



Thank You to Our Volunteers!

Dear Machar members,

Machar is so lucky to have such a spirit of volunteerism! It truly proves what a dynamic community we are. The active involvement of our members is so important in shaping the kind of Machar we want.

Everything we do happens because of the hard work of our members who are so willing to serve the whole and bring value to all ages. Our committees and clubs, our holiday celebrations, and all of our other activities happen because of our dedicated community.

Machar's depth of talent has brought us some of our most memorable Adult Education programs, with interesting and thoughtful presentations by Mark Swartz on Marc Chagall, Peter Wolfe on the Khazars, Barry Dancis on secularism in Jewish culture, and Michael Prival's Darwin Day talk. We look forward to hearing Hildie Block's March 9 talk on Maurice Sendak and the April 6 group discussion for Good Deeds Day led by Marlene Cohen and Danielle Leff. They all take great effort to prepare to teach and share their expertise with us.

It doesn't take much; a simple idea can turn into a great activity for all. For example, Sue Zwicker got the ball rolling for our Pete Seeger sing-along, with Marco Gonzalez on guitar, and it was a wonderful opportunity to sing together as a community. Nancy Harris and Roberto Levy began our Saturday restaurant gatherings that continue to be a fun way for our members to socialize while trying new restaurants. We want to continue our Shabbat potluck dinners to bring the community together but we need you to make that happen!

And, this Newsletter would never get done without the continued dedication of Tricia Gordon!

So, thank you to all our wonderful, talented, committed and amazing volunteers. Your willingness to give your time to Machar is the foundation that ensures we remain an active and vibrant community. I hope you will consider becoming involved with one of our many committees and clubs or help us plan our holiday celebrations or other special events. Your enthusiasm and efforts are so very much appreciated.

Darlene Basch
Machar President

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JCS News

Debby Brennan

We are all looking forward to an exciting Spring, with Purim and Passover approaching. On March 9, immediately after adult ed, our students will participate in a play of the book *Where the Wild Things Are*, that has been organized by the teen group. This year we celebrate Maurice Sendak.

March 16 is our Purim party at Schweinhaut Senior Center in Silver Spring. Our resident artist, Lisa Hamilton, will be organizing an art project extravaganza... including creating a mural of the Purim story for older students, and puppet making for a play for the younger students. Please join us for arts and crafts fun and of course, some tasty hamantaschen!!

All children and adults are welcome to wear COSTUMES!

Tots—Roxanne Arnon

In the tots class the kids worked with teens to make monster masks. These masks will be used during our next meeting for a *Where the Wild Things Are* performance. The tots were given a brief introduction to tzedakah and decorated their own tzedakah boxes. Finally, the kids participated in music where they were introduced to songs about Purim. Next time we will learn the story of Purim and create our own groggers.

Kindergarten—Ben Lauing

The teen group came to the classroom and showed us how to make masks for the *Where the Wild Things Are* play. Then, we moved on to our lesson about Havdalah.

Last class, we learned about Shabbat. Shabbat is our Jewish day of rest, and to kick it off, we light candles, drink grape juice, and eat challah. At the end of Shabbat (on Saturday nights) we celebrate Havdalah, to say goodbye to our day of rest and usher in the new week that we hope will be full of peace. The Havdalah ceremony involves lighting a funny-looking braided candle, smelling spices, and, again, drinking grape juice.

I brought the Havdalah candle and the grape juice, but before we could celebrate, we had to make our own spice pouches. First, we took our cloth and put inside of it an assortment of spices - we got to pick from cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, bay leaves, and ginger. Then, we folded it all up, wrapped it with a rubber band, and added a piece of yarn to help hold it together. Finally, we took markers and decorated the outsides.

Second Grade—Sue Zwicker

Second graders have been busy with creation stories (Jewish and others) and bible stories from Genesis, from a secular humanistic viewpoint. In addition, second graders are learning about Purim. All students enjoyed making masks for *Where the Wild Things Are*. and second graders enjoyed music with Naomi.

Third Grade—Heather Gale

Third graders have been playing Simon Says in Hebrew and they now know many body parts in Hebrew! The class talked about Purim, reviewed what they knew and read a story to refresh everyone's memories. They had an arts and crafts project with the teens, and made masks for *Where the Wild Things Are*. All of the masks turned out great and everyone had fun making monster masks. After that the third graders had music where they learned some Purim songs and sang their hearts out. Looking forward to next class!

Fourth Grade—Aviva Downing

We're close to finishing our book *Letters from Rifka* and I continue to be impressed with the students as we read through this complicated story. They ask great questions and have lots to share when we have discussions. For our January 26th class the class used props and the students split into groups and put on a skit of their favorite scene in the book. They all did a great job!

We also are close to completing our family tree project. We created mobiles of our family trees using paper cut-outs of leaves which we decorated with colored pencils, markers, stickers and glitter glue. Some of you may have seen the mobiles already but there are still a few students that have a couple more steps to finish up before their mobiles will be ready to go home.

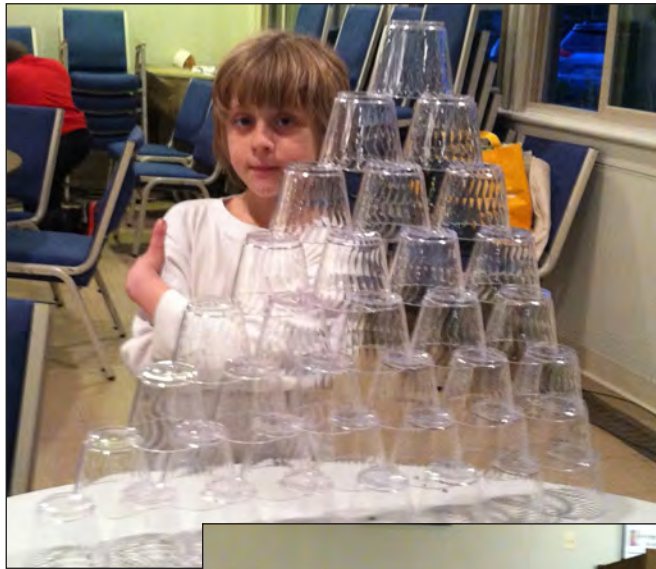
Fifth/Sixth Grade—Izzy Parillis

The 5th and 6th grade class has been tackling various ethical issues using various bible stories and ideas. We've been discussing what it means to develop a belief system and learning about Jewish religious diversity. A lot of big thoughts have come out of our classes lately - notably - is it better to be all knowing or all powerful? Should we seek mentorship in exceptionally good people or exceptionally smart people? How do our values shape how we treat others? How can we be more

inclusive when forming social circles and, more largely, communities? We are looking forward to continuing such discussions and learning more about pre-WWII Jewish life in Europe.

B'nei Mitzvah Class—Hadas Gold

We talked about the Israeli and Palestinian conflict with Susan Morawetz, who explained the time line of the conflict, showed us some videos and discussed the biggest obstacles facing the peace process. We also discussed the upcoming holiday of Purim. On March 9 we have Akiva Liberman talking about life as a modern Orthodox Jew and other branches of Judaism.



Left: Kids learn to make challah under the expert guidance of Rahel Hanadari at our February 22 Havdalah Potluck.

Above: Activities at the potluck included creating a Havdalah set with a decorative plate and cup.

Machar Adult Education and Community Sundays

Adult Education Sessions are Sundays from 10–11:30 a.m. Sessions are open to all.

All sessions are held in the Jewish Primary Day School, 6045 16th St. NW, DC 20012 unless noted.

There is parking on 16th Street and in the back. All talks will be in the gymnasium. *(If you have trouble climbing stairs, use the rear entrance.)*

March 9

Sendak Day/Hildie Block—Maurice Sendak and the Wilde Khaye (Wild Thing)

Sendak, SHJ's Humanist Jewish Role Model for 2013–14, perhaps best known for his book *Where the Wild Things Are*, was an artist obsessed with bringing out the hidden truths in society. After years on the fringe, a child confined to bed, an adult who made window dressings for FAO Schwartz in NYC and who drew the backgrounds in for comic books, Sendak embraced the truths as he saw them: he was gay, people you love die, adults lie to children, and there is no god. Join us to find out more truths about this courageous artist and his role in humanism. The Washington Post called Machar member Hildie Block a "book expert," but when she's not lecturing about writing at American University's Literature Department, she's a "book midwife." (More info at www.hildieblockworkshop.com)

Community Sunday: Children will perform "Where the Wild Things Are"

March 16

Purim Carnival at Schweinhaut Center, 1000 Forest Glen Road, Silver Spring, MD, 10 a.m. to noon

Join us for a morning of fun with an emphasis on using art to tell the story of Queen Esther. We'll make a Megillah mural and Purim puppets, and sing Purim songs together. REGISTER HERE or from the link on the www.machar.org home page (and at Holidays/Purim), indicating what you can bring or how you can help with the festivities. Costumes are welcome! Please invite friends who may be interested in Machar.

April 6

Group Discussion—Wholeheartedness and Humanism

A discussion about embracing authenticity, self-compassion, play, and other guideposts of Brene Brown's research, which Rabbi Miriam Jerris introduced many of us to during the High Holidays this year. Led by Marlene Cohen and Danielle Leff.

Community Sunday: Good Deeds Day

April 20 (Easter Sunday)

Passover Seder at Cedar Lane UU Church, 9601 Cedar Lane, Bethesda, MD, 4:30 p.m.

April 27

MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Members' input is valued. Please attend to hear from the Board what we have been doing in the past year and discuss plans for the future.

Community Sunday: Yom Ha Shoah (Holocaust Remembrance)

May 4

Sherry and Bob Jason—City Hearts: Kids Say Yes to the Arts...Transforming At-Risk Children through the Arts

Sherry and Bob Jason (Darlene Basch's sister and brother-in-law), both former Los Angeles County Public Defenders, established City Hearts in 1984 to provide free visual and performing arts classes to the most-at-risk children in economically distressed neighborhoods in Southern California, enabling children and youth to be confident, imaginative, tolerant, generous and cooperative, as well as productive, contributing participants in their communities.

May 18

Debby Brennan – Jewish Education: Exposure or Commitment?

Machar's Jewish Cultural School Director, Debby Brennan, will talk about the JCS curriculum, the model SHJ curriculum, and will lead a discussion on members' expectations about children's Jewish education at Machar. What would Machar parents and members like children to learn? What Jewish experiences would they want children to have? She will also share with members her own reflections and questions about "exposure" versus "commitment" as different goals of a Jewish education. Would Machar parents like their children to be "exposed" to Judaism? Or do they expect their children to learn "how to be a Jew" with the goal of a Jewish identity?

Community Sunday: Lag B'Omer Picnic



Machar is a member of SHJ, the Society for Humanistic Judaism.

Response to the Pew Study

On October 1, 2013, when the Pew Research Center published its study, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," the Society for Humanistic Judaism responded positively. None of the findings of the report surprised Humanistic Jews. The survey revealed that most Jews (6 in ten) see being Jewish as mainly a matter of culture or ancestry, that more than 90% of Jews say they are proud to be Jewish and feel a sense of belonging to the Jewish people and one in five Jews (22%) describe themselves as having no religion.

Secular Humanistic Jews see Judaism as the historical and cultural experience of the Jewish people. The results of the Pew Study show that more and more Jews share that view and that cultural rather than religious identification is greater among the younger age groups.

In response to questions about what is essential to being Jewish, the top five answers provided by respondents fell into three basic categories: historical, emotional and ethical. None of these relate directly to Jewish practice or involvement in Jewish life. The specific answers were: Remembering the Holocaust (73%), leading an ethical and moral life (69%), working for justice and equality in society (56%), having a good sense of humor (42%), and being intellectually curious (49%). This again supports a more secular approach to Jewish identity.

There were also questions asking respondents to judge whether certain beliefs or practices contradicted Jewish identity. Sixty eight percent (68%) answered that one need not believe in God to be Jewish. Additionally, respondents noted that being Jewish did not require one to refrain from working on the Sabbath (94%), from being strongly critical of Israel (89%), or even from believing in Jesus as the messiah (34%).

Although it is tempting for Humanistic Jews to claim those Jews falling into the category of "Jews of no religion," it is not statistically appropriate to do so. One-in-five Jews of no religion describe themselves as Reform Jews (20%), while 6% identify with Conservative

Judaism, and 1% even say they are Orthodox Jews. The market for prospective members continues to diminish when we discover that only 1% of Jews of no religion specifically say that they are culturally Jewish, atheist, or agnostic. And even then, we know that a shared world view does not necessarily lead cultural Jews to join a Humanistic Jewish community. Indeed, only 28% of all respondents indicate that being part of the Jewish community was important.

The findings of the Pew Study must be carefully assessed and the desire to make claims must be tempered. The results are complex. As secular, cultural, and Humanistic Jews, we can be confident of one very significant factor. The claim that Judaism is primarily a religion or being Jewish is primarily religious is no longer accurate. The majority of Jews claim their Jewish identity as ancestral or cultural, rather than religious. From this perspective Secular Humanistic Judaism is in the mainstream of Jewish life.

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Associate Professor of Professional Development, IISHJ,
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Past President, Association of Humanistic Rabbis

Rabbi Miriam Jerris of the Society for Humanistic Judaism, Past President of the Association of Humanistic Rabbis, will speak on "Intermarriage Math: Intermarriage Can Save the Jewish People." It will be held on Saturday March 22 at 2:00 at the Owings Mills Branch of the Baltimore County Public Library. Her visit is sponsored by the Baltimore Jewish Cultural Chavurah, an affiliate of the Society for Humanistic Judaism.

Owings Mills MD is 22 miles north of BWI airport.

Clubs and Activities

WITs

Renée Weitzner

The wonderful women of WITs will be meeting in March at the home of Donna Copeland for what promises to be a delightful evening of good food and excellent conversation. This will be on **March 26, 2014 at 7 p.m.** Please let me know that you are coming and what you are bringing by March 24, 2014, so that I may let our host know of our numbers and our menu.

WITs (Wimmin' in Transition) is open to all women members of Machar. Please see the Machar website for guidelines and policies about WITs. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. You may email me at [rwcats at aol.com](mailto:rwcats@aol.com) or reach me by phone.

Thank you. I hope to see everyone very soon.

Young Adult Havurah

Danielle Leff

Join our listserve at groups.google.com/group/macharyah or join our group on Facebook at www.facebook.com/groups/macharyah to get the details. YAH events are open to all regardless of membership status in Machar, and participants are encouraged to bring friends who may be curious about our movement.

Book Club

Renée Weitzner and Darlene Basch

The Book Club of Machar has been reading *Gone to Soldiers* by Marge Piercy for the past few weeks. While it is a very long novel, Piercy's ability to sketch out each character and voice is uncanny. We will be meeting on **March 16 at 3 p.m.** at the home of Martha Mednick to discuss this novel and select our next choice of book to

read. Please let me know by March 9 if you are planning to attend, so that I am able to give our numbers to our host in a timely fashion. I hope to see many of you soon.

Evening Study Group

Michael Prival

The Machar Study Group on Jewish religious texts continues to meet every other Monday evening at my home. We are reading and discussing texts from the Bible, the Talmud, and other rabbinic sources. In this way we are learning not only about the Hebrew Bible but also many fascinating and surprising things about traditional Judaism as it existed before the Jewish Enlightenment began in the 18th century. All Machar members, at any level of prior knowledge, are invited to join us. If you'd like more information about this study group, please send me a note: [mprival at aol.com](mailto:mprival@aol.com).

Rabbi Nehama singing
and Sue Zwicker
at guitar during the
Havdalah service at our
February 22 potluck.





Machar members
enjoying Havdalah
service and pot luck
with Rabbi Nehama
Benmosche at Rockville
UU Congregation,
February 22, 2014

Im l'et kazot (Perhaps for a time like this):

The Story of Purim, Pema Chodron and the ambiguity of the present moment

The serendipity of coming to speak at Machar during the month of Adar, leading to the celebration of Purim is hard to ignore. The book of Esther and the Song of Songs are the only two books of the Hebrew bible with no mention of the name of God. Unlike so many of the stories in the Bible, there is no divine intervention here. There are no conversations with God. No acts of prayer or worship. Esther's 3 day fast does not presume a time of conversation with any deity and Mordechai's donning of sackcloth and ashes is not accompanied with a cry to the heavens in quintessential Tevye fashion asking God to "choose someone else!" The story of

Vashti, Esther, Mordechai, Achashverosh and Haman features human beings taking actions. These human beings make choices and through our understanding of their actions, we can understand a little more about our own humanity. Do we choose to stand up for ourselves when we are asked to humiliate ourselves? Do we make ourselves uncomfortable or even put ourselves in danger for justice? Are we encouraging the people around us in positions of influence to act from their truest selves and to seek justice? Or, like Haman, are we acting from a place of fear and tearing down the unfamiliar, the unknown and the different among us?

There are many moments of the Purim story that teach us values about our basic rights as human beings and the ways we need to work to achieve justice and change. But first, let's go back to the basics of the story and make sure we are all clear about what happens in the book of Esther. The story begins with a wild party of the king, Achashverosh. In a drunken stupor, he asks his queen, Vashti, to parade before the nation's ministers in her royal crown. (And tradition holds that the catch was that she was meant to parade in her crown. . .and only her crown). Despite being at her own banquet and feast, it seems Vashti was not drunk enough to think this was a reasonable request and she refuses. Advised that word of her actions could sway all women to defy their husbands in this manner (oh the horror of the possibility!), Achashverosh banishes her from the palace and letters are sent throughout the provinces. Official word from the palace declared that such behavior would not be tolerated.

But the poor king became lonely. A new band of virgins were summoned from all of the provinces and collected at the king's harem. Our hero and heroine don't miss this opportunity to enter the scene since she has the body and he has the political savvy to want someone on the inside. Esther succeeds and becomes the new queen. Not long after, Mordechai manages to overhear a plot to assassinate the king and reports it through Esther to the king's guard and the foiled plot is recorded in the king's records.

Next, our villain enters the story—Haman (BOO!!). Mordechai refuses to bow to Haman because he is a Jew and Haman is enraged and fixates on annihilating all Jews as



Rabbi Nehama Benmosche spoke about the story of Purim and the ideas of Tibetan Buddhist nun Pema Chodron at Adult Ed on February 23.

punishment for Mordechai's insistence on transgressing the king's decree to bow before Haman. When Mordechai begins to weep for his people, Esther begs him to stop. He convinces her that her concealed Jewish identity must be revealed to save the Jews. He exhorts her to enter the inner sanctum of the king, despite the penalty of execution for entering without being summoned. He adds the line "im l'et kazot higat l'malchut Perhaps it was for a time like this that you came to the kingdom."

The story quickly turns as Queen Esther weaves her way into foiling Haman's plan with her plea to the king that her life be saved. The Jews are allowed to defend themselves against attack and there is great celebration (and unfortunately much blood is shed on those days, despite the seemingly obvious return to peace that could have been created by repealing the decree of death to the Jews.)

While the story begins and ends with missed opportunities for justice, the turning point of the story is the moment where Esther chooses to face her fear, let go of her own safety and security and her actions change the course of the story and the fate of the Jews of Persia. Most times we won't be in positions of power to change the fate of life and death for a large group of people. But the moment that Esther faces is a personal one. She has to realize that it is all a house of cards that could crumble at any moment. Her status as queen, her life of indulgences and creature comforts could all be ripped away. The illusion of her safety is the illusion that all of us can be duped into. And according to some, we are always trying to uncover our eyes from the wool that tries to keep us blind to the reality that there is no safe ground beneath us. We only have the present moment. We have the impossibly uncertain now. Mordechai tells Esther, maybe it is for exactly this moment that you were brought to this palace. Living with our eyes wide open to the place we are fully inhabiting in this very moment is the challenge that Pema Chodron and many other Buddhist teachers put to each of us who hope to learn from their teachings

I first started listening to Pema Chodron lectures when I borrowed my mom's car one weekend in 2006. The content of the lectures drew me in—her playful jokes and accessible illustrations, even the sound of her voice on the CD just drew me to keep listening. This is an impressive feat for me, since anything other than loud music that I sing along with usually makes me drowsy while driving. I am sorry, folks. I did not

hear that great piece on NPR last week.

Pema Chodron has an interesting story that led her to her life as a Buddhist nun. She was born in New York City as Deirdre Blomfield--Brown and attended Miss Porter's school growing up in rural Connecticut. She was living in New Mexico when her life changed. Her husband came home one day and announced to her that he was having an affair and that he wanted a divorce. She describes this moment as a spiritual experience. She says that for a moment the world just stopped and she felt an overwhelming sense of peace. And then she bent down and picked up a rock. And threw it at him.

She has studied Buddhist thought since the early 1970's and has become one of the prominent faces of Buddhism in the West. Her teachings often focus on the essence of letting go of everything, especially shenpa. Chodron explains that the Tibetan word literally meaning attachment, is the chain reaction that happens when we get emotionally hooked by something. It's that tightening you feel in your chest when someone criticizes you or when you feel your anger start to boil under the surface. It leads to any number of addictive behaviors that are an attempt to run away from the bad feelings that are welling up within us.

The feelings themselves are our natural response, though. In Chodron's book, *When Things Fall Apart*, she begins with a beautiful image of an open sea anemone that reflexively closes as someone reaches and touches it. It's our natural response, she says, to recoil in response to fear. "We habitually spin off and freak out when there's even the merest hint of fear," she says. "We feel it coming and we check out. It's good to know we do that—not as a way to beat ourselves up, but as a way to develop unconditional compassion. The most heart-breaking thing of all is how we cheat ourselves of the present moment." Our challenge, in other words, is to let things fall apart and to stay present for it by facing our feelings, instead of covering them up or checking out.

Returning to the Purim story, we see a few classic avoidance moves before Esther faces her mortal fear and approaches the king. Let's take a look at the text just before what I am calling the turning point of the story: Chapter 4

1 Mordechai knew all that had occurred, so Mordechai tore his clothes [in mourning] and put on sackcloth and ash. He went out into the city crying loudly and bitterly. 2 He went up until the king's gate, for it is improper to enter the king's

gate wearing sackcloth. 3 And in every province, wherever the edict of the king and his law reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, crying and wailing; sackcloth and ash were spread out for the masses. 4 Esther's maids and chamberlains came and told her about it and the queen was terrified. She sent garments with which to dress Mordechai so that he would remove his sackcloth from upon him, but he did not accept them. 5 Esther summoned Hatach, one of the king's chamberlains whom he had placed in her service, and she commanded him to go to Mordechai to find out the meaning of this and what it was about. 6 Hatach went out to Mordechai, to the city square that was in front of the king's gate. 7 And Mordechai told him about all that had happened to him and about the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the right to destroy the Jews. 8 He also gave him a copy of the law that was proclaimed in Shushan calling for their annihilation, to show Esther and to tell her about it, and to instruct her to go to the king to beseech him and to plead with him on behalf of her nation. 9 Hatach went and relayed the words of Mordechai to Esther. Esther told Hatach to relay to Mordechai: 11 "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that any man or woman who goes to the king and enters the inner courtyard without being summoned, his is but one verdict: execution; except for the person to whom the king extends his golden scepter [only] he shall live. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for thirty days now." 12 They relayed Esther's words to Mordechai, 13 and Mordechai said to relay to Esther, "Do not think that you will escape [the fate of] all the Jews by being in the king's palace. 14 For if you will remain silent at this time, relief and salvation will come to the Jews from another source, and you and the house of your father will be lost. And who knows if it is not for just such a time that you reached this royal position."

When Esther is faced with the news of the decree, the text tells us "she was terrified." The Hebrew word used in the text לחלחלתו is a "hapax legomenon," the fancy word for a word that only occurs once in the Biblical text. This means that it is usually harder to trust the definitions for the word. Other definitions included, writhing with anxiety or grief. It is a word that is linguistically linked to the word for dancing, as well. That first moment, Esther's panic and pain, are very real. They are the reality that every one of us hits many times each day.

Chodron distinguishes between pain and suffering. In one of her talks she described pain as inevitable. This is linked to the first noble truth of the Buddha, in which the suffering, uneasiness and pain of life is acknowledged as a necessary part of the experience of life. When you find out that your entire ethnic group's annihilation has been sanctioned by your husband, you feel that deep well of emptiness at the pit of your stomach, your throat begins to swell and your breath begins to quicken. The fear of losing your life, the fear of being caught passing as a Persian and suddenly being found out that you are a Jew, the fear of losing your adoptive father—that in fact he was the one who set the chain reaction into motion—these fears all demand a response. Esther's response is clear as day: DENY, DENY, DENY. She sends Mordechai clothes, as if to say—don't mourn. This isn't really happening. There has to be another way out of this. Let's not draw more attention to ourselves. And maybe she thinks, if you stop mourning with the other Jews, maybe you will be spared.

Mordechai twists her into facing that real fear. He tells her what Chodron refers to, as an inconvenient truth. Mordechai tells her that if she does not act that deliverance will come from another place, but that she and her family will perish. In my interpretation of this verse, he is telling her that she is going to die. She is not going to live forever. But action will be taken by someone to save the Jewish people. And that she is in the position to take action that would be eternal, extending her story and the story of seeking justice in the face of injustice. Into the future. Indefinitely. He tells her that perhaps it is for a moment like this that she came to the malchut, to the place of leadership.

Some may choose to read this passage as filled with innuendos of potential divine salvation or the uncovering of a master plan. I don't believe this verse teaches any of that. It teaches us about the inevitability of change, of the hopelessness of avoiding death, and the truth that if we pay attention and open ourselves to "being the change we want to see in the world" that we will be living a life that respects change, that works for change, and one that is inspired by facing our fears and relaxing into experiencing the fullness of now.

In her discussion about hopelessness and death, Chodron raises an interesting teaching about the difference between theism and nontheism. It is this particular teaching that I looked forward to sharing with the Machar community

today. She believes that:

The difference between theism and nontheism is not whether one does or does not believe in God. It is an issue that applies to everyone, including both Buddhists and non--Buddhists. Theism is a deep--seated conviction that there's some hand to hold: if we just do the right things, someone will appreciate us and take care of us. It means thinking there's always going to be a babysitter available when we need one. . . Non--theism is relaxing with the ambiguity and uncertainty of the present moment without reaching for anything to protect ourselves. Nontheism is finally realizing that there's no babysitter that you can count on. You just get a good one and then he or she is gone. Nontheism is realizing that it's not just babysitters that come and go. The whole of life is like that. This is the truth, and the truth is inconvenient. For those who want something to hold on to, life is even more inconvenient. From this point of view, theism is an addiction. We're all addicted to hope—hope that the doubt and mystery will go away. This addiction has a painful effect on society: a society based on lots of people addicted to getting ground under their feet is not a very compassionate place.

But as we all know, the end of the story of choosing to live a nontheistic life isn't an unhappy one. It leaves us with the rug pulled out from under us. That is true. And it means there is no safety net of feeling good about dying, or that our pain is part of some cosmic master plan where what feels bad today is ultimately for some greater good that we could only see if we had that long beard in the sky, bird's eye view. There is no one to blame for causing our pain and there will always potentially always be someone out there to get us, whether we think of that as an individual or a collective experience.

As we say in the Passover Haggadah, *v'hi she'amdah lavoteinu v'lanu, she'lo echad b'lvad amad aleinu l'chalotainu, elah she' bchol dor vador, omdim aleinu l'chalotainu*—THIS is what has stood by our ancestors and us. For it wasn't just one that stood against us and tried to destroy us, but in every generation they stand up against us to destroy us. As those of you who know this part of the Hagaddah well will automatically hear in your heads, the next line is that “the holy one, blessed be he saved us from their hands.” That's the cushion that theism offers. And the hope that in every generation there will be salvation from oppression. But if we take that line away, what is “THIS” that has stood by our ancestors and us? As a nontheistic community, what is our imperative in the face of oppression and misuse of power? The rabbis say that “THIS”

refers to the covenant between God and Abraham that the Jewish people would be delivered from centuries of slavery. Perhaps our work is reminding ourselves and those around us that in the absence of a covenant, in a reality where there is no babysitter to scoop us up when we fall off the monkey bars—or even when we get pushed off the swing, that it is upon us.

Aleinu, a word from a familiar prayer and from the quote from the Hagaddah I read earlier—literally means it is upon us. That's right. That's the truth that is inconvenient. The whole of the world and the work of picking up all the broken pieces around us is upon us. And it doesn't need to be saving the Jews from annihilation. It could be walking up to an athlete who isn't on your team, and offering him an extra ski so that he can finish the race with dignity. It could be offering your own coat to a freezing child at a bus stop, because you know that even though he's not your child, he's someone's child. It is the moment when you feel the tightening in your chest but you don't respond by lashing out at someone else. It could be any moment you are given to stand up for yourself, to stand up for others, to stand up for justice, because it is for moments like this that we exist. We need to be awake and aware. *Im let kazot*. Perhaps for a moment like this.

Thank you.

—*Rabbi Nehama Benmosche*

For Community Sunday Rabbi Benmosche and musician Naomi Gamoran led us in Purim and peace songs.



The Machar Family

Birthdays

March 7: Michael Kidwell
March 14: Kira Appelman
March 21: Joshua Castellano
March 22: Susan Ogden
March 22: Lev Tomashevsky
March 25: Tricia Gordon
March 27: Yael Hanadari-Levy
March 29: Helena Dinerman
March 31: Rebecca Guilfoyle
March 31: Dan Tobocman
March 31: Martha Mednick

Anniversaries

March 1: Jules Abrams and Anita Willens
March 1: Tamara and Brett Grosko
March 4: Anna Greenberg and John Delicath
March 18: Kenneth Lederman and Helena Dinerman
March 27: Marina Broitman and Tibor Roberts
March 28: Harry Appelman and Mimi Brody

Yarhzeits: We remember...

March 3: Tome Kurtzman, sister of Michal Freedman
March 5: Wilfred Williams, grandfather of Dan Tobocman
March 10: Sidney Levine, father of Rose Levine
March 13: Nancy Tebelman, sister of Linda Tebelman
March 22: Joseph Mauer, father of Marc Mauer
March 24: Rhoda Zwicker, mother of Sue Zwicker
March 27: Dorothy Bassin, mother of Donna Bassin
March 28: Ronald Bassin, brother of Donna Bassin
March 31: Rose Slater, grandmother of Leah Kaplan

We send our sincere condolences to Laurie Miller, whose mother Marcia Miller died on February 3, and to her family.

Machar is so fortunate to have a community of people willing to share their expertise. Three of our members are therapists or social workers and are willing to be contacted by any members who may need someone to talk to about any personal trauma or other issues that come up. These volunteers will plan to have an initial discussion with the member and/or family, to listen and to help direct them to more support or services in the area. Please contact Renee Weitzner, rwcats at aol.com, for information. All discussions are entirely confidential.

Whaddaya Talkin'?

Marlene Cohen

Sh- or shm- as the added introduction to a repeated word

So this month's word is NOT a word – the shortest Yiddish entry I'll bet I ever do! How concise; you can add "sh" or "shm" to a word the second time you say it, and your doubt, scorn or mockery will be clear.

Leo Rosten's *The Joys of Yinglish* has some great examples (with minor changes).

She has a virus? Virus-shmirus!

In which Machar's newsletter will provide you with Your Monthly Word in Yiddish—Use it ten times this month and you won't forget it!

"The psychoanalyst says my son Marvin is suffering from an Oedipus complex."

"Oedipus-Shmoedipus," scoffed her neighbor, "so long as he loves his mother."

"It's driving me crazy. Doctor, how can I get rid of this ringing in my ears?"

"Ringing-Shminging," shrugged the doctor. "Don't answer."

****Submit YOUR ENTRY to MarleneCCohen@comcast.net**

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Harold Black (*deceased*)

Ann Black

Joe Goodman

Millie Goodman

Mary Perica

Michael Prival

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Ami Argaman

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Laurie Miller

Wimmin' In Transition (WITs)

Renée Weitzner

Young Adult Havurah

Danielle Leff

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Marlene Cohen

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Interested in Advertising with Machar?
Contact [info at machar.org](mailto:info@machar.org)

Directions to Machar

"Cedar Lane" events are held at Cedar Lane UU Church. 9601 Cedar Lane, Bethesda, MD.

From DC, go north on Wisconsin Ave. (Rt. 355), pass the Naval Hospital, right on Cedar Lane, cross Beach Dr., 2nd entrance on right. From 495, Rockville, etc., take Rockville Pike (Rt. 355) S to left on Cedar to 9601. Metro - Red Line to Medical Center. Walk ½ mile north on 355, right on Cedar, 0.7 miles, or Ride-On Bus #34 (ask the driver).

"JPDS" is the site of our Jewish Cultural School (JCS). 6045 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Metro: Red Line to Silver Spring. S-2 or S-4 bus to Federal Triangle to Military Road and cross 16th Street. JCS and Adult Ed begin promptly at 10 a.m.; please arrive early.

For meetings in private homes, contact hosts for directions.

Machar E-mail Lists for Members and Nonmembers

Michael Prival

There are two different e-mail lists that Machar members can join. The first, the "Machar" list, enables members to receive the monthly Newsletter, event reminders by email, plus announcements of program changes that may

occur between printed newsletters. Almost all Machar members are already on this list.

The second list is "MacharCommunity." Members of this list can share information about local, non-Machar cultural, educational, social action, or community service events and activities. Any list member can post a note on the "Machar Community" list at any time.

If you would like to be added to either of these lists, or if we are not using your preferred e-mail addresses for them, please send a note to Email at machar.org. Of course you can get off these lists at any time.

Earn for Machar Jewish Cultural School with Service Magic and DriversEd.com!

Get Matched to Prescreened Home Improvement Contractors and earn up to \$6!*

Service Magic is a FREE service matching you to pre-screened, customer-rated service professionals: Maids, painters, remodelers, plumbers, roofers & more! *Earnings depend on the type of project and range from \$2-\$6.

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Help Machar as You Shop

Larry Lawrence

Machar participates in the eScrip (Electronic Scrip) program, a fundraising organization in which participating business partners contribute a percentage of your purchases to our Jewish Cultural School. Some participating businesses in the Mid-Atlantic are Safeway (which contributes 1-3% of your purchase value) and American Airlines (3%). To sign up for eScrip, go to <http://www.eScrip.com> and choose "Machar-Jewish Cultural School" as the benefiting group.

Raise Money for SHJ While you Surf

Use GOODSEARCH.COM to Search on the Web and Raise Money for SHJ

GoodSearch.com is a Web search tool for organizations such as ours to raise money each time someone uses it. Simply go to goodsearch.com, key in "humanistic Judaism," and type in whatever you are searching for. You can even see how much we have raised—and imagine the potential if all of us use it! .