injustice. Although it may draw on images of past religious persecution and ghetto-segregation, modern anti-Semitism is based on the racist concept that the offending people are inferior or threatening and, therefore, must be exterminated. Humanity cannot progress nor survive in the presence of racism in any of its forms.

Resolution

Therefore, we members of the International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews, call upon all people of good-will, on every continent, of every ethnic group, every religion or belief, every skin color, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, to totally condemn and reject anti-Semitism and racism in whatever guise it may take.

For our part, we commit ourselves anew to the eradication of every form of racism, and of the social injustice in which it flourishes. We call upon all segments of the Jewish people to reject every form of racism in our own self-interest as well as in the interest of humankind. We call upon all peoples to unite against the real common enemy – racism. The survival of humanity depends on our concerted efforts.

New CSJO Chair

Karen Knecht of the Pacific Community assumed the position of chair of CSJO upon the resignation of Jeff Zolitor for personal reasons.

Karen has been vice-chair for several years. She has served on the executive committee, acted as chair of a CSJO conference, and for many years has been the board liaison to the teens.



CSJO OFFICERS: Karen Knecht, new chair; Jeff Zolitor, past chair; Shariee Calderone, secretary.

CSJO News Briefs

New CSJO affiliates

The Victoria Society of Humanistic Judaism (Victoria, British Columbia) has officially joined the CSJO family (effective September 1, 2002). Their president Edward Davidson attended our most recent conference in Windsor, Ontario. Rifke Feinstein, executive director of CSJO, will visit the group at the end of this month.

Officially joining as well: Sholem Aleichem Community of Winnipeg, Manitoba. They have been in contact with us for several years.

Baltimore group hosts seminar

The International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism seminar on the American Jewish experience will be held in Baltimore, December 13-15. We're hoping for a large turnout from CSJO. To make it more affordable, the Baltimore Jewish Cultural Chavurah will offer home hospitality to CSJO members and transportation to the seminar and to the homes from the train or airport. In addition, the CSJO Gerry Revzin Scholarship Fund is available to defray the cost of the seminar.

The faculty for the seminar is planned to be Adam Chalom and Bennett Muraskin. The seminar itself will be at the home of Judy Seid and David Gates. Friday night, the Baltimore Jewish Cultural Chavurah will host a shabbes gathering and potluck dinner for participants and members of BJCC.

Baltimore Jewish Cultural Chavurah—A Secular and Humanistic Jewish Alternative—623 Lake Drive, Towson, MD 21286. 410/337-0100 www.Baltimoresecularjews.org

Celebrating Jewish Holidays revised

It's not too late for your group to purchase copies of

Celebrating Jewish Holidays: An Introduction for Secular Jewish Families and Their Communities.

This book is intended as a guide for family and community celebrations. It reviews all the Jewish holidays and suggests approaches for activities.

Bennett Muraskin was the lead editor of an older manual by Judy Seid and Larry Schofer. There are also contributions by Hershl Hartman and Eva Goldfinger.

Copies may be ordered from Rhea Seagull at rheacbs@aol.com. Cost of the holiday book for CSJO members & affiliates: \$5 each; \$3 each for orders of 10 or more. For non-CSJO members and groups: \$6 each; \$5 each for orders of 10 or more. Postage/handling extra for all orders.



Nelson Gutnick and Jacky Price, Calgary

CSJO representative goes to Calgary

Judy Seid of the Baltimore Jewish Cultural Chavurah visited the Calgary Secular Jewish Group Calgary, Alberta, where she presented her ideas

on secular Jewish community life and how the local organization can relate to the CSJO.

Insights into Hanuka

The Sholem Community Organization has just published *The Hidden History of Hanuka For Kids (And Grownups Too)*. The booklet was written by Hershl Hartman, who has written a number of enlightening booklets on various Jewish holidays.

The booklet is available for \$7 plus \$.50 shipping from the Sholem Community Organization, 4833 Radford Ave., Valley Village, CA 91607.

Sherwin Wine — Humanist of the Year

Rabbi Sherwin Wine has been named Humanist of the Year by the American Humanist Association. For more information, see the magazine *Hofesh*, published by the International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews.

All members of CSJO should receive this magazine free. If you are not on the mailing list, please contact your CSJO delegate.

CONGRESS OF SECULAR JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS

A non-profit organization

An affiliate of the North American Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews, a Constituent Organization of the International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews

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The Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations - 2002

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To join the CSJO online discussion group on the Internet

1. Go to www.yahogroups.com
2. In the search box, type in, "CSJO."
3. The next window will give you two CSJO discussion groups to choose from: one is only for educators ("CSJO-EDU") and the other is the one you want to join ("CSJO"). Click on "CSJO."
4. Complete the form and hit the "Send" button on the bottom.

This discussion group is not moderated, but you will need to be cleared before being allowed to post material. Joan Kurtz, who monitors this group, will send you an email, asking you to identify who you are and with which group you are affiliated. If you are an associate member, just say so in your response and if you are a paid-up member, you will be approved as well.

Find CSJO on the web at www.csjo.org

Hellenism and the Jews

Jeff Zolitor presents workshop to CSJO conference

by Jeff Zolitor

Jeff Zolitor, former chair of CSJO, has made presentations at several CSJO conferences on various aspects of the Jewish past. This essay is drawn from several of his presentations.

With the victories of Alexander the Great in 334 BCE, the Greeks came as conquerors to the eastern Mediterranean and settled in as the ruling classes. They showed little inclination to learn the language, customs or culture of the people who came under their authority; neither did they engage in missionary activity to promote Hellenism or Greek culture. They took their superiority for granted.

Their only promotion of Greek culture took place in the gymnasium. The other institutions of Greek culture, the stadium, theater, odeum, lyceum, were more or less public works projects for the benefit of Greek citizens. They were excellent architects but also sculptors, poets, musicians, playwrights, philosophers and debaters. They were traders as well, and having control of the trade routes around the Mediterranean, the economy boomed. Greek culture and Greek prosperity appealed strongly to the societies of the Near East, and the Jews were no exception.

Universalist View of Judaism

Most Jews accepted Greek influence. They paid taxes, joined the army, held positions of state and in general, were loyal subjects, as long as they were free to practice their religion in peace. The enlightenment that Hellenism brought with it had a profound impact on Jewish society, prompting the emergence of a reform movement. Started by the Jewish elite, its motives were primarily secular and economic; that is to make Judea a world-class state.

There was an intellectual aspect to this movement as well, based on a more universal view of Judaism. The Greeks had developed a universalist outlook that expected all good men to regard themselves as citizens of the world. The Jewish reformist intellectuals saw a direct connection between the concepts of a universal God and the universal society. They argued that Abraham and Moses, these strangers and sojourners, were in fact citizens of the world.

Liberalizing the Law

The reformers didn't want to abolish the Law; they wanted to liberalize it. They wanted to drop provisions that would forbid or interfere with their participation in Greek culture, like the ban on nudity. They wanted to reduce the law to its ethical core and combine the Greek *polis* or city-state, with the Jewish ethical and moral God. Marrying Greek culture with Jewish universal monotheism was an ambitious project—and one that was doomed to fail. Greeks were polytheists and their concept of god was quite different from that of the Jews.

Their gods were basically successful and virtuous ancestors who undergo apotheosis, a divine transformation. It was but a short step for them to deify a monarch, a concept that was anathema to Jews. However this did not keep the reformers from continuing to push towards a greater embrace of the Greek city-state culture. And they had an enthusiastic ally in Alexander's successor, Emperor Antiochus IV.

The High Priest Menelaus attempted to institute the reforms that his party had promoted. In 167 BCE he effectively abol-



The only known remnant of a synagogue in Jerusalem from the period before 70 CE (destruction of the second Temple). The inscription records the building of a synagogue, guest-house, and ritual bath by a leading Jewish citizen, noted by his Greek name, Theodotus. (From Elie Kedourie, ed., *The Jewish World*, 1979, p. 105.)

ished Mosaic law, replacing it with secular law. The Temple became an ecumenical place of worship. In keeping with that idea, a statue of Zeus was introduced. This initiative came directly from the Jewish reformers themselves, led by Menelaus, who believed that such a move was necessary to bring about the symbiosis of Greek universalism and the Jewish universal god. The priests were divided on this issue.

Origin of 'am ha-aretz'

The people labeled as *am ha-aretz*, the common folk of the land, might have been attracted to the universal concept. Years before, upon the return from the Babylonian exile, those who originally remained behind, 'the poorest people of the land,' were viewed by many of the new religious orthodox, led by Ezra, as illiterate, ignorant of the Law and scarcely Jews at all. This sentiment led to their being treated as second class citizens by the religiously rigorous *bnei hagolah*, people of the Exile, and as a result, these poorer people would have had no objection to the religious leaders' losing power and influence.

These 'people of the land' would have benefited from the economic boom and the cultural advancements it was sure to bring. The problem was that the reformers were predominantly from the wealthy elite whom they directly blamed for their hardships and excessive taxes. They had no strong desire to follow the reformers nor the theocracy, and the opportunity to meld the philosophical concepts of the Jews and Greeks was forever lost. Incidentally, since that time, "am ha-aretz" has been used in Hebrew literature to indicate an ignoramus.

In their battle with Greek education, the newcomers began to develop a national system of Jewish education. Local schools, where all Jewish boys could learn Torah, were founded. (This development became the forerunner of the synagogue and the political party known as the Pharisees, a movement rooted in popular education.) The education provided in these schools was entirely religious, and while all outward manner of Greek culture was purged, Greek rationalism found its way into the schools by



“Absalom’s tomb,” Jerusalem, 2nd-1st c. B.C.E. From Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, *Ancient Jewish Art*, 1997, p. 32.

way of the Oral Law. This process of expounding on the written law in order to adapt it to changing circumstances was a very Greek concept. It meant that the Law could be adapted to changing conditions and administered in a realistic manner.

By contrast the Temple priests, dominated by a group called the Sadducees, insisted that the Mosaic Law must be unchanged and unchangeable. Without the supremacy of the Temple cult and strict adherence to the written Law, their authority would be compromised. To admit that oral teachings could subject the Law to creative development would undermine their leadership position..

Two Biblical books written during the Hellenistic period; Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, both reflect Hellenistic ideas. Ecclesiastes explores themes like the pursuit of lasting wisdom.

Perhaps the concept we are most familiar with from this great work is, “...a time for every purpose...” In Ecclesiastes, the author is torn between his skepticism and his piety, his critical thought and his conservatism. Song of Songs, while following the literary form of other books of the bible, is unquestionably influenced by the Greek authors, most notably Theocritus (ca. 275-260 BCE) who had a penchant for sly and ribald humor, as well as double entendre. And Song of Songs, while being beautiful and heartfelt, contains such humor; her lover compares her to a palm-tree, and adds “I will climb up into the palm tree,

I will take hold of the branches thereof....”.

Also: “Blow upon my garden,
set free its fragrances, that they may drift upon the wings of the wind.

Come into my garden, O love of mine, taste of its choicest fruits!”

The literary technique as well as the philosophical and allegorical overtones are completely unknown in the Bible up to this point and show a profound influence, integration and appreciation of Hellenism.

The language of state was Greek. In a generation or two Jews grew up as Greek speakers and became integrated members of the community, but their Judaism remained intact.

They translated the Bible into Greek in the Septuagint, and they retold the legends of the past using Greek language and Greek literary forms. As seen in Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, both written in the Hellenistic period, piety is transformed from a harsh and almost unattainable, self-sacrificing goal, to a standard that is attainable in everyday life and through real human emotions.

To be continued

Report from International Federation

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Man of the Year, Belgium; Bernardo Sonj—sociologist and representative from Brazil; and Egon Fiedler, author.

I was honored at the invitation, and it was an additional honor to serve with such distinguished members. At the Council of Delegates meeting on Friday, I was elected to my position, and

the statement was approved unanimously.

Yossi Beilin, the former Minister from Israel, was an amazing speaker. Aside from the very radical notion that Jews should stop sending money to Israel and instead use it to promote Jewish organizations and issues at home, he also promoted and supported the peace initiative and the proliferation of enhanced secular Jewish education in Israel.

Where he and other Israelis differed from many in the Federation was on the issue of secular conversion. He does not stand by the halakhic [Rabbinic law] interpretation of ‘who is a Jew,’ but he realizes that the nation must apply some standard for national recognition as a Jewish citizen of Israel. Whether it be the mother’s lineage or the father’s or whether it be any conversion recognized by a rabbinic association matters little. His point was that any nation has a right and obligation to define its requirements for citizenship, and this presents a special situation for Israel.

There were perhaps 250 people at the sessions, including perhaps 15-20 from various affiliates of the Society for Humanistic Judaism. They support their leader, organization and its various affiliations with a devotion that caught me by surprise. Further, they were quite capable of relating the philosophy of SHJ, in no uncertain terms.

The number of people who approached me to ask about CSJO and its history and background also caught me off guard.

When asked about the numbers associated with CSJO, I replied that, “We do not make a point of limiting our influence in the progressive Jewish movement in the US to only those who can pay the dues. Thousands of families have passed through our schools and affiliates, and CSJO has certainly been part of their lives and Jewish identity, and they continue to support our affiliates in various ways.”

We have touched the lives of so many people but have not always been successful at retaining them as part of our affiliates. Many who asked said that they feel quite close to our philosophy. Many SHJ members also told me that their roots were in the Jewish labor/Folkshuln movement, but they found an identity and a home in SHJ, usually after a visit to their area from an SHJ leader, usually Sherwin Wine. Outreach works!

The analysis of Jewish pluralism in Israel was enlightening.. One of the problems is that Israeli Jews are free to embrace their own philosophies, and do so, but it is not an overt act. They seem to be very secure in their theism, or lack thereof, and it doesn’t interfere with their Jewish identity. They attend the synagogue or don’t, they meet in havurot or not, they celebrate Shabbes traditionally or progressively or not at all, and there is little conflict. Where our movement is making inroads is in the education system. Jewish culture and secularism is making its way into more and more schools through Meitar and Alma Colleges.

The progressive Jewish movement is doing quite well in Europe, although there is some disagreement on the issue of anti-Semitism. The issue seems to revolve around the very term ‘anti-Semitism.’ Europeans tend to view anti-Semitism as an ongoing, organized and sanctioned movement, and they believe that is not the case in Europe today.

CSJO was warmly received by all those in attendance. Our continued presence and growth, along with special outreach to the international community will bode well for our special place in the progressive Jewish movement that we hold so dear.

ITSIK MANGER (1901-1969)

by Bennett Muraskin

Itzik Manger (pronounced Mahng-er with a hard “g”) occupies a unique place in Yiddish literature as the greatest and very likely the last Yiddish troubadour. His skillful retelling of Bible stories in verse was meant to provide secular Jews with a stake in their cultural heritage, without the tribalism and violence of the original. As American Jewish scholar, David Roskies observed, “Manger’s Bible folk were the people of the Humanistic Book,” because they were modeled after Manger’s contemporaries among East European Jewry, grappling with the clash between tradition and modernity.

Manger was born Isidore Helfer, the son of a master tailor, in Czernovitz, the capital of Bukovina, a province in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but he grew up in nearby Jassy. After World War One, Bukovina became part of independent Rumania. It was a regional center of secular Yiddish culture and the home of the Yiddish theater. Manger settled in Czernovitz after serving in the Rumanian Army.

Manger began to write Yiddish poetry at age 17, and by the time he was 20, his ballads began to appear in Yiddish journals. In 1927, he arrived in Warsaw, the greatest Jewish city in Eastern Europe. It was there that he first achieved fame as a poet, editor, dramatist and lecturer. He was conversant in German and Russian literature, and in 1936 published a collection of folklore from many different nationalities entitled *Felker Zingen* (People Sing).

Manger saw himself as a modern *purim-shpieler*, [actor specializing in Purim skits] who re-worked traditional themes and stories for the common people, with warmth, wit and irreverence. His masterpiece was *Khumesh Lider* (Bible Songs) which he also playfully called *Medrash Itzik* (Itzik’s Midrash or legends), written in the mid-1930s. It was a collection of poems that parodied Biblical figures from Adam and Eve to the Patriarchs/Matriarchs and King David, as well as lesser known figures such as Potiphar’s wife, who attempted to seduce Joseph. Joseph gets the worst of it for being such a prude. He showed special sympathy for Hagar, Abraham’s handmaiden and the mother of Ishmael, whom Sarah drove out of their home in a fit of jealousy.

Manger depicted these legendary figures as if they had been born and raised in an East European shtetl, with Yiddish as their *mama loshn* (mother tongue). His deliberate anachronisms struck a chord among his audience, who recognized themselves and their community *machers* (big shots) in his verses. These poems were put to music and adapted for the stage, under the title, *Songs of*

Abraham lectures his nephew Lot

(excerpt)

And what about your daughters, Lot?
I’ll give it to you straight:
Why do you think the *shadchonim* [marriage brokers]
Never come through your gate?

I’ve got to tell you, Lot, it’s *feh!*
You get drunk every single night.
Just yesterday, in the Golden Stag,
You got drunk and started a fight.

Which is okay for Manger the *shneideruk*, [low-life tailor]

But certainly not for you,
A man with two marriageable daughters,
A rich and respectable Jew.

This poem by Itzik Manger was translated by Max Rosenfeld. The complete poem, along with others by Manger, appear in *Festivals, Folklore & Philosophy* by Max Rosenfeld, published by the Sholom Aleichem Club.

Paradise, first at Joseph Papp’s Public Theater in New York in 1989.

In the 1930s, Manger wrote the lyrics for a Warsaw musical production of Sholem Aleichem’s novel “Wandering Star” and for the first Yiddish film musical, “Yidl with his Fiddle.” He popularized the Book of Esther in his hilarious and satiric *Megile Lider* (Megillah Songs), which includes Haman having a bad dream in which he sees Mordecai eating a hamantash. It was written in 1936 and made into a musical comedy both on Broadway and in Israel in the 1960s, where it became the longest running Yiddish play.

Manger had a more tender side. His poem, “Afn Veg Shteyt A Boym” (On the Road Stands a Tree) which was put to music, became one of the most beloved songs about the love and tension between a mother and a son—and is still one of the most poignant. Marek Edelman, a leader of the Warsaw Ghetto

Fundraising for CSJO

CSJO relies on membership dues and donations to its various funds to promote programs of educational, cultural, and social activity. The funds are:

- **The Gerry Revzin Scholarship Fund:** offered to those members who take courses in Jewish Studies. The scholarship is NOT limited to the International Institute of Secular Humanistic Judaism and may be used for Jewish studies abroad.
- **The Max Rosenfeld Publications Fund:** assists in publishing material on secular Jewishness prepared by our members.
- **The Harold Gales Community Development Fund:** supports staff activity for affiliate groups and potential affiliates in an attempt to encourage new membership.
- **The CSJO General Fund:** covers our administrative and general expenses.

Please send contributions to CSJO, 320 Claymore Blvd., Richmond Heights, OH 44143. Undesignated funds will be deposited into the General Fund. Your generous donations are appreciated and will be acknowledged in our quarterly newsletter.

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Uprising, told Manger that the Jewish resistance fighters sang it. It was so popular that it was translated into Polish.

Manger also wrote short stories and essays. His humorous and fanciful “The Adventures of Hershl Summerwind” made it into Howe and Greenberg’s collection, *A Treasury of Yiddish Stories*. His short novel, *The Book of Paradise* pokes fun at Bible heroes, angels, ordinary Jews and Gentiles alike in a spirit of egalitarian humanism. In contrast, his essays consisted of memoirs and serious intellectual commentary on the nature and future of Yiddish culture. He considered Jewish folklore, both religious and secular, to be the wellspring of Yiddish literature, and wrote, “Let us acquaint our children with it; let us teach them the lesson of ‘continuity,’ for this way of life was terribly lovely and authentically Jewish, and if the word classic still has any meaning, classically Jewish.”

Before World War Two, Manger had a reputation as a libertine and a prankster. Although he escaped the Nazis by fleeing to France, North Africa and finally to London, he was embittered by the Holocaust, which he called by its Yiddish name, the *khurbm*, and especially by the death of his brother in Central Asia, a refugee from the Nazis. Manger’s hatred of Germans and their Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Polish collaborators was only exceeded by his hatred for God, who, as he wrote in a poem, he longed to meet personally, so he could spit blood in His face.

Although sympathetic to socialism, Manger was not overtly political. In 1943, he greeted Soviet emissaries Solomon Mikhoels and Itsik Feffer during their visit to London on behalf of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. In 1948, he represented the international writer’s organization PEN at the unveiling of the Warsaw Ghetto memorial. However, when he condemned the “murder of Yiddish literature and culture” in the Soviet Union in the late 1940s, the Stalinists labeled him an agent of Western imperialism.

Manger lived unhappily in London from 1941 to 1951, then in New York City for the next 15 years in obscurity and poverty. Chain smoking and heavy drinking weakened his health. In 1967, he emigrated to Israel where he regained his popularity and garnered official honors. He died there in 1969. The government of Israel named a street after him and awards a Manger Prize in his memory to recognize outstanding new works in Yiddish.

Manger continues to have an audience. As recently as 2001,

DONATIONS

General Fund

Joan Kurtz, NY in honor of Hans Leander’s new grandson.
Ruth Seid, CA in memory of Joanna Scott
Judy Seid, MD in honor of Emma Rose, daughter of Julie Gales and Laurie Kirchmeier.
to General Fund.
Gerry Revzin, IL
Judy Seid, MD
Gerry Revzin, IL
Secular Jewish Study Group, IL
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The Shane Family, PA in memory of Joan Kurtz’s father.
Ethel Seid, CA
Robert Sims, MI

Max Rosenfeld Publications Fund

Gerry Revzin, IL in honor of the new great-grandchild of Bess and Marty Katz, PA

Harold Gales Community Development Fund

Roberta Feinstein/Hans Leander in honor of Julie Gales/Laurie Kirchmeier’s new baby.
Roberta Feinstein/Hans Leander, OH in memory of Stanley Robbin, father of Joan Kurtz.

New York’s last Yiddish theater, the Folksbiene, revived *Songs of Paradise* and in 2002, the Eldridge Street Synagogue and National Yiddish Book Center jointly sponsored a tribute, *Itzik Manger Remembered in Words and Music*.

For further reading (and further proof of his continuing appeal), see *The World According to Itzik: Selected Poetry and Prose* (2002), with an introduction by Yiddish scholars David Roskies and Leonard Wolf. A setting of the poem “Afn veg shteyt a boym” is found on the CD released by the Sholom Aleichem Club, “Mayn oyster — My Treasure” (available through bkatz@erols.com or 215-636-0736).

Letters to the Editor

From a review in May 2002 by Bennett Muraskin of Michael Carin, *The Future Jew*:

“I have thoroughly read the literature of secular humanistic Judaism, and find that it has little in common with Carin’s. His strange brew of Holocaust obsession, militant atheism, right-wing Zionism, naïve faith in science and technology, combined with his neglect of Yiddish culture and the entire history of the secular Jewish movement has no appeal for me.”

Dear Editor:

I read with interest, and then with some dismay, Bennett Muraskin’s critical review of Michael Carin’s *The Future Jew*. I don’t disagree that Carin doesn’t seem to know much about Jewish culture, but I am reminded of what we say when we sing “dyenu” each year at our Pesakh seder. “... even when we consider the things in the song, the things we say we *are* satisfied with, we see that no one of the things we sing about – in the tra-

ditional dyenu: the existence of Miriam, Yokheved and Moses, the exodus from ancient Egypt and freedom, – in our dyenu: freedom, celebration and hope – none of these, alone, would indeed have been enough. . . . When we sing Dyenu, it means we celebrate each step toward our goals *as if* it were enough, and then start out on the next step. It means that if we reject each step because it is not the whole liberation, we will never be able to achieve the whole liberation. It means to sing each verse as if it were the whole song – and then sing the next verse!”

Carin is new to the Secular Jewish world; he doesn’t know much about CSJO or our long history. He doesn’t know much about Jewish labor and political involvement. But that doesn’t mean he wouldn’t be interested to learn. It just means he hasn’t learned yet.

Michael Carin has a strong voice. He writes beautifully. He cares about the future of the Jewish people. And he agrees with us! He’s not perfect yet. (Of course, the rest of us are!) But I think he’s made a great step with his book and can help the Secular movement with it. Instead of excoriating him for his

lacks, we should welcome him and help him become part of our movement.

Judith Seid

Dear Editor:

While Bennett Muraskin in his review (Summer, 2002) of Michael Carin's "The Future Jew," merely expressed disagreement with the book's back-jacket endorsements by Eva Goldfinger and Judith Seid, my reaction is closer to that of dismay.

I, too, received an (unsolicited) copy of the manuscript, seeking my endorsement. After a quick perusal, I informed the importuning author when he called, if memory serves, that Secular Jews are not especially interested in the existence or non-existence of a supernatural power; that we consider our Jewish identity to be based on our history and culture, with relationship to the supernatural a purely personal matter. I noted his admiration of Rabbi Wine and the Society for Humanistic Judaism, suggesting that he might find there people who shared his overriding concern with proving the non-existence of God and who might, therefore, find his book valuable.

I believe I also took exception to his Holocaust Hagaddah for many of the reasons Bennett cited in his review.

I am dismayed that vegvayzer/madrikhot/Leaders in the Secular Movement are unable (or unwilling) to distinguish between Secular Jewishness and village atheism, and that they take pleasure in a book perpetuating the chauvinistic myth of eternal Gentile anti-Jewish hatred, slighting the history of Secularism and even denying the very existence of our CSJO.

I, for one, am not so desperate for recognition in the larger community that I will shed principle to attain it.

Hershl Hartman

Blowing the Shofar, Saying goodbye

continued from p. 1

teacher, and as my mind drifts back to that year, I realize that this is it. My last Rosh Hashanah as the shofar blower is my graduation, the day this community sends me off into the world hoping that they have raised a good person. Did they teach me what it means to be a humanist? Did they help me to form a more mature

understanding of morals, values, and community? Did they provide an open environment conducive to exploration and creation of one's own Secular Jewish identity? Three fluctuating notes flow across the audience and are followed by nine rapid, staccato notes, which barely escape from the ancient horn.

"Tekeeyah!" The original call is repeated. The faces in front of me have not changed in appearance or countenance, yet they seem different. Feelings of sadness and pride emanate from my parents. They are watching me. I again let a brief, steady pitch fill the large room.

The final command is given, "Tekeeyah Gadolah!" I want to shout to them, "Thank you! You did well! Thank you! You have given me the tools I need! Thank you!" but I can't say it. Instead, I watch the audience, following my lead, take a deep breath, as if they want to see how long they can hold it. I look up as I begin the final note, and observe the puffed cheeks of the people in front of me. Eventually, they all run out of air, and smile when they realize that I have not. The booming call of the shofar continues, and the congregation takes on uniform movements. At first their chins lower slightly, revealing near gapes. Then, scattered grins form on faces throughout the room. Finally, as the note comes to a close, the seasoned members of the community begin to nod, as if to signal that they are content with my performance. I finish the note, lower the shofar, allow my face to return to a normal shade, and sit down as the clapping fades. I told them, and they know.

Publications Available

A large number of publications are available from CSJO. Details are available on the Web page of CSJO: www.csjo.org. A full list will be published in the next issue of the newsletter.

See p. 2 for information on new publications on Hanuka and on celebrating Jewish holidays. Other recent releases: Judith Seid, *God-Optional Judaism. Alternatives for Cultural Jews Who Love Their History, Heritage, and Community.* Sholom Aleichem Club: "Mayn oytser — My Treasure. Sherm Labovitz sings Yiddish art and folk songs."

Hanukkah -
details on p. 2



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