VOLUME 15, ISSUE 4
SPRING 2025

BETH CHAVERIM

HUMANISTIC JEWISH COMMUNITY

What's Happening at Beth Chaverim

Ma Nishmah

Sunday, April 6th - Maot Chitim Passover Food Delivery (Good Deeds Day)

Sunday, April 13th - Chocolate Seder in Sunday School

Sunday, April 13th - Community Passover Seder, Northbrook Hilton, 6pm

Saturday, April 19th - Northlight Theater Production of "Prayer for the French Republic"

Wednesday, April 23rd - Book Group

Wednesday, April 23rd - Adult Ed, 2pm

Sunday, May 4th - Last day of Sunday School

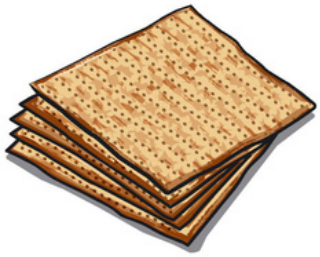
Wednesday, May 21st - Adult Ed, 2pm

Wednesday, May 21st - Book Group

Sunday, June 1st - Pinta Pride Parade, Buffalo Grove, 11am

Sunday, June 29th - Soup Kitchen at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Evanston, 11-1

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

Resilience is Our Mantra

We live in chaotic times that are unnerving, exhausting and challenging. Our fundamental values and things we hold dear are under assault. Indeed, many of our basic assumptions that we have long held seem to be faltering. Our security may feel threatened. We may be feeling either the slow undercurrent or the brazen attack of anti-Semitism. At times it may be easier, if less satisfying, to surrender. Recognizing this litany does little to assuage it. But we have been here before. The history of the Jewish people is the history of resilience. The old joke that purports to summarize that history, "they tried to kill us, we won, let's eat!", is funny because it rings true. As Rabbi Sherwin Wine wrote, "Laughing has always seemed to me more Jewish than praying." We are the best advocates for what we value; we are the only ones who can bring about the changes we want. It is our actions that matter. Individually they may seem insignificant and inconsequential but together they have the capacity to achieve remarkable things.

This newsletter comes between the holidays of Purim and Passover. Purim, described in the Book of Esther which is one of two books in the Bible named for women and also one of two books that do not mention the biblical god, tells the story of a brave Queen Esther who risked her own life to expose the murderous plot of Haman to kill all the Jews. In the end, the plot is foiled, and it is the evil Haman who is destroyed. The custom of making loud noises to overwhelm Haman's name, or writing his name on the soles of our shoes only to rub it out, derives from the very human belief that our actions matter. Passover tells the story of the ancient Israelites' journey from slavery under Pharaoh to freedom. We retell this story annually, beginning with the words "Let all who are hungry come and eat." Freedom is not simply the ability to do what one wants; it involves responsibility to others. The veracity of these stories does not matter; rather it is the essential moral and ethical lessons that we remind ourselves of each year that do. The responsibility and courage to speak out in the face of threats is Queen Esther's legacy. The obligation to seek freedom not only for ourselves but for people enslaved anywhere is the teaching of Passover. Our tradition offers the wisdom that we are not to give up, no matter how daunting the task. Rabbi Tarfon famously said, "It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you free to abandon it." We are the heirs of an ancestral legacy that we are free to reinterpret and make meaningful in our own way. Were it any other way, the Jewish people would have long ago ceased to exist. Our secular and humanistic approach to our Judaism is expansive and inclusive. Resilience is our mantra.

There is much to be done to repair our deeply broken world, and they are not easy tasks, but we do not face them alone. Instead, we have the benefit of family, friends and community. The wider our reach for others, the greater the opportunity for their positive influence in our lives. We can become diminished by creating "others" whom we keep at a distance and view only through that lens; but conversely we are infinitely enriched by repeatedly including "others." It is worth reminding ourselves that we too may be "others" in someone else's paradigm with all the isolation, loneliness and potential harm associated with that status. Inclusion is the antidote.

Remember, resilience is our mantra, and we can repeat it again and again and again.

May you go from strength to strength.

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

At Beth Chaverim Humanistic Jewish Community, inclusion is not just a value—it is a cornerstone of our identity. As a community that embraces Humanistic Judaism, we recognize that Jewish life flourishes when it welcomes all who seek to engage with it, regardless of background, belief, or identity. Our commitment to inclusion aligns seamlessly with our humanistic values, emphasizing the dignity, equality, and worth of every individual.

Humanistic Judaism acknowledges that Jewish identity is as much about culture, ethics, and shared experience as it is about history and tradition. This perspective allows us to create a space where diverse voices and perspectives are not only heard but celebrated. Whether someone comes from an interfaith family, or identifies as LGBTQ+, or is exploring Judaism for the first time, they will find a home with us. Our services, programs, and celebrations reflect this openness, ensuring that everyone can connect to Jewish life in a way that feels meaningful to them.

Inclusion also means fostering a sense of belonging and participation. At Beth Chaverim, we encourage members to shape and contribute to our community, offering opportunities for learning, discussion, and leadership. Through engaging programs for children and adults alike, we create pathways for connection, ensuring that no one feels like an outsider in their Jewish journey.

Our commitment to inclusion is a living expression of Humanistic Judaism. By embracing diversity, we affirm that Jewish life is enriched by the contributions of all who engage with it. In a world that often seeks to divide, our community stands as a beacon of acceptance and unity. Together, we celebrate a Judaism that is welcoming, meaningful, and deeply humanistic.

This commitment extends beyond our walls. Through social action initiatives, interfaith collaborations, and advocacy for justice and equality, we actively live our values in the broader world. Whether supporting refugee families, standing up against discrimination, or engaging in dialogue with other communities, we demonstrate that Humanistic Judaism is not just about what we believe—it's about how we act.

As we continue to grow and evolve, our dedication to inclusion remains unwavering. We invite everyone to join us in shaping a vibrant, compassionate, and forward-thinking Jewish community. By honoring each person's unique journey, we strengthen the bonds that unite us all.

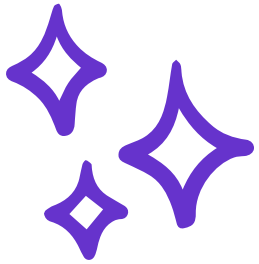
Carolyn Lewis

What's Happening at Beth Chaverim – Ma Nishmah

Welcome New Members

The Weisman family: Stephanie, Andrew, and Eli, and Ilene Weisman

Mazel Tov



Sue and Hugh Pinkus on the engagement of their son Elliot
The Young family on the upcoming bat mitzvah of their daughter Lexi
Elyse and Tom Magill on the birth of their granddaughter Winnie

Donations

Donations in memory of Meryle Mitchel

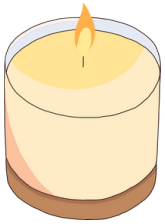
Robin and Cary Chessick
Linda and Rich Horn
Julie Boyer
The Lewis family
Linda and Rick Vittenson
Mary and Richard Knapp
Judith Matz and David Barhydt
Elyse and Tom Magill

Todah Rabah

Jodi and Juan Hernandez for providing the ingredients and making latkes for our school Chanukah celebration
Nancy Freedkin for making the Chanukah cookies and supplies to decorate them
Marlena Weheliye for substitute teaching the upper primary class
Fill-A-Heart volunteers: Dan, Carolyn and Marlee Lewis, Jodi and Juan Hernandez
Nourish Our Neighborhoods donors of hats, gloves and hand warmers: Jodi and Juan Hernandez, the Lewis family, the Moyer-Uno family, the Ratliff family; and Mason Young for transporting the kits to the JCC
Nancy Freedkin for proving the ingredients and making hamantashen with our students
Devin Sanders for driving the truck for our delivery of Passover food packages in partnership with Maot Chitim

Beth Chaverim Remembers

Meryle Mitchel, mother of Rabbi Jodi
Eileen Freeman



Winter & Spring Happenings

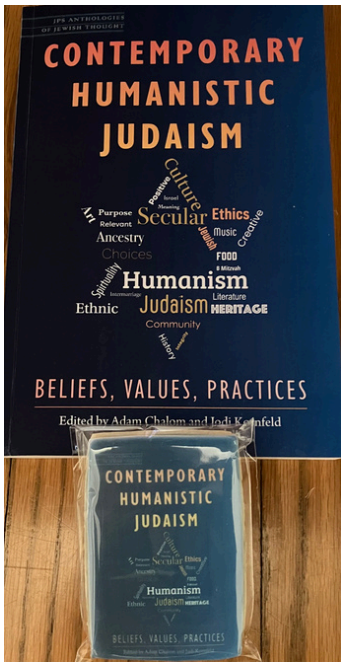
Sizzle, Sizzle!

Jodi and Juan Hernandez celebrate Chanukah by making latkes

Our Sunday school students celebrated Tu B'shevat, the New Year of the Trees, by painting bird feeders and enjoying our annual Tu B'shevat seder.

Fill-a-Heart

Happenings: Book Launch



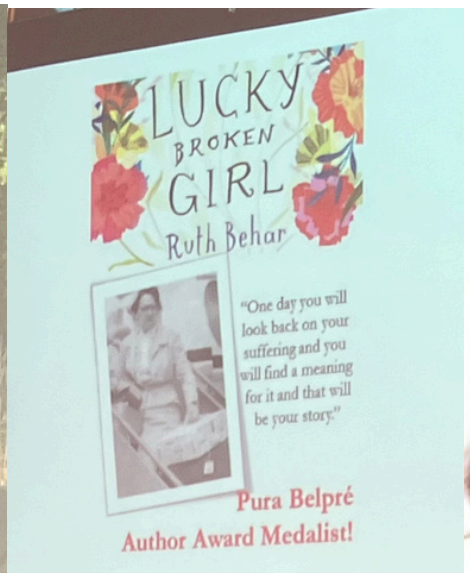
Book launch of *Contemporary Humanistic Judaism: Beliefs, Values, Practices*

On January 25, 2025, a date that happened to be the birth date of Rabbi Sherwin Wine the founder of Humanistic Judaism, Rabbi Jodi and Rabbi Adam Chalom launched the book they co-edited Contemporary Humanistic Judaism: Beliefs, Values, Practices. It was well-attended in person and online. Everyone who attended in person was treated to cookies that were made to copy the cover of the book. The book is available at jps.org or on amazon.com. A video of the entire launch is available at https://youtu.be/tE6_0QpNn2Y?si=mjXT5DF65fwMswmm.

↺ BC Rewind!

We made a parade from the Center for Enriched Living to Orphans of the Storm to deliver pet supplies (~2005)

Happenings: Virtual Author Visit



The middle school students of Beth Chaverim Humanistic Jewish Community were joined by those of Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation for a virtual author visit by Ruth Behar. Behar is the author of "Lucky Broken Girl," a novel based on her own experiences as a girl immigrating to New York City from Havana, Cuba, and having to spend a year in a body cast after a car accident when she was ten. She is also a professor of anthropology at University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Leading up to this, the students read her book as part of their respective immigration studies. Dr. Behar shared a powerpoint presentation about her experiences, her family, and the book, and then answered all the students' questions. This is the second, and hopefully annual, cultural program that the two schools shared. Following the presentation, the students were treated to flan, made by Janet Century Kol Hadash's teacher, one with coconut milk and one without, using the recipes in the back of the book. It was a delicious way to end the program.

Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine

"The Jewish experience is the experience of humanism." (Contemporary Humanistic Judaism: Beliefs, Values, Practices page 8)

Seder Reservation Form

Why is This Night Different From All Other Nights?

It's the Beth Chaverim 2nd Night Seder!

Sunday, April 13, 2025
6:00 PM

Hilton Northbrook
2855 N. Milwaukee, Ave., Northbrook

Dinner Includes
Gefilte Fish
Matza Ball Soup
Mixed Green Salad
Entrée (Choose ONE) - Brisket of Beef, Roasted Half Chicken, Grilled Salmon or Passover Vegetarian Lasagna
Dessert - Flourless Chocolate Cake, Strawberry Shortcake

Bring your own wine or grape juice

$48/adult
$25/child

Deadline April 6th

Send Payment to:
Beth Chaverim Humanistic Jewish Community via Paypal, Zelle/QuickPay or mail a check directly to Beth Chaverim

Click to send us your food order.

Standing on One Foot

Judaism in roughly 140 characters

"Judaism, then, is everything that the Jewish people in their very long history have produced. Judaism is Jewish civilization, Judaism is Jewish culture."
-Yehuda Bauer

Beth Chaverim Book Club

On April 23, we will discuss "I Made it out of Clay" by Beth Kander. According to goodreads.com, "In this darkly funny and surprisingly sweet novel, a woman creates a golem in a desperate attempt to pretend her life is a romantic comedy rather than a disaster. Nothing's going well for Eve: She's single, turning forty, stressed at work and anxious about a recent series of increasingly creepy incidents. Most devastatingly, her beloved father died last year, and her family still won't acknowledge their sorrow. With her younger sister's wedding rapidly approaching, Eve is on the verge of panic. She can't bear to attend the event alone. That's when she recalls a strange story her Yiddish grandmother once told her, about a protector forged of desperation... and Eve, to her own shock, manages to create a golem. At first everything seems great. The golem is indeed protective—and also attractive. But when they head out to a rural summer camp for the family wedding, Eve's lighthearted rom-com fantasy swiftly mudslides into something much darker."

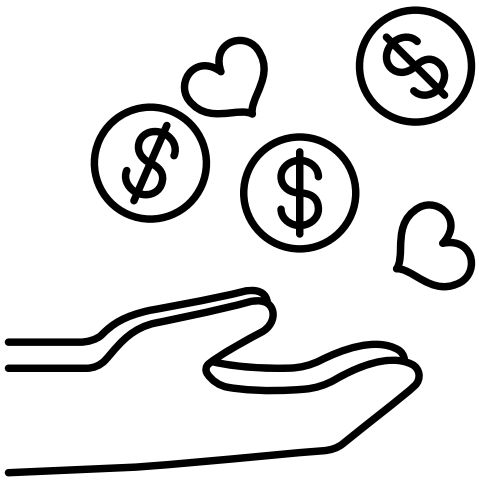
On May 21, we will discuss Tova Mirvis' new novel, "We Would Never." Described on amazon.com as follows: "A riveting literary page-turner that explores the extremes to which a family will go to protect their own. . .
No one is more surprised than Hailey Gelman when she comes under suspicion for the murder of her soon-to-be ex-husband Jonah. Hailey--nicknamed Sunshine by her mother for her bright outlook and ever-present smile--is the peacemaker who has always tried to do what her family expects of her. The months leading up to Jonah's death have been fraught, including a bitter separation and a messy custody battle over their young daughter, Maya. When Hailey files a motion to relocate to Florida so she can be near her family, the divorce begins to escalate, drawing in all the members of Hailey's family, who are determined to help her however they can. Most invested is Sherry, Hailey's mother who wants nothing more than to be close to her family. Then there's Nate, Hailey's devoted and protective older brother, as well as the patriarch, Solomon, who is keeping a secret of his own that threatens the stability and security Sherry has worked so hard to maintain. As the divorce spirals dangerously out of control, they are all forced to consider just how far they will go for each other. Part gripping mystery, part compassionate family drama, *We Would Never* explores what people are capable of when they feel cornered, and how, in the absence of forgiveness, love and hate can intertwine and turn deadly."

Adult Education

We will study the motif of the barren woman in the Bible. This includes stories of Sarah, Rebekah, Hannah and others. Meetings will be held at 2pm on Wednesday April 23rd and Wednesday May 21st.

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

The American Humanist Association defines humanism "as a rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion." The holiday of Passover as celebrated in Humanistic Judaism meets all these criteria. It is an annual time to reflect on the importance of freedom; commit to the struggles of those still enslaved in a compassionate way; creatively and meaningfully develop new rituals and engage in established ones, and all the while do so despite knowing that the story set forth in the Book of Exodus is just a story and there is no evidence that there was an enslaved Israelite population in Egypt. Annually we repeat the words "let all who are hungry come and eat." Yet we continue to tell the story. The truth of the story is secondary to its message and place in Jewish communal history. In fact, Passover demonstrates a key humanistic value of freedom; the transmission of Jewish ancestral identity on a cultural basis; and the importance of creating meaningful ritual. We are responsible for all that. There is almost nothing more humanistic.

Passover Haggadah cartoon by Jamie Oskenhorn

Brown Butter Chocolate Souffle gluten-free and kosher for Passover
Recipe from Bonappetit.com

Ingredients

- 4 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1 cup (200 g) granulated sugar, plus more for sprinkling
- 7oz. (200 g) bittersweet chocolate (65–70% cacao), chopped
- 1 cup heavy cream, plus more for serving
- ½ cup (57 g) Dutch-process cocoa powder
- 2 Tbsp. dark rum (optional)
- 1 ½ tsp. Diamond Crystal or ¾ tsp. Morton kosher salt
- 6 large eggs, room temperature, separated
- ½ tsp. cream of tartar
- Powdered sugar (for serving; kosher for Passover if desired)

Special Equipment

A 1½-qt. soufflé dish

1. Cook 4 Tbsp. unsalted butter in a small skillet over medium heat, swirling occasionally, until it foams, then browns, about 4 minutes. Pour into a small heatproof bowl and chill, stirring halfway through, until spreadable, about 20 minutes (butter should be opaque but still soft enough to brush).

2. Using a pastry brush, generously coat bottom and sides of soufflé dish with butter, making sure to go all the way to the edges. Sprinkle bottom and sides with some granulated sugar (about 2 Tbsp.) and tilt dish to coat evenly; tap out excess. Chill until ready to use.

3. Place a rack in middle of oven and preheat to 375°. Place 7 oz. (200 g) bittersweet chocolate (65–70% cacao), chopped, in a medium heatproof bowl. Heat 1 cup heavy cream in a small saucepan over medium, stirring occasionally, until steaming, about 2 minutes. Pour cream over chocolate and let sit, stirring occasionally with a heatproof rubber spatula, until chocolate is melted and mixture is smooth and has cooled slightly, about 5 minutes. Add ½ cup (57 g) Dutch-process cocoa powder, 2 Tbsp. dark rum (if using), 1½ tsp. Diamond Crystal or ¾ tsp. Morton kosher salt, and ½ cup hot water; whisk to combine. Add 6 large egg yolks, room temperature, and whisk until smooth (don't overwhisk; the objective is to incorporate, not aerate).

4. Using an electric mixer on medium-high speed, beat 6 large egg whites, room temperature, ½ tsp. cream of tartar, and 1 cup (200 g) granulated sugar in a large bowl until glossy and medium peaks form, 8–10 minutes.

5. Add one fourth of egg whites to chocolate mixture and mix with a spatula to incorporate completely (this will lighten the batter). Add remaining egg whites in 3 more batches, gently folding after each addition until only a few streaks of egg whites remain. Scrape batter into prepared soufflé dish.

6. Bake soufflé until puffed and top is slightly darkened and just set (it should wobble slightly in the center when gently shaken), 35–40 minutes.

7. To serve, dust soufflé with powdered sugar and spoon onto plates. Drizzle with heavy cream.

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

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Society for Humanistic Judaism

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