



# BETH CHAVERIM



HUMANISTIC JEWISH COMMUNITY



## What's Happening at Beth Chaverim

*Ma Nishmah*

Sunday, December 22nd, 29th, & 1/5 - Winter Break for Sunday School

Wednesday, December 25th - Chanukah Begins

Sunday, January 12th - Sunday School Resumes

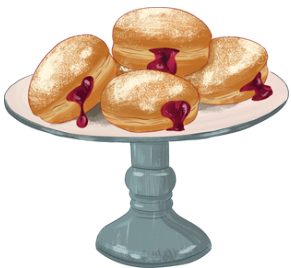
Wednesday, January 15th - Book Group

Saturday, January 25th - Book Launch of "Contemporary Humanistic Judaism" 3-5pm, Unitarian Church, Half Day Road, Deerfield

Sunday, February 2nd - Author Virtual Visit for Middle School Class

Sunday, February 9th - Tu B'shevat Seder at Sunday School

Wednesday, February 12th - Book Group



You can find all of this information & more  
on our [website](#) under  
"News & Events"



## Beth Chaverim Steering Committee

President - Carolyn Lewis

Secretary - Steve Rusnak

Treasurer - Deb Rusnak

Past President - Deb Rusnak

Members at Large - Dan Lewis and Rachelle Durrer

# The Darker the Day, the Greater the Need for Light

Chanukah is our winter solstice holiday. It generally falls at or near the day when there is the least amount of physical light available to us. Our tradition has us lighting an increasing number of candles on our hannukiahs (or menorahs) on each successive day so that by the end of the holiday, there is a brightness that is otherwise unusual for the time of year. Indeed the legend of the single day's worth of oil lasting in a miraculous fashion for eight days underscores the essential need for the provision of more light when things are at their darkest.

Of course candles can be lit, fires ignited, lamps turned on and even our phones illuminated. Yet we need not be so literal about how to bring light into the world; in fact the metaphor of bringing light into darkness is more powerful. The darker the day, the greater the need for light. The state of our country is under cover of a dark shadow. For many of us, the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel seems farther and farther away resembling a mere speck. We continue to grieve for the victims of the massacre of October 7, 2023; the hostages taken and continued to be held; and the enormous loss of innocent Palestinian lives. Anti-semitism is making an angry comeback here and abroad. Again for many of us, our values seem to have fallen to the wayside in the recent election. The litany of darkneses is daunting. But we are not helpless. Hope is our ally; it is our light. Humanistic Judaism often centers this idea of light. Rabbi Sherwin Wine wrote "ayfo ori, ori bi, where is my light? . . . my light is in me." We bless our Shabbat and Chanukah candles by saying, "baruch ha-or ba-olam, baruch ha-or ba-adam . . . blessed is the light in the world, blessed is the light in every human being." These remind us that not only is there light in each of us, but like the full hanukkah on the last night of Chanukah, it is brightest when joined with others. Joy is our ally, it too is our light. Focusing on the things like the smiles of our children, or the connection provided by our community can bring us joy. We can center these things and not take them for granted, making our world brighter. Tikkun olam (repairing the world) is our ally, it likewise is our light. The many acts of doing good in the world bring its own rewards as so often, doing good makes us feel good.

The winter solstice is but a day in time; the clearly evident darkness of the day does not last. As soon as it ends, light increases daily. This is the way of the natural world in which there are no miracles or anything supernatural. We follow these cycles as we live our lives and integrate their well-established patterns into them. Our metaphoric light should be second nature by then. Patterns of light, joy and tikkun olam will be established. May we go from strength to strength together, holding and recognizing the light we bring to the world.

Wishing you a very happy Chanukah, and a secular new year that brings peace, good health and happiness.



*B'shalom, Rabbi Jodi*



## Beth Chaverim Mission Statement

Beth Chaverim is a place for individuals and families to explore their Jewish heritage and traditions, to learn to think critically and independently about religious and theological issues, and to develop meaningful and relevant Jewish identities through education.

## President's Column

As I write this message, we find ourselves in challenging times. The recent presidential election has left many in our community feeling disheartened, uncertain about what lies ahead. At the same time, the ongoing war in Israel, as well as the rise in antisemitism here at home and across the world, has left us with heavy hearts and an urgent need for reassurance. We are reminded daily of the trials facing the Jewish people, and the work we still have ahead of us to build a world where dignity, understanding, and respect are extended to all.

In such moments, we find ourselves turning to our roots – to our identity as a Humanistic Jewish community. Ours is a history marked by resilience, a history in which our people have faced seemingly insurmountable hardships, yet time and again, have chosen to hope, to rebuild, and to thrive. This commitment to hope has not only shaped our past but is essential to how we navigate the present and envision our future.

In the face of divisive political outcomes, I urge us to focus on unity. We may differ in our political affiliations, but our shared values and commitment to Humanistic principles bind us together. Let us strengthen our community by listening, learning, and supporting each other, reminding ourselves that we can create change that reflects our values, even when the world seems divided.

In his post-election statement, President Joe Biden reminded us that, “Setbacks are unavoidable, but giving up is unforgivable.” These words resonate deeply, especially now. While we may feel weary and face moments of frustration, we cannot allow these challenges to break our spirit. Giving up is not an option for us, nor has it ever been. Our tradition of perseverance calls upon us to act, to build, and to remain steadfast in the face of adversity.

The ongoing conflict in Israel weighs heavily on all our hearts, and it is easy to feel despair in the face of violence. Yet, even amid this darkness, there are stories of kindness, bravery, and an unwavering commitment to peace. These are the stories we need to elevate, for they serve as a reminder of the humanity that persists in times of conflict. Let us hold space for peace in our hearts and actions, supporting efforts for dialogue, compassion, and understanding. Our work, even from afar, can contribute to a future where peace is possible.

The recent attacks on Jewish individuals in Amsterdam have sent shockwaves throughout Jewish communities worldwide, and our hearts are heavy with sadness and anger. Amsterdam, a city long cherished for its rich Jewish history and known for embracing cultural diversity, now faces a painful reckoning with the same antisemitic violence that has risen globally. These acts remind us that hatred has no borders, and that even in places where Jewish life has been integral to the cultural fabric for centuries, hostility and prejudice still lurk. In the face of these horrifying incidents, we stand in solidarity with our Jewish brothers and sisters in Amsterdam and around the world. We must speak out, educate, and work with allies to confront antisemitism and any ideology that targets people based on identity. Let us commit to creating a world in which Jewish communities, wherever they may be, feel secure, valued, and embraced.

## President's Column (Continued.)

The surge in antisemitism here in the United States and around the world is deeply painful. Our congregation has felt this too, and we know it can be difficult to keep faith in humanity in a world that sometimes feels hostile. But we have been here before, and we are still here. Our community will continue to stand strong, and together, we will work to build an inclusive, educated, and compassionate society. Our task is not only to protect each other but to share the power of allyship with our neighbors and to advocate for change within our broader society.

Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine, founder of the movement of Humanistic Judaism, shared the following words in his poem, *Let It Go*:

Let go of despair.  
Let go of the past.  
Let go of anger.  
Let go of fear.  
Let go of pain.

What is done is done.  
What is lost is lost.  
The future is open.  
The future is ours.  
New strength and new courage,  
They are our companions.

Let go of despair.  
Let go of the past.  
Let go of anger.  
Let go of fear.  
Let go of pain.

Hope and love,  
They are our friends.  
Joy and laughter,  
They are our salvation.

In the weeks and months ahead, Beth Chaverim will continue to serve as a sanctuary for hope, resilience, and action. Through our programs, our learning, and our shared values, we will strive to remain a beacon of compassion and strength. I encourage each of you to join us in our efforts, to find ways to engage, to support one another, and to uplift the values that define us as a Humanistic Jewish community.

Thank you for being part of this community and for carrying forward the light of hope, especially now, when it is most needed. Together, we can build a future that honors our past and reflects our highest ideals.

 Carolyn Lewis

# What's Happening at Beth Chaverim – Ma Nishmah

## Mazal Tov

Our vocalist Scott Bass and his wife Anna on the birth of their daughter Riley Lacey and Max Kottler on the birth of their daughter Shoshana

## Todah Rabah

Barbara Ratliff for substitute teaching our lower primary class

Our volunteers who delivered food packages for Rosh Hashanah: Julia Bliss, Rachele and Anastasia Durrer, Steve and Samantha Field, Dan, Carolyn and Marlee Lewis, Barbara, Gianna and Kaelyn Ratliff, Sarina Reuben and Ben Adams, the Sanders family, the Wilens-Cutler family, J.P. Young

Oneg bakers: The Baba family, Phyllis Cheskin, the Kornfeld-Wild family, the Lewis family, Judith Matz, the Oster family, Deb Rusnak, Jillana Enteen

Nancy Freedkin for creating and making pomegranate magnets with our students and providing all the supplies

Dan Lewis for taking the donated bags of food to the Vernon Township Food Pantry

Devin Sanders, Mason Young, and Howard Cheskin for helping construct our sukkah and Howard Cheskin for designing it and providing all the wood; and Mason and JP Young for dismantling it

Elite Growers for donating the tall grasses for our sukkah roof and Phyllis Cheskin for making the arrangements and picking it up

Toy donors for the holiday toy drive with Jewish Children and Family Services: the Bliss family, the Fisher-Stawinski family, the Lewis family, the Ratliff family, Bobbi and Jim Taormina, the Uno family, and Rabbi Jodi

Jillana Enteen for substitute teaching our upper primary class

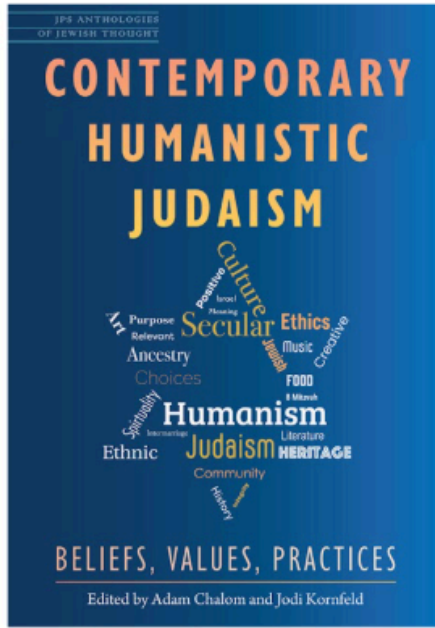
## Yom Kippur Donations

Vivian and Loren Kramer  
Bobbi and Jim Taormina  
Phyllis Hecker  
Carolyn Rusnak

## Beth Chaverim Remembers

Debbie Shore

# Book Launch!



BOOK LAUNCH EVENT ♦ Saturday, January 25<sup>th</sup> ♦ 3-5 PM CST

"Contemporary Humanistic Judaism" collects key Humanistic Jewish texts in one volume, along with illuminating introductory essays on the history and philosophy of the movement. Edited by Rabbi Jodi and her colleague Rabbi Adam Chalom

## Chanukah Candle Lighting Blessings

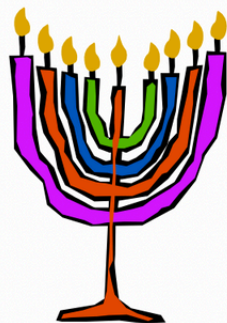
Chanukah Candle Lighting  
Beth Chaverim Humanistic Jewish Community

*Baruch ha-or ba-olam  
Baruch ha-or ba-adam*

*Blessed is the light in the world  
Blessed is the light in each person*

*Baruch ha-or ba-Chanukah*

*Blessed is the light of Chanukah*



# Fall Happenings

In a first for Beth Chaverim and Rabbi Jodi, a sukkah was put up in her backyard and Sukkot was celebrated on a beautiful fall day.



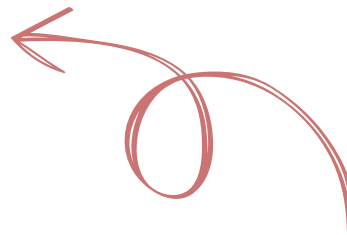
# More Fall Happenings!



We learned about the phases of the moon and its importance to the Jewish calendar, using Oreo cookies.



First Presbyterian Church gave us such a warm welcome as we celebrated the High Holidays there.



With the help of Nancy Freedkin, our students made pomegranate magnets. The seeds are thought to be as numerous as the good deeds we can do and the blessings we can have.



# Even More Fall Happenings!



Rabbi Jodi participated in the annual interfaith Thanksgiving service.



The generosity of our members provided a trunkful of groceries for a local food pantry.

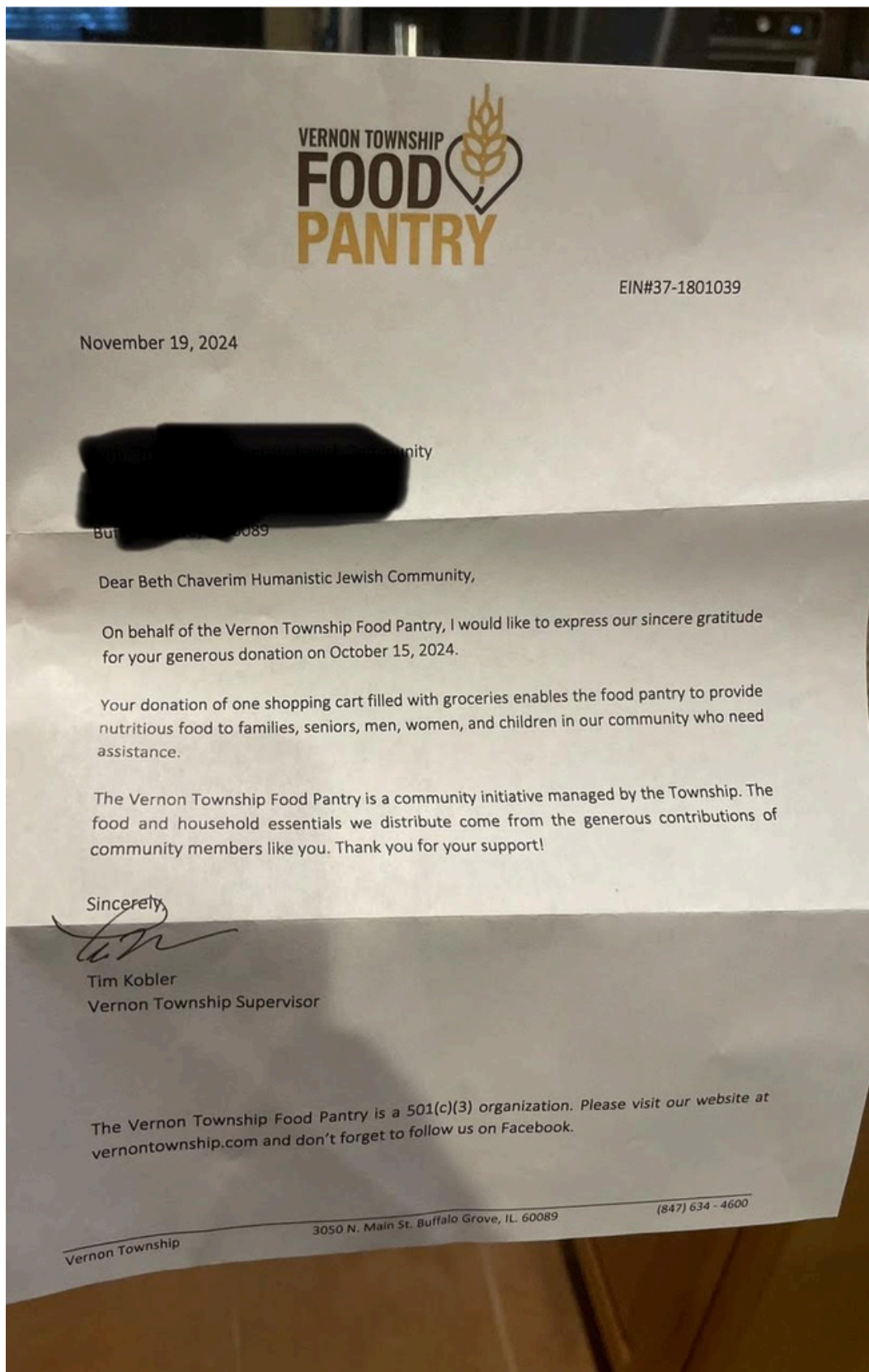


## Standing on One Foot

*Judaism in roughly 140 characters*

“Do not be wise in words - be wise in deeds.” A Jewish proverb

# Look What the Mail Brought In



## Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine

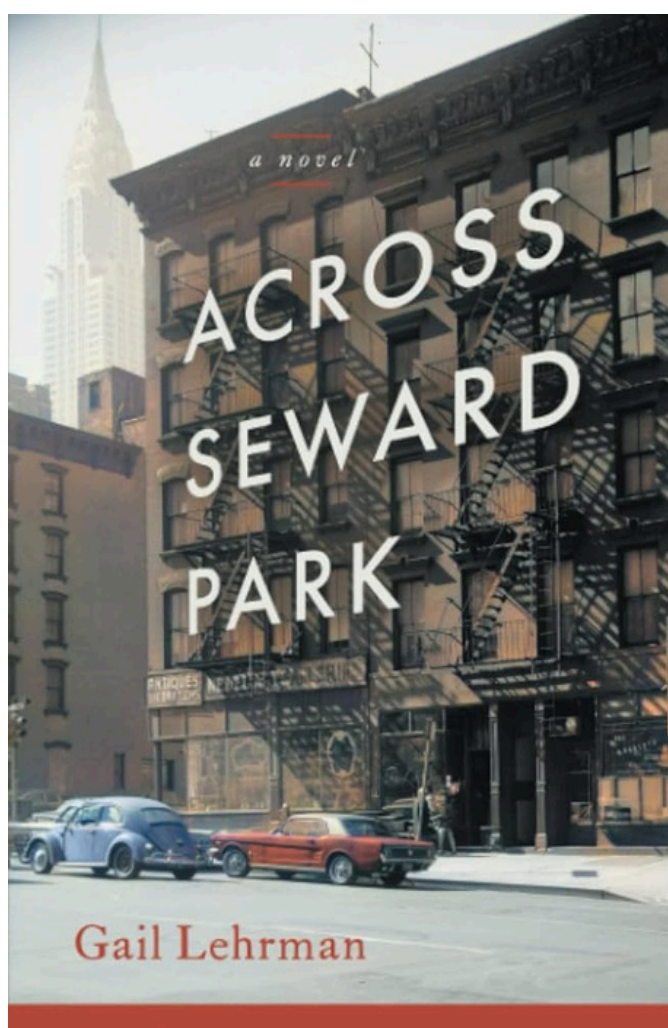
“Hope is an act of will, affirming, in the presence of evil, that good things will happen, preferring in the face of failure, self-esteem to pity. Optimists laugh, even in the dark; they know that hope is a lifestyle not a guarantee.”

## Beth Chaverim Book Club

On January 15th, book group continues with a discussion of “Across Seward Park” by Gail Lehrman. Described by goodreads.com as a sweeping historical saga, “Set against the backdrop of 20th Century Manhattan, “Across Seward Park” weaves a riveting tale of family, ambition, and self-discovery.

When idealistic Young Irving Friedman and his beautiful, hard-nosed sister Miriam are forced to leave their brutal father’s home, they must make their way amid the sprawling tenements of the Lower East Side. Trapped in the garment industry’s backbreaking sweatshops, Irving is swept into the dangerous world of union organizing, while Miriam finds unexpected new love. As the years pass and one generation yields to the next, the siblings’ hard-won success is imperiled when an old family secret is unearthed that puts Irv on a collision course with Miriam’s ambitious daughter Shelly. Will secrets from the past destroy their family’s bond, or will they find a way to forgive?

An unforgettable tale of love, sacrifice, and the enduring power of kinship in the face of adversity.”



## Beth Chaverim Book Club

On February 12th, we will discuss “On Her Own” by Lihi Lapid. HarperCollins.com describes it as follows:

“Nina, a teenage runaway, wakes up in the unfamiliar stairwell of a Tel Aviv apartment in a torn minidress. As her memory starts to resurface—the abusive older man she’s running away from, the crime she witnessed—she knows one thing: she needs to find a place to hide.

When one of the building’s tenants, Carmela, a lonely old widow suffering from memory loss, mistakes Nina for her granddaughter she hasn’t seen in years, Nina jumps at the opportunity for a safe haven. Soon, the two strangers become each other’s lifeline as Nina settles into the apartment with sweet, reassuring Carmela. Meanwhile, Irina, a Russian immigrant, is living a parent’s worst nightmare: her only daughter has gone missing. She knows Nina got involved with the wrong men and will do anything to find her. Across the ocean, Itamar feels that something is happening to his mom, Carmela. The guilt over having left Israel for his pursuit of the American dream stirs childhood memories in him and a longing for the family that once was complete.

Set between the eve of Passover and Israel’s Independence Day, *On Her Own* is a tense and immersive psychological read about two families looking for redemption and the transformative bonds between strangers.”



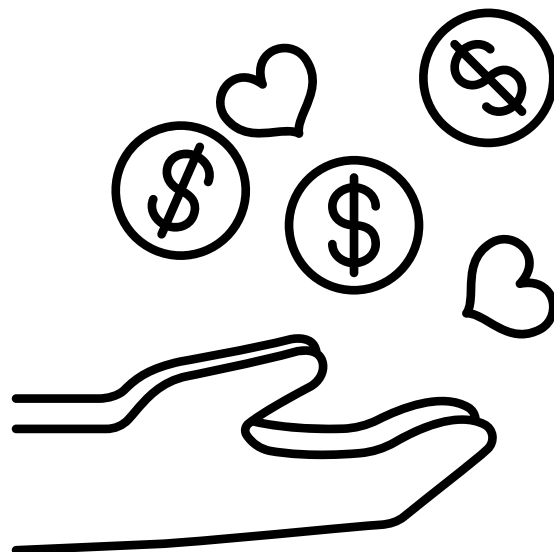
## Adult Education

We will continue our exploration of motifs in the Bible including the younger prevailing over the older, and the barren woman. Please check our website for upcoming dates.



## Support Beth Chaverim through Donation Matching

If your employer has a matching program for donations you make, please note that Beth Chaverim is a certified 501 (c)(3) organization; if needed we can supply the necessary documentation to receive matching donations.



# Humanist Café - Food for the Mind & the Appetite

Amy Goodman was named the Humanist of the Year for 2024 by the American Humanist Association. Goodman is the granddaughter of a Hasidic rabbi, born to secular Jewish parents, parents who were active in social action causes, and she identifies as a secular Jew. Her professional biography is set forth on the AHA website.

“Goodman is the co-founder and main host of Democracy Now!, a progressive global news program that is free of corporate influence. Her award-winning investigative journalism work spans Chevron Corporation’s role in Nigeria, Morocco’s occupation of Western Sahara, and more.

Shortly after graduating from Harvard in 1984, Goodman helped launch Democracy Now! and has grown it to become one of the leading US-based independent daily news broadcasts in the world. As a producer and host, Goodman interviews people on the front lines of the world’s most pressing issues, allowing a range of people to speak for themselves in ways that would normally not reach the mainstream media. Goodman and her colleagues often focus on issues they consider under-reported or ignored by mainstream news coverage, like racial injustice and peace activism.” Significantly, it noted, “As an advocate for factual reporting that builds bridges between communities, Goodman sticks to facts and holds politicians and corporations accountable. Her commitment to grassroots political journalism is not just inspiring—it’s essential for the preservation of democracy and human rights. In a time when disinformation spreads rapidly and journalists face increasing threats, Goodman’s lifting fearless reporting has never been more critical.”



# Humanist Café - Food for the Mind & the Appetite

## Produce

Persian cucumber *sliced lengthwise*  
 Apples *thinly sliced*  
 Cherry tomatoes  
 Radishes *quartered*  
 Onions *finely chopped*  
 Lemon *thinly sliced*

## Carbs

Oven-Ready Latkes  
 Cauliflower Latkes  
 Sweet Potato Waffle Fries  
 Purple Sweet Potato Kettle Chips  
 Everything Bagel Chips

Latke Charcuterie Board  
<https://ainttooproudtome.com/large-latke-hanukkah-board/>

## Accoutrements

Caperberries  
 Applesauce  
 Chives chopped  
 Capers  
 Sour Cream  
 Hanukkah Gelt  
 Castelvetrano Olives

## Proteins

Lox  
 Egg Whites scrambled  
 Egg Yolks scrambled  
 Roe Caviar  
 Whitefish Dip

## Instructions

1. Add the egg whites, egg yolks, onions, chives, capers, and caper berries to ramekins and line up in the center of the board along with the tin of caviar.
2. Add the white fish dip, sour cream, olives, and apple sauce to small bowls and place evenly throughout the board.
3. Fan the latkes and sweet potato fries around 3 of the small bowls, then add the lox and produce to the board being sure to separate similar colors.
4. Fill in the rest of the board with the carbs, and serve whatever doesn't fit on the side.



## Can You Help?

Over the past few years, we have had several families within our community that have had a temporary set back, ie: a surgery, loss of a job, family crises, etc. "Helping Hands" is available to help with the needs of these families, either through delivering a meal, or driving to a doctor's appointment or any other minor needs a family could use. If you would like to be added to the list of members who will assist when needed, please email us and we will contact you when the need arises. Thank you to everyone who has volunteered already; it is greatly appreciated. Any family needing assistance can seek it by contacting Rabbi Jodi.



We are always looking for some assistance, large and small, for our events.

Please let us know if you are interested in helping.



Humanistic Judaism 101



- Defines Judaism as the collective historic experience of the Jewish people and promotes a community of shared Jewish values.
- Promotes the development of a strong Jewish identity, especially for those Jews who cannot intellectually or emotionally embrace a supernatural being, or who are unsure about the existence of such a being and want to express their Judaism in an honest and meaningful way.
- Emphasizes the capacity in all human beings to improve themselves and the world through learning and the performance of good deeds.
- Teaches that ethical behavior is conduct which enhances the dignity of every individual.
- Understands that ritual without meaning is simply empty ritual and that liberal Judaism is authentic Judaism without apologies to the present or nostalgic bows to the past. Beth Chaverim is affiliated with the Society for Humanistic Judaism.

## Did you know?

Rabbi Jodi Kornfeld is available to conduct life cycle ceremonies including weddings, baby namings, and funerals for members and non-members. Contact Rabbi Jodi for further information at:

(847) 945-6512

rabbijodi@gmail.com



# Thank You for Reading!

This is a quarterly publication by



## Beth Chaverim

*Humanistic Jewish Community*  
Deerfield, IL (847) 945-6512  
<http://bethchaverim.net/>

**Rabbi - Jodi Kornfeld**  
**Administrator - Linda Horn**  
**Editor - Lindsey Grant**

**Beth Chaverim is proudly affiliated with:**



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