

**An exploration of humanistic Judaism and
its quest to retain Jewish culture and
tradition**

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Abstract

This research evaluates, from a historical perspective, the doctrine and ethics of the new movement known as Humanistic Judaism, which was founded in America in 1963 by Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine (1928 – 2007). The thesis examines the theology, doctrines, ethics and ritual celebrations of the movement. The study examines the non-theistic structure of Humanistic Judaism, which places humanity at the centre of its ethical and spiritual belief systems. The thesis demonstrates that this new movement provides secular and humanistic Jews with connections to their culture, history, and religious celebrations that reflect their traditions without binding them to theistic beliefs. The research includes fieldwork in the United States, a visit to the headquarters of Humanistic Judaism, and discussion with key figures to gather material. The study concludes that the organisational structure of Humanistic Judaism as a movement very much resembles that of any other theistic institution in that it offers its followers leadership, fellowship, doctrines, ethics and ritual celebrations. This thesis also examines the question of whether this movement is a genuine form of Judaism. No one has previously presented in a single work the history and development of Humanistic Judaism together with a critique from an evangelical Christian perspective.

Key Words

Humanistic Judaism, agnosticism, assimilation, atheism, humanism, Judaism, pluralism, secularism, spirituality, theism.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Title

An Evangelical Reflection on Humanistic Judaism and its Quest to Retain Jewish Culture and Tradition

1.2 Background and Problem Statement

1.2.1 Background

This study explores a new movement called Humanistic Judaism and examines its implications from an evangelical perspective. This fits well within the field of apologetics because the thesis embraces the need to rightly represent Humanistic Judaism before offering any kind of critique from an evangelical perspective or any other. By apologetics is meant both a defence and promotion of the Christian faith either through direct argument, clarification of misconceptions, and comparisons and contrasts that show the negative implications of differing worldviews and positive implications of the Christian faith. As an accurate picture of Religious Humanism gradually unfolds, chapter by chapter, a fair and honest critique from an evangelical perspective is appropriate.

An interest in atheistic Judaism arose during my studies for a first degree in theology in Brazil. However, the non-Jewish approach to explain Jewish atheism did not answer the many questions that arose. A search for a Jewish understanding of Jewish Atheism led to Humanistic Judaism. This, in turn, led to extensive research and an ever-deepening understanding of its nature and rationale.

Humanistic Judaism was born under the vision and guidance of an ordained Reform Rabi, Sherwin T. Wine. Its atheistic philosophy offers a completely different approach to Judaism than is proposed by other branches, such as Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist or Reform (Adler, 1965:27).

One of the places to search for information on the movement is Detroit and a visit provided an excellent opportunity to gather material for this thesis, but also

to see things directly. A visit to the Birmingham Temple and the Institute for Humanistic Judaism enabled free access to the library and this was crucial because much of the earlier material is out of print and cannot be found easily elsewhere. An opportunity to sit in on some of the teaching sessions in the Birmingham Temple proved an added benefit, enabling some understanding of how their educational programme works. Also, the opportunity arose to learn about some of the rituals within Humanistic Judaism and even to be present at a Jewish Humanistic Funeral Service and note its resemblance to a Christian Funeral Service in terms of format, though not of content.

An interest in Humanistic Judaism and Judaism in general has motivated visits to other places as well, enabling a better understanding: for instance, Holocaust memorials, art galleries and locations where films and debates can be viewed. A visit to Israel made it possible to learn from American Jews, British Jews, Brazilian Jews, Israeli Jews, Tunisian Jews, and from other different nationalities. Sources relevant to the study were secured from the various contacts made.

The Jewish people, in general, have a very rich spiritual heritage, but at the same time many of them do not uphold theism. Humanistic Judaism is a form of Judaism that rejects theism, while upholding Jewish culture, yet has the structure of theistic religions. This work will include analysis of this structure, comparing it to the main forms of Judaism and evaluating its relationship, if any, to Judaism in general. Sherwin Wine (1995:204) explains that Humanistic Jews cherish their cultural inheritance but deny the existence of God or the need to believe in God in order for Judaism and Israel to exist. Adherents believe that Judaism is beyond God. Therefore, Wine and later converts have created a structure that needs to be analysed in order to provide answers for those who ponder over Jewish Atheism.

Jewish customs and culture were and still are a major strength for the survival of Jewish identity. Even the most secular and humanistic Jew would accept the importance of their culture and customs, particularly with regard to Jewish survival. Secular Jews perceive how important the Hebraic religion, that motivated these customs and culture, was in developing the customs and

cultures that have kept the Jewish people together, but they do not interpret this as an indication of God's protection. Wine (1995:120, 121), like the secular Jews, maintains that the traditions and culture that developed were very important, but the idea of a Deity hindered and still hinders the potential of Jews. This, he explains, is because it leads them to depend on divine intervention instead of developing self-reliance and fighting for their own future.

There is not a great amount of literature on Humanistic Judaism and this reality stresses for this researcher the importance of the work that is being undertaken. There are some prominent figures and writers within the movement whose work will be cited in this research: Sherwin Wine's most famous book (Wine, 1995); a biography of Sherwin Wine compiled by three of his friends (Cohn-Sherbok, Cook & Rowens, 2003); and an anthology about Humanistic Judaism (Katz & Kogel, 1995). Humanistic Judaism tries to demystify the divine Inspiration and authority of the Torah and some books have been written on this subject (Hillman, 2001a). In Israel there are certain Jews who have written books about the movement, for instance Malkin (1988). Humanistic Judaism is very open to women exercising their gifts. Within the movement there are many women who have been ordained as Rabbis and others use their gift as authors: Judith Seid is one who has written books and articles (Seid, 2001). There are many other authors, books, magazines and colloquiums, which will be referred to during the process of researching and writing this thesis. But this dissertation will chiefly focus on the following: Judith Seid, Rabbi Tamara Kolton, Rabbi Miriam Jerris, Myrna Bonnie Cousens, Shulamit Aloni.

Humanistic Judaism is not well known. It can be found mainly within North America and Israel. There is some spread to different parts of the globe but over-all real members among Jewish or non-Jewish communities are meagre in number. This leads to questions being asked as to why secular Jews are not embracing Humanistic Judaism. There are many possibilities, which need to be examined: lack of missionary enterprise by those who lead the movement; lack of knowledge of the existence of this movement; the apathy of those who belong to the movement or it might be because Secularism and Judaism do not go hand in hand, as some Humanistic Jews advocate (Chuman, 1998:23-26).

1.2.2 Problem Statement

The thinkers within Humanistic Judaism – Hayyim Schauss, Rabbi Daniel Friedman, David Ibray, Yaakov Malkin, Derek Penslar, Bauer Yehuda, Roger Kogel, Zev Katz, Rabbi Sherwin Wine – have taken away many important pillars of Judaism. Therefore the primary research problem is to ask to what extent, if any, Humanistic Judaism falls short of forming a legitimate expression of Judaism.

The questions that naturally arise from this are:

- What is known about the Humanistic Judaism movement in terms of its history, its doctrines and its ethics?
- Is it possible to disassociate the customs and culture that developed out of the Jewish religion from the religion itself?
- In what ways has Humanistic Judaism tried to bridge the gap left by atheistic philosophers and do these provisions serve the purpose?
- To what extent does Humanistic Judaism really fill the social and spiritual void created by other forms of atheism?
- What does a critique from an Evangelical **apologetical perspective** look like with respect to Humanistic Judaism?

1.3 Aim and Objectives

1.3.1 The Aim

To examine which important pillars of Judaism have been taken away by the thinkers within Humanistic Judaism and whether or not the replacements fall short of being a legitimate expression of Judaism.

1.3.2 Objectives

The objectives, therefore, of this thesis are:

- To determine and examine what is known about the Humanistic Judaism movement in terms of its history, its doctrines and its ethics.
- To examine whether it is feasible to disassociate cultural Judaism from religion.
- To assess the ways in which Humanistic Judaism has tried to bridge the gap left by atheistic philosophers and to evaluate whether these provisions serve the purpose.

- To assess whether Humanistic Judaism really does fill the social and spiritual void created by other forms of atheism.
- To also assess all this from an Evangelical Apologetics Perspective.

1.4 Central Theoretical Argument

The thinkers within Humanistic Judaism have taken away many important pillars of Judaism and what they have put in place may resemble Judaism, but falls short of being a legitimate expression of Judaism.

1.5 Methodology

The study of Humanistic Judaism is done from the perspective of the Evangelical Apologetics tradition. The following methodology will be used to address the central problem statement of the thesis, as well as the questions that logically follow from it. There is first the need to accurately understand Humanistic Judaism. Then a critique is appropriate but one that takes account of its strengths and weaknesses. The critique will consider the implications of the various aspects of Humanistic Judaism as seen from a standpoint of consistency as well as from the standpoint of the consequences of embracing Humanistic Judaism. But an evangelical critique will also be advanced after Humanistic Judaism is explored, understood accurately and examined from the standpoint as to whether Humanistic Judaism can make good its own goals with respect to legitimately representing Judaism. In assessing the questions that were posed in the Problem Statement of this proposal, a comparative approach is employed as well as a practical analysis of the workability of Humanistic Judaism in achieving its own stated ends.

The methodology of exploring Humanistic Judaism and assessing it is based primarily on written sources: primary and secondary. There is a significant lack of secondary source material. Considering the plethora of criticisms published on certain movements that emerged at the same time as Humanistic Judaism, the lack of any critical material is surprising. There is a great lack in Christian literature on Humanistic Judaism and this same lack includes atheists of a secular persuasion.

1.5.1 What are the Questions the Study will Address?

- Is it possible to disassociate the customs and culture that developed out of the Jewish religion from the religion itself?
- In what ways has Humanistic Judaism tried to bridge the gap left by Atheistic philosophers and do these provisions serve the purpose?
- To what extent does Humanistic Judaism really fill the social and spiritual void created by other forms of atheism?
- What does a critique from an Evangelical Apologetics Perspective look like with respect to Humanistic Judaism?

1.5.2 Why do they Matter?

There is not a great amount of literature on Humanistic Judaism and this really stresses for this researcher the importance of the work that is being undertaken. There are some prominent figures and writers within the movement whose work will be cited in this research. Up to the present moment no one has done a full research on Humanistic Judaism from an apologetic perspective. My work matters because it will be addressing the above questions and will also provide a critique from an apologetic perspective.

1.5.3 How Widespread and How Serious is the Question Being Researched?

The researcher is taking very seriously his work in order to answer the above questions. He read many books, talked to many Jewish people, he has receive a lot of teachings from Rabbi Cohn-Sherbok, he has visited Israel and also the headquarters of Humanistic Judaism in Detroit – USA

1.5.4 How Can Individuals Contact the Researcher if they Wish to Make Enquiries or Complain?

Those who wish to make further enquires or complain will be expected to go through the right channels as established by the NWU.

1.5.5 How will the Study's Findings be Used?

The researcher hopes to use his findings to enhance the knowledge of theological students who are interested in Jewish Atheism.

1.5.6 If there are any Hoped-for Benefits, What might these be?

For the research it will open up new opportunities for him in his cross-cultural missionary work, as also will increase his knowledge and understanding of Humanistic Judaism.

In view of the above, the risk level is deemed as LOW because the purpose of the research is to widen knowledge of Humanistic Judaism and evaluate its implications positive and negative from an evangelical apologetics perspective. This form of evaluation serves to further enhance the understanding of Humanistic Judaism from a uniquely evangelical understanding. This in turn serves as a resource to establish bridges and enhanced communications in cross cultural dialogue.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1 will introduce this thesis and the relevance of studying Humanistic Judaism.

Chapter 2 will provide the background information about the origins and historical development of Humanistic Judaism.

Chapter 3 will deal with Humanistic Judaism's bid to preserve Jewish culture and identity apart from religion.

Chapter 4 will focus on Humanistic Judaism's quest to bridge the atheistic gap.

Chapter 5 will examine the spirituality of Humanistic Judaism and its efforts to fill the spiritual and social void of atheism.

Chapter 6 will provide an evangelical critique of the movement from a biblical perspective.

Chapter 7 will show the conclusions that have been achieved by researching Humanistic Judaism

Chapter 2

THE HISTORY OF HUMANISTIC JUDAISM

2.1 The Founder

The founder of Humanistic Judaism is Sherwin Theodore Wine. Once when talking about his family Wine said, 'there was nobody famous in my family, we are pure peasant stock' (Cook, 2003:4-12). Wine's roots are in modern-day Poland and Eastern Europe. However, his parents Herschel Wengrowski and Teibele Isrealiski went to America – he in 1906 and she in 1914. Wengrowski was born the second of four children in the north east Polish *shtetl* of Korczyk in 1884. His father did not have the opportunity of a very good education and attended a one-room schoolhouse where he studied the Torah in Hebrew (Cook, 2003:12).

When Wengrowski was 18, the Russian authorities, who governed what is now Poland, approached him for army duty, which meant in essence he was drafted. He was assigned to a Moscow garrison led by a commander named Sergei, the brother of Alexander the Third. One of the impressions that Wengrowski had of the leaders was the virulent anti-Semitic attitude which he saw in Sergei. This negative impression led him to take a different direction in his life. Young Wengrowski decided to desert from the army in 1905 after going home on leave (Kolton, 2008:11). He crossed the border and from there he went to England, and in 1906 arrived in New York City via Liverpool. Once in America he travelled to join his uncle and two cousins, who were already established in Detroit in a cap-making business. He was told that the family name now was "Wine", so he changed his name from Herschel Wengrowski to William Harry Wine. He lived in a boarding house and worked in his uncle's factory, Wine Brothers, at Woodward and Montcalm. Later on it ceased making caps, and instead turned its attention to the burgeoning trade of making trousers. Bill Wine, as he came to be known, became a trouser cutter until he died in 1948 at the age of 64 (Cook, 2003:13).

Teibele, Sherwin's mother, was born in 1897, one of nine girls in a merchant-class family in Sztabin, Northern Poland. The family business was related to wheat brokering and the family lived in a fine house where the father was the

centre of attention. Teibele went to school to learn fundamental literary skills. The boys studied in Hebrew but the girls studied in Yiddish (Cook, 2003:13).

In June 1914, on the eve of the first Great War, Teibele's father decided to send her and her sister Fanny to America. Teibele found a job in a millinery shop feathering hats. The two sisters almost starved themselves, living on one meal a day so as to save money to bring their parents and siblings to America. They were able to do this in the early 1920s, although not without incident. Teibele's mother was found by Ellis Island officials to have trachoma, and she had to make the return voyage to be cured. In 1921 she returned to join her family in a house that Teibele and her sister Fanny had found on Lenox Avenue in the Harlem (Kolton 2008:11). In 1923, when Teibele was twenty-six years old she accompanied her father on a trip to Detroit in order to visit some relatives. During a party, Teibele Israelski met Bill Wine, who, out of his carefully saved earning as a trouser cutter, had purchased a new flat at 1961 Clairmount. The following year they got married in the Bronx and took residence in Clairmount, where their two children, Lorraine and Sherwin, were born, she in 1925, and he in 1928 (cf. Goldfinger, 2008:16). Rabbi Tamara Kolton writes:

Lorraine Pivnick talking about her brother remarks that even at a very young age he had displayed an amazing intelligence, even though he did not walk until he was 22 months old, and once a doctor had told his mother that Sherwin might be retarded. His mother went home and declared that no son of mine is slow, two months after Wine started walking. He was very bright in school but he wasn't big-headed. When he won the prize in school and his sister asked him about how did the competition go, he replied, I don't know, I must have the booby prize (Kolton, 2008:11-12).

2.2 Wine's Education

According to Rabbi Kolton (2008:11-12), Wine was enrolled in Detroit State School in 1933, and, unlike many children at that time, he was fortunate to have a father with a secure job, giving the family the security it needed. He learned to read and write without assistance from his elders and he loved to read the newspaper. He knew that if his mother had not worked hard and sacrificed herself to bring her family to America, his family might have perished at the hands of Hitler. He also knew that, if his father Bill had not run for his life, he would have died in Eastern Europe.

Sherwin loved school and learned at a very young age to please the right audience, which, in school, was of course, the teachers. He was a good pupil and was always ready to answer the teacher's questions, which caused him to be appreciated by those who taught him; he earned excellent grades. He also learned that he had a passion and interest for the subject of history (Kolton, 2008:16). In school he learned civics, citizenship, and American history. He also grew up with the knowledge of his Jewish ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and he developed a passion for Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln. He also learned to admire Churchill and appreciate all he did to save the Jewish children during the Second World War (Rowens, 2003:52-53).

From 1940 to 1943, at the height of the war years, Wine attended Hutchins Junior High School, where he discovered his ability to debate and speak without the aid of notes. Once he debated with a girl called Mary Power on the question of the United States entering into war. He defended the idea, but Miss Power stressed the line of thought that only Jews wanted America to enter the war. Sherwin won the argument (Cook, 2003:17).

Wine entered the Central High School in 1943 where he spent four years studying Latin. He carried on with his oratorical activities, even giving several orations in Latin. In 1945 he entered a National History Contest sponsored by the *Detroit Times*. The entrants were required to answer questions orally. The topic of the controversy between Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton in the late eighteenth century was introduced, and on the spot, an essay had to be composed. Sherwin won the contest (Kolton, 2008:12).

In 1946 Wine went to study at the University of Michigan, which opened a new world for the eighteen-year-old. He had won a scholarship for his tuition but took many different kinds of jobs to raise the money to pay his board and lodging. When at the University Wine fell in love with the subject of philosophy, the line that attracted him most being Logical Positivism, which is a twentieth-century philosophical movement holding that all meaningful statements are either analytic or conclusively verifiable, or confirmed by observation or experiment, therefore metaphysical statements are without meaning (Kolton, 2008:12). Wine observed how important philosophy was within Judaism. He said, "... the major

harvest of the Jewish people throughout the past two thousand years has not been wheat. It has been the written word” (Blanter, 2001:312). He was taught by some very notable teachers: Irving Koplitz, Charles Stevenson, and Roy Sellars, who in 1917 published a book titled *Humanistic Religion* (Cook, 2003:19-20). When his undergraduate days were coming to a close, Sherwin gave some thought to staying at the University and taking a Ph.D. in Philosophy, but at the same time he was feeling inclined to pursue the rabbinate. He looked with favour upon the work which the rabbis developed but there was a major problem in front of him: his personal views about God. He knew the seminary that trained rabbis would not accept him if he went public with his ideas, so he decided to keep them for himself. Wine wanted to be in the reform tradition, which was the only branch of Judaism he tolerated. So, in September 1951 he started his studies in Ohio’s Hebrew Union College (Rowens, 2003:18).

2.3 Wine’s Religious Formation

The Wine family was taught to observe the Jewish rituals. It was a kosher home, Shabbat candles were lit, and no work was done on Shabbat or on any of the prescribed holidays. Looking back, Wine surmised that it was a good introduction to Jewish life, as from those experiences he could discern what was important in being Jewish and what was not (Cook, 2003:18).

As young boy Wine and his sister Lorraine went with their father to Shaarey Zedek, a conservative congregation, where he was deeply influenced by the young assistant rabbi Morris Adler, who was a very impressive orator and was captivating Wine’s imagination. Even though he was impressed by Adler, he was wondering in his own mind ‘Why? Why?’ and his father used to say to him ‘Do not ask’ (Rowens, 2003:51-52). Adler was an assistant to Rabbi Abraham Hershman who was a confirmed Zionist involved in the controversy regarding Israel’s independent statehood. Wine acknowledged that Hershman was a great scholar, but about Adler he said, ‘he became my teacher’ (Cook, 2003:17-18).

When Wine was under the teachings of Hershman and Adler, he did not remember them getting into theological talk, but speaking about national issues, secular concern and like. It was the world of ideas and knowledge with the

promise of attention and prominence that attracted Sherwin Wine towards the rabbinate (Cook, 2003:18).

2.4 Towards the Rabbinate

Wine did not take lightly the decision to attend the Hebrew Union College (Cohn-Sherbok, 1999:311). One big question he had in his mind was whether he could be a rabbi if he did not believe in God. He put human freedom at the centre of his worldview (Silver, 2006:97). He considered other careers, but he felt deep connections to his Jewish roots and also to his father's loyalty to Judaism, which, combined with his own great love for history and the impression made by Adler, led him to become a rabbi (Kolton, 2008:12).

It was a few years after the war and American society was seeing some of its values being challenged and changed. Wine entered the Hebrew College during the days of traditional ways and conformity, a devout humanist studying at a Reform Seminary. Wine persevered with his rabbinic studies and was ordained a rabbi at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio (Cohn-Sherbok, 1999:311). Recalling his time at the seminary, Wine says that some of the teachers were quite good, notably Sheldon Blank, a scholar of the prophets in the Old Testament and under whose supervision Sherwin wrote his rabbinical thesis; Julius Levy, a scholar of the languages of Babylonian times; and Israel Betan, a professor of Midrash. He considered the others quite mediocre (Cook, 2003:22).

Looking back to this period of time, Wine knew the rabbinical students at the Hebrew Union College were going to be ordinary rabbis and such a prospect did not attract him at all. As part of the curriculum he went to speak in different places, but what really laid the foundation for later, when he established Humanistic Judaism, was the time he spent working at the synagogue Beth El, in Detroit. Through the teaching and orientation that Wine received at the Hebrew College, he considered his duty to serve in the forces as chaplain. Therefore, after his studies, he applied to the army, which was not ready to receive him. He went to serve for six months as an associate rabbi at the Reform congregation known as Temple Beth El, then located in Detroit on Woodward Avenue at Gladstone. Richard Hertz was the senior rabbi at the time

and he asked Sherwin to fill in for him because he was going to Israel in the summer of 1956. After one month, he was invited by the board to become the associate rabbi, though the invitation was without consultation with Rabbi Hertz. When Hertz returned from Israel he needed to comply with the idea and soon Wine found that he was not disposed to be anyone's assistant; rather, he wanted to lead his own congregation. In January 1957 Wine entered the army to serve in Korea as First Lieutenant (cf. Kolton, 2008:12).

2.5 Work as a Chaplain in Korea

Going abroad was new to Wine, who had never been out of his native country. Wine enjoyed serving as a chaplain in Korea; it taught him to deal with people who treated him as an authority figure. He became very popular amongst the GIs and in his work as chaplain broke tradition and concentrated on Jewish culture more than religion. The soldiers went to him not to pray, but to talk about different subjects. They liked the rabbi with whom they could talk about things which were relevant to them. He gave lectures on subjects he knew would be of interest and he had a captive audience who appreciated what he had to say. He tried not just to give lectures but to involve the soldiers in what today would be called character-building, because he was conscious of the pressures those youngsters were going through (cf. Kolton, 2008:12).

One of the things which characterised his rabbinical work was that Wine was not only ready to speak to the young soldiers about their Jewish roots and how important they were for them but was also ready and willing to laugh with them. His exceptional sense of humour was quite catching and gave those youngsters a sense of home and family (Kolton, 2008:12).

His time in Korea gave him a passion that would follow him all his days, a passion for travel. Before returning to America, Lieutenant Wine took a thirty-day leave just before his tour of duty was over. He travelled to Asia and saw all that he could in one month. Since this time in Korea, Wine took an annual month-long sabbatical, usually in July. His work in Korea was not only recognised by the GIs but also by the people in authority who had followed his work, and at the close of his work he received a reward (Cook, 2003:26-27).

2.6 Back in America

In November 1958, Wine returned to work as an assistant to Rabbi Hertz for the next nineteen months. He remembered growing more and more uncomfortable with the language and ways used by Reform Judaism. His relationship with Hertz was a strained one. Rabbi Wine felt that Reform Judaism was not the way by which he would like to express his Jewish identity. He felt a strong desire to be in control of the congregation and be able to create a space that would enable him to express his understanding of Judaism (cf. Cook, 2003:27). Wine wanted a congregation that would not just recite words which did not mean anything to them. He wanted a group of people who would not be afraid of asking questions and who would not just conform to traditions (cf. Cousens, 2008:73).

In the autumn of 1959 Sherwin became aware that a group of Jews in Windsor, Ontario – across the river from Detroit – had decided to organise a Reform congregation. He grasped the opportunity with both hands, made contact with them, and soon became their rabbi. Miriam Jerris, now a rabbi at Birmingham Temple, was part of the congregation in Windsor when Wine went to work with them. She recalls that through his sense of humour she learned that Judaism is joyful, and it was not long before the synagogue erected their own building. It was during his work in Windsor that Wine made up his mind to stick to the rabbinate; he could see that this was the only venture that he wanted to pursue in life (Kolton, 2008:13).

In 1962 he came to the conclusion that the Reform movement was not for him. 'How could I be a rabbi? I did not believe in God. Could I pretend to believe in God? No' (Cook, 2003:28). When all these things were going through his mind, a couple from suburban Detroit, Sue and Harry Velick, phoned Wine and asked him to help them and others who had broken away from Beth El Temple to organise their own temple. The group of eight families were disappointed with Rabbi Hertz's leadership. Sue and her husband made the necessary arrangements and Wine met the group for the first time in the home of Lois and Richard Lurie on the 21st August 1963 (Olitzky, 1996:180). The group was thinking about starting a new Reform congregation under new leadership. 'We

did not know anything else. When Sherwin got involved with the group, they were in a new road' (Goren, 1969:1).

The core group of what became the Birmingham Temple included Sue and Harry Velick, Doreen and Stuart Velick, Bunny and Merrill Miler, Elaine and Steve Fish, Baily and Gil Franklin, Lisa and Joel Hepner, Marge and Bill Sandy, and Mary Ann and Ted Simon (Cook, 2003:29). These eight discovered a similarity in attitude. All wanted something fresh. Everything in the new organisation should be subject to inquiry or question. In contrast to Beth El, where there were simply questions that were not asked (and were not answered if asked), the new community would offer information. At the more formal series of adult education, led by Wine, and open to the public, the topic selected was, 'What is your concept of God?' (Goren, 1976:24.)

The first service was on September 15th, 1963, at Eagle Elementary School in Farmington Hills, Michigan. It would be another year before the congregation got organised. Those in the forefront of the organisation had fully decided that the new entity would be a free and open one (Olitzky, 1996:180).

A Ritual Committee was put into place to look over the services Wine composed. 'Sometimes a single word took on great significance', Sue Velick said (Cook, 2003:290). As the committee's members carefully savoured their new freedom, eventually the word 'God' became an obsolete word, and soon enough, the congregation would become the Birmingham Temple, where that word was out of its collective vocabulary (Olitzky, 1996:180). Of course such a movement would not go unnoticed and the Jewry in the Detroit area was very upset with Rabbi Wine and his heretical followers. Some rabbis demanded Wine to retract and retreat. The answer was 'Nothing doing' (Goren, 1969:7-8). Rabbi Leon Fran, the President of the Michigan Association of Reform Rabbis, strongly attacked Wine and his followers. He accused them of being disruptive, maintained that their theological position was not acceptable and stated that the group had no interest in Jewish culture, art and literature (or in the survival of Jewish thought). He called on the Central Conference of American Rabbis to discipline Sherwin Wine and remove his rabbinical designation. Leon Fran did not succeed because the Central Conference of Rabbis did not have in its by-

laws any provision to defrock a rabbi (Kreger, 1976:8-9). With so many things happening around Wine and his followers, they attracted a lot of attention. The press did not miss what was going on and, in December 1964, the Detroit Free Press printed an article written by Wine where he stated publicly that he was an atheist. This headline was a bombshell for which no one, not even the radicals, was prepared. The unpleasant after-effects of the story on some members and on the organisation itself were unquestionably present for at least six months. About 20 families left the organisation during the months following the publicity (Goren, 1969:6-7).

2.7 Samples of the Newspaper Coverage About Rabbi Wine and His New Teachings

The following newspaper articles are just some samples of what has been written about Wine, his beliefs and also the work that he developed. The articles are not exhaustive but by reading them it becomes apparent that Wine had a very difficult time. The articles have been placed in chronological order.

Wine did not see atheism according to popular philosophy. He did not see or understand its definitions as perhaps an ordinary person would. Neither could he share in the popular version and impression of how people who proclaimed to be believers used to define their idea of God and their relationship with an all-powerful being. Wine saw people's view of God as a very incongruent one. He saw the popular view of a Supreme Being, who had power over human lives to aid in times of trouble and who demanded worship, as unproductive for the development of individuals. Rabbi Wine thought that human beings should take full responsibility in shaping their own destiny instead of depending upon someone else to sort out their lives (Brooks, 1976:1).

In his interview with the Detroit Free Press, Wine admits that according to his own beliefs he is an atheist, but does not like the immoral connotations the society implies regarding those who deny the existence of a Supreme Being.

'Suburban Rabbi: I Am an Atheist'

A Birmingham rabbi who had built his temple's congregation from eight to 140 families in less than two years declared on Wednesday he is an atheist. On the simple popular level, I am an atheist, said Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine of the

Birmingham Temple, but on the sophisticated sense, I don't know ... I would object to being called an atheist when it has the immoral meaning that society has often given it (Ward, 1964a).

Wine shocked people, not only because he did not believe in God, but also because of the new interpretations that he was introducing which were shaking some orthodox teachings, a classical example being the interpretation that he gave to the story of Judas Maccabeus. The traditional teaching of *Hanukkah* is based on a true historical fact. It concerns the Israelites being rescued by the Maccabeus family from Greek origin. The Maccabees were of priestly origin and became military leaders in the nation of Israel. To celebrate their victory they used an old festival called *Nayrot* (lights) and renamed it *Hanukkah* (dedication) and elevated it to official importance. Later on, rabbis sought to diminish the importance of Maccabeus' conquest, attributing it to the intervention of YHWH (Wine, 1995:164–5). When the Greeks defiled the temple they desecrated the holy oil, so that when the Jews took control of the temple they found only a small flask of oil which would light the *menorah* for just one day, but a miracle occurred and the light lasted for eight days (Schauss, 1996:225). Humanist Jews, feeling very uncomfortable with this legend, refuse to celebrate *Hanukkah* according to the tradition it is based on. At the same time they see the importance of this festival, so, instead of causing it to disappear from the celebrations they bring a new understanding of it. As well as discarding the miraculous intervention of YHWH, the Humanist Jews also refute the idea of Judas Maccabeus as being a person who re-installed 'true religion'. They see him as a foe of a religious freedom rather than a defender of it. Humanist Jews celebrate *Hanukkah* as a Jewish festival without any connotations of religion or the Maccabeus history. Their defence is that this festival existed before under the name of *Nayrot* (Detroit Free Press, Dec 7th 1964:3).

'Godless Rabbi Raps Revered Jewish Hero'

The Detroit-area rabbi who does not believe in God conducted a 'godless' *Hanukkah* Sabbath service over the weekend. He sought also to shatter the image of Judas Maccabeus as a great Jewish hero. Rabbi Sherwin, of Birmingham Temple, said the real rebirth of freedom in civilization did not come from a Maccabean victory in 165 B.C., but the rediscovery of Greek philosophy in the later Middle Ages. He pictured Judas Maccabeus as a foe of religious freedom, rather than a defender of it, as tradition has it. 'Judas Maccabeus banned idols and forbade the Hellenistic (Greeks). To him there is only one *Kosher* religion of the *Torah*' (Ward, 1964b).

One of the important points that ignited the interest of the press was not that Wine was an atheist, but that he was a well-educated and capable person and that his movement was causing an impact in terms of growth. Wine was expressing some strong and intelligent arguments as to why people should search within themselves to find answers to their problems instead of using a 'crutch God' to intervene in supernatural ways in their lives. Wine was not just a charismatic speaker who could impress the crowds and his followers; he was a very well-educated person who had gained immense ground in the academic sphere. It is wrong to think of him just as a person full of charisma; he was also well-prepared intellectually. What was infuriating many rabbis and religious leaders of those days was that his education was not only in secular universities but also in well-respected religious institutions. Another subject that caused consternation in religious circles and awe in secular ones was that this man, who proclaimed himself to be an atheist, was at the same time an ordained rabbi of a well-respected Jewish organisation. How this person could have passed through the net undetected was a real puzzle. It became a challenge to Rabbi Wine and an embarrassment to those who oversaw his religious formation.

'Rabbi in Detroit Suburb Admits He is an Atheist'

Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine, 37, of the Birmingham Temple, a bachelor, said it is no secret from his congregation, which he built from eight to 140 families in less than two years. Many of them, he said, agree with his philosophy. Rabbi Wine holds a master's degree in philosophy from the University of Michigan. He studied five years at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio and received his rabbinic degree. He is ordained in Reform Judaism (*The Flint Journal*, Dec 4th 1964: page unknown).

'National Jewish Groups to Get Story on Rabbi Who is Atheist'

Rabbi Leon Fran, spiritual leader of Temple Israel, 17400 Manderson, and president of the Michigan Association of Reform Rabbis, said his estate group will meet soon to discuss its future relationship with Rabbi Sherwin Wine and his 140-family Birmingham Temple. A group of Detroit rabbis recently summoned Rabbi Wine to a meeting and confronted him with the rumours and accusations they had heard, Rabbi Fran said. 'He assured us they were true, so there is no longer any doubt about it. Naturally we are concerned about this and plan to meet and decide whether this is to be regarded as a Jewish Congregation' (*Detroit News*, Dec 4th, 1964: page unknown).¹

¹ Page unknown – most of the newspapers used as reference for this thesis were found in a paper box in the headquarters of Humanistic Judaism in Detroit, USA. The newspapers were not kept in their entirety, and what were left were only cuttings. The person who cut them did not keep all of the pages

Wine did not allow the newspaper to create a sensation at his expense without making clear his viewpoints. He did not hold back but exposed his ideas to different papers in order to attack those who were misrepresenting his doctrines. One could define it as Wine fighting fire with fire. Once, he was asked questions over the phone and refused to answer them, but he was not intimidated by the questions. He was not afraid of being questioned about his beliefs; he would rather talk about them openly. He was unwilling to answer questions over the phone but he was willing to be interviewed or even to answer questions that were put in writing (Gobetz, 1964: page unknown).

Wine was aware that this theology was not well accepted and that many people would misinterpret his ideas. He refined them as much as he could so that his opponents and those interested in the movement would know where he stood. Some rabbis would add to the things that he said and come to the wrong conclusions. In order to divulge his ideas and fight those who misunderstood him, Wine made use of the media to propagate his teachings and also to defend himself against those who attacked him.

'Rabbi Feels Newspapers Misinterpreted His Views on Belief in God: Congregation Backs Him Completely'

Rabbi Wine's congregation agrees with him in categorizing him as an atheist, maintaining that the headline distorted and oversimplified his belief. As he explained in the text of the article, Rabbi Wine regards himself as an 'Ignostic': one who says to a person who speaks of God: 'I don't know what you mean and cannot tell whether your statement is true or false ... the word of God, as used by the ordinary man in the street, refers to a person up there, with whom he can converse. This kind of God I deny. If this is the kind of God you are referring to, then I am an atheist. If, however, you use the more sophisticated definitions of God – such as He is a transcending being, out of space and time or an impersonal first mover, outside the world; or pervading purpose in the universe; or the ground of being or something mysteriously big out there – then my answer is: in their hearts they search the scripture and confront the needs of a man'. Rabbi Wine regards 'God' as a useless word. This is so because it depends primarily on private definitions. A word, to have usefulness, must have a shared public meaning (*Observer*, Dec 9th 1964: page unknown).

As expected, the ideas taught by Wine were not well received amongst the more traditional and orthodox Jews. However, even the more broad-minded Jewish movement did not welcome Wine's teaching and some of them even

numbers or authors of the articles. This box was going to be given to Wisconsin University for its archives. I found these newspaper articles of great historical importance for those studying Humanistic Judaism.

asked him to recant or leave the rabbinate. This was the position that the 'Reconstructionist Judaism' movement took in relation to the ideas which Wine was propagating. This movement started with Mordecai Kaplan in the first decades of the 20th century. Kaplan was born in Lithuania and moved to America at an early age. He attended and graduated from the Jewish Theological Seminary, and remained in the school to teach. He started his own congregation in West Manhattan and called it 'The Society for Advancement of Judaism', which attracted rabbis and laymen who were in agreement with his ideas, and led to the publishing of a magazine called *The Reconstructionist*. The movement started growing and a rabbinical seminary was opened in Philadelphia. The structure of the movement was impressive. Kaplan was a signatory of the *Humanist Manifesto* and an ardent disciple of John Dewey.

John Dewey, together with William James, was the father of American Pragmatism. He would argue that the truth of a statement is according to its usefulness in the struggle for survival. For him, salvation is successful survival in the here and now; there is no long-term ultimate human existence. The question about life after death does not occupy a central part in its theology and it is irrelevant for the day-to-day struggle. Religion, if it has any humanistic meaning, is the celebration of powers in the universe, which helps us to find happiness. God, if the word had humanistic meaning, is the symbol of that power (Wine, 1978:6-7).

'Reconstructionists Tell Rabbi: Recant or Leave'

New York - 'Get out of the rabbinate' is the message to any rabbi who cannot conscientiously use the word 'God', says the lead editorial of the current issue of the *Reconstructionist* magazine. The editorial was occasioned by the much-publicized claim by Rabbi Sherwin Wine, of the Birmingham Temple, Detroit, that the 'modern alternatives' to the traditional idea of God are 'vague and meaningless' (The National Jewish Post, 29th January, 1965: page unknown).

Wine attracted the attention not only of the local religious papers, but also some of the national Jewish and non-Jewish papers such as *Detroit Free Press*, *Detroit News*, *The Flint Journal*, *The Observer*, *Time Magazine*, *National Jewish Post*, *The Daily Tribune*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Newsweek*, *The Birmingham Eccentric*, *Jewish News*, *Jerusalem Post*, *Rhode Island Herald*, etc. They wanted to put into print for the general public the new ideas which Rabbi Wine

was so strongly voicing. If you were a rabbi, or any sort of religious leader, one of the common factors was the belief in a divine being; even though the divine being believed in could differ in character from one theology to another, the basic concept of a superior being was part of it. It was a very intriguing philosophy for people to understand and come to terms with. Was it possible to have an atheist rabbi or any sort of spiritual leader who denied a belief in God? The press understood the public fascination with these new concepts and were trying to find what Wine's beliefs really were. Wine would not accept the labels that people tried to place upon him. He would not consider himself an agnostic – one who holds that nothing is known or likely to be known, of the existence of God or gods or of anything beyond material phenomena (Coulson *et al.*, 1976:15). He would not accept being called gnostic – having esoteric spiritual knowledge (Coulson, *et al.*, 1976:357). Wine coined a new word, 'ignosticism', which he thought would suit him and his philosophy, and which he defined as the attitude of someone who will accept the truth of a statement which can be empirically proved.

'Judaism: The Atheist Rabbi'

Out of respect to the sacred name, some devout Jewish will never pronounce the Hebrew word for God. Rabbi Sherwin Wine, 36, of Birmingham Temple in the Detroit suburbs, has another reason for not mentioning the deity: he cannot prove God exists. To the consternation and dismay of his fellow Reform rabbis, Wine publicly declares, 'I am an atheist', and has expunged the name of God from all services at his temple. Wine is a rather special sort of atheist. Technically he calls himself an ignostic, which Wine defines as someone who will only accept the truth of statements that can be empirically proved. 'I find no adequate reason to accept the existence of a supreme person', he insists, although he is willing to change his mind if new evidence appears. Believing that man's destiny and fulfilment are more important than the idea of deity, Wine has rewritten the Reform ritual to give it more a humanistic cast. At Friday evening services, for example, 'You shall love the Lord your God', becomes 'We revere the best in man'. Wine has eliminated the Sh'ma, the traditional Jewish confession of faith in God (*Time Magazine*, January 29th, 1965: page unknown).

The aforementioned articles in this chapter are some examples of the many articles published during the birth of the movement. Rabbi Wine was very bold and courageous in speaking up about his beliefs and ideas, which were contrary to the beliefs and ideas of those who desired to pursue a career in the rabbinate. Had it been a philosopher or professor expressing his atheistic ideas it would not have caused as much disturbance as it did when it was a rabbi who

was actively leading a congregation. Wine did not invent atheism; before him many philosophers had expressed and taught their atheistic ideas. It is not as if someone put a new philosophy on the market where intellectuals search for new forms of affirmation to be found and discussed, and if the product is good it is taken on or if not, thrown away. Atheism existed for thousands of years, but what was revolutionary was for a spiritual leader to proclaim openly that he did not believe in God. Even though he did not believe in God, he was occupying a post for which only theistic spiritual leaders would be considered suitable. He was the leader of a congregation of people and he established a structure that would reflect a spiritual congregation even though he and his followers were not spiritually-minded people. To the amazement of those who were watching him it became a success, and because of this success, opposition arose, opposition which could probably be founded on fear of the success of the organisation more than on its 'heretical views'.

Pressure mounted on every side and the Humanistic Jews were even evicted from the buildings that they were using for their meetings. Wine and his congregation were meeting together in a Freemasons Temple in Bloomfield and were asked to leave. When the request was made, the one excuse which the Freemasons could not use was that they did not know that Wine and his followers were atheists. Wine and his group had been around for some time and had made their views known publicly. It was not as though they had tried to disguise themselves in order to find shelter. They became a social embarrassment for any established organisation which would directly or indirectly support them.

'Masons Ask Liberal Rabbi to Leave'

The state organization of the Masons has asked a Jewish congregation to leave the new Masonic Temple in Bloomfield Hills because its rabbi admitted last December – with considerable publicity – that he does not believe in God. The Birmingham Council of Churches, a Protestant body, has sent off a letter to the Masons asking for an explanation. The council urges freedom of religious expression. The Birmingham Temple congregation of 145 families became the Masons' first tenants when the building opened last September. But in December, some views of Rabbi Sherwin Wine and his congregation received widespread publicity. Shortly thereafter, the state Masonic organization asked the group to move (*The Daily Tribune*, February 4th, 1965:21)

The leadership of the Masonic Temple in Bloomfield was caught in a difficult situation. If they thought that the steps they were taking in putting the Humanistic Jews out of their premises were going to impress the religious leaders of the local community, they were mistaken. Because Wine and his congregation were asked to leave the Masonic Temple in Bloomfield, the Freemasons faced opposition even from religious groups in the area who asked them for an explanation. The reaction of the local religious leaders did not mean that they agreed with Wine, nor did it mean that they would accept his theology and doctrine. Even though they did not agree with him, they believed that Humanistic Jews should feel free to express their ideas and also be welcome to practice them. The position taken by the leadership of the Freemason's temple showed intolerance towards a group of people who did not share beliefs as they did, and as such it was an insult to religious freedom. They were calling on the Masonic Order to analyze its position more carefully. Even though they used the argument of unbelief in a Supreme Being as their strong point to deny Humanistic Jews use of their properties, they were at the same time breaking other principles (i.e., freedom of religion) which should not be ignored (Olitzky, 1996:180).

'Ministers Write'

The Birmingham Council of Ministers, of which Rabbi Sherwin Wine is a member, has written to Dorr urging freedom of religious expression and asking for an explanation of the Masonic action. Dorr said he received the letter but did not plan to answer it. 'Our action speaks for itself. We believe in God', he said, and 'they don't'. In its letter the mainly Protestant Council defended Rabbi Wine as an able and sincere leader. 'We have many varied expressions of religious conviction in our community and we rejoice in this,' the ministers wrote. 'The heritage of all of us prizes diversity of expression and free interchange. Religious freedom is the most important of our freedoms, a foundation on which we all depend. We presume the Masonic Order shares these ideals.' The Temple president Harry A. Velick, in a letter to congregation members, said the Masons insisted that a positive commitment to the existence of a Supreme Being was a requisite for the continued use of the temple (*Detroit Free Press*, 5th January, 1965: page unknown).

Even though Mason C. Fuller Dorr initially did not want to explain to the newspaper why the Freemasons Temple in Bloomfield had asked Wine and his congregation to leave, he sent a letter to the Birmingham Temple leaders explaining why the Masons had asked them to vacate the building. The last thing the Freemasons wanted was to be caught in an argument with the press, where it had already been highlighted that their attitude was a breach of

religious freedom. Against such accusation the Masonic Temple did not put forward a very intelligent argument to defend their position, only their belief in God. The religious leaders of the community were convinced that one of the reasons why the Freemasons had taken such a decision was because of the publicity attached to Wine and his teachings. Wine was very gracious in his approach to the Masonic request and did not blame them or criticise decision. He said he understood them as he hoped to be understood by other groups. The religious leaders who stood against the Freemasons' position put action to their words and offered the Humanistic Jews their churches as places where they could hold their Sabbath services. Through this action they were showing that they did not want just to engage in an aimless argument, but they were willing to offer their premises in order to prove support for Wine and his group.

'Masons Ask Liberal Congregation to Leave'

The enclosure of this was the statement from C. Fuller Dorr, of Grand Rapids, Grand Michigan, Grand Master of Masons in Michigan, dated December 29th 1964: 'A Mason believes in God. With deep convictions and without any reservation whatsoever, he affirms his solid faith in the Supreme Being. We read in the Bible (Genesis 1:27), 'God created man his own image, in the image of God he created him'. We accept the inspired word the Bible as the rule and guide of our faith. Every Masonic meeting is opened and closed with prayer to our Heavenly Father. In view of this sacred tenet, it is understandable why the premises or facilities of any Masonic Temple should never be available to any person, group of persons, or organization that does not profess a belief in the Almighty God. This ancient fraternity is rich in precious landmarks – and the greatest of these is our firm conviction that God governs in the affairs of man. We are concerned with the reports that come to our attention that one of our fellow religious institutions, 'The Birmingham Temple,' has been asked to vacate their tenancy of our local Masonic Temple building. It is our understanding that this action resulted because of newspaper publicity concerning the theological position of the rabbi of the religious society.' The letter was signed by Rev Robert W. Boyley, pastor of Beverly Hills Methodist Church and president of the Birmingham Council of Churches. Also signing were committee members the Rev Robert Marshall, pastor of Birmingham Unitarian Church; John Root, pastor of Saint Andrew's Lutheran Church, Caryl Sayres, rector of St Stephen's Episcopal Church, and John Wigle, rector of the Episcopal Church of the Advent (*The Daily Tribune*, 1965a, 3 February: page unknown).

'Understand Others'

He said there were no hard feelings, 'As we understand others, so we hope others will understand us'. Among the forefront of their 'understanding' is the Birmingham Council of Churches. It firmly attacked the Masons for their action and offered the Jewish Congregation its churches for Sabbath Services (*The Daily Tribune*, February 4th, 1965: page unknown).

The situation of the Humanistic Jews became publicly known and Wine and his congregation had no option but to find a new place where they could hold their meetings. Their disappointment with a religious institution caused them to relocate to a secular institution. They did not want to be facing the same problems again and again; they would prefer to be in a place where they knew they would be welcome and not become a source of embarrassment to anyone. It was strategic for them as a new and small organisation to make sure that as much as it depended upon them they would have a good relationship with all sorts of different institutions within their community where they were located. In their search for new and neutral premises, Wine and his congregation found a school that was willing to allow them to make use of their premises for their meetings, The Glenn Levey High School.

'Banished Temple Will Move Here'

The 140-family Jewish congregation of Rabbi Sherwin Wine, a professed non-believer in God, will meet at Southfield's Levey Junior High School, starting February 19th. Rabbi Wine, who organized the Birmingham Temple in November 1963, admits that he and his congregation do not believe in God as he is popularly conceived. The move to Levey stems from ousting of the congregation from Birmingham's Masonic Temple, because of its beliefs (*Detroit News*, 11th February, 1965: page unknown).

Any institution, religious or secular, is composed of different members who in turn belong to different creeds and accept different philosophies in life. The members' opinions are heard, and most of the important decisions are based on them. Even though the religious leaders were prepared to support Humanistic Jews, it did not mean that their ideas and support reflected the popular opinion. As discussed previously, some religious groups supported Wine and his group, but it would be wrong to surmise that the entire religious community was unanimous or even that the great majority supported them. There were some clerics who were very courageous in offering their support even if they did not agree with Wine's theology, but the majority who did not agree with his theology did not offer Wine and his group any support and in point of fact showed opposition to them. This was evident when the agreement with Southfields Levey Junior School was suspended and Wine and his people needed to look elsewhere for new facilities in which to hold their meetings. The pressure mounted from people in the community and also from individual trustees. The

pathway proved to be not as smooth as Wine and his congregation would have liked. Moving from a religious institution, the Freemasons, to a secular institution, a school did not prove to be as straightforward as the Birmingham Temple people expected it to be. Because of the opposition expressed, Humanistic Jews were asked to withdraw their application for using the school for their meetings. The Unitarian Church of Birmingham offered Wine and his congregation their facilities so that they could have a place to hold their activities. It was a very bold move of the Unitarian leadership to take such a step, as many people would misunderstand their decision and they were exposing themselves to a very strong searchlight of criticism (Olitzky, 1996: 180-181).

'Pressures Force Agnostics to Withdraw School Use Bid'

Reacting to public pressure Southfield School Board asked a Jewish congregation professing a human philosophy of religion to withdraw its application to use Levey Junior High School for its services. A spokesman for Birmingham Temple said it has withdrawn and will hold its services at Birmingham Unitarian Church, starting Friday... Theodore Minke, Southfield School Board president, said a flurry of protests against renting facilities at Levey School to the group was registered at the school offices and with individual trustees. Minke said he received about a half dozen calls 'all from women'. He said they registered disagreement with Rabbi Wine's beliefs, questioned whether his beliefs actually represent a 'religious philosophy', and protested against him using the school to spread his thoughts and beliefs. Because there is a school policy requiring a majority of members in organizations renting schools to be Southfields residents, Minke said he told Supt. John W. English to take a good hard look at the Birmingham Temple application. After talking with school officials Monday, Harry A. Velick, president of the Birmingham Temple, said the application was withdrawn. It was never presented to the school board. In a letter to the 145 member families he said, 'the Southfield authorities have advised me that they have been subjected to great public pressure since the announcement of our agreement to use one of their schools for the conduct of religious services. As a result, they have requested that we withdraw.' Velick said he has assurance facilities will be made available at the Birmingham Unitarian Church (*Daily Tribune*, 1965b, 13th February, page unknown).

After leaving the Masonic Temple, Wine and his people tried to avoid a religious institution; however, it was indeed a religious institution that assisted them. Wine and his congregation made use of the Unitarian Church for their meetings for a little while. The leaders of the Humanistic Jews who tried to get away from using a religious institution needed to make use of one, since they were refused permission to use a school as the base for their services. Wine and his congregation were very grateful to the Unitarian people for opening their doors

to them, but they did not want to impose on them. While making use of the Unitarian Temple in Birmingham, the Humanistic Jews were looking for another place where they could hold their meetings. Subsequently, after being rejected by a secular organisation (school), Wine and his congregation found another school – Frost Junior High School – that was willing to allow them use of their facilities for their meetings. Again, it was very courageous of those who were in the school's leadership at that time to give them permission in face of the opposition and rejection that the group had previously received from a sister institution.

The Birmingham Temple leaders knew that as the movement was prospering it was fundamental for them to have their own facilities. They needed a place where they could feel secure and know that no one would be able to ask them to leave and where they could give continuity to their work and outline strong plans for the future. The president of the temple at that time, William W. Wizer, unveiled intentions of the Humanist Jews: to possess their own place for their services.

'Birmingham Temple Relocates'

The Birmingham Temple, headed by Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine, has moved from its temporary quarters. The previous quarters in the Birmingham Unitarian Church were secured after the state organization of Freemasons asked the Birmingham Temple officials to leave the new Masonic Temple in Bloomfield Hills. The initial move was requested due to Rabbi Wine's controversial statements that belief in a Supreme Being is not as important as the development of man. The Temple will meet at the cafeteria of the Frost Junior High School, Oak Park. The Temple's new president, William W. Wizer, said that it was an imposition on the Birmingham Unitarian Church to use their facilities and that he appreciated the use of their facilities up until now. He also said that the Birmingham Temple plans to have its own temple in the future and that they were looking in Birmingham for a site (*The Birmingham Eccentric*, 5th August 1965: page unknown).

2.8 The Birmingham Temple

The permanent facilities for the Birmingham Temple were built in 1971, although Birmingham Temple existed before in temporary quarters. The permanent facilities in Twelve Miles met the demands of an evident need. Humanistic Judaism now owned its own place, and the members of the

movement knew that they would be able to give continuity to their work (Olitzky, 1996:181).

When Harry and Suzanne Velick and seven other couples met with Rabbi Wine in 1963, they had no idea what the future held for them. The group of people who met Wine named themselves the Birmingham Temple because the group often met in Birmingham and some of the members lived there (Rowens, 2003:58).

Wine and the Ritual Committee established that the Birmingham Temple believed in Humanistic Judaism, a Judaism that was people-centred instead of God-centred. The committee, under the supervision and influence of Wine, wrote their own liturgy, which reflected their beliefs and their ethics. It took a lot of courage to write a liturgy where the name of God was excluded (Rowens, 2003: 58-59).

The year 1963 saw the birth of the Humanistic Judaism Movement. In 1965 the Birmingham Temple had grown from 140 member families, and in 1967 the Ritual Committee resumed its important task of developing services and rituals which would reflect the Jewish culture and not what they considered to be superstitious beliefs. It was in 1968 that the Birmingham Temple family started debating building their own facilities that could be used to house their organisation (Kreger, 1976:9).

The Birmingham Temple expanded considerably in the following years. Wine left the Beth El Congregation in Windsor and started to hold services in Birmingham Temple on Friday nights (Kreger, 1976:9). Because of their new pursuit it was inevitable that a new order of service which would reflect Jewish culture with a humanistic understanding had to be written. It was during this time that the first edition of *Meditation Services for Humanistic Judaism* was completed and published (Rowens, 2003:60). The new movement started to attract a good number of people whose main characteristics were that they were second and third generation Jews who benefited from the opportunities of a university education and choice of profession. They were the children of World War II and were young adults during the 1960s, a time when authority

was questioned, a time to march for civil rights. These like-minded people found support in the Birmingham Temple, so it grew to more than 400 families who became loyal supporters and who helped to create material, committees and the new Philosophy of Humanistic Judaism (Rowens, 2003:60-61). The Humanistic Jews had plans to have their own centre, and after meeting for five years in Oak Park's Frost Junior High School, Wine and his congregation started to build their own facilities that would become the headquarters of the movement (Kreger, 1976:9-10).

'New Beginnings'

Ground was broken recently for the new home of the Birmingham Temple, to be located at 28611 West 12 Mile in Farmington Township. The \$200,000 temple, contain 6,000 square feet of space, is scheduled for completion by the end of May 1971, Robert Farrah, current president of the temple that has met for five years in Oak Park's Frost Junior School, had said (*The Farmington Observer*, 26th December 1970: page unknown).

Plans were traced and architects were called to design what would be 'the first Humanist Temple in the world'. The groundbreaking ceremony took place and would leave a strong mark in the continued life of the movement.

'Groundbreaking Ceremonies Set for Birmingham Temple'

Groundbreaking Ceremony for the new temple will be at 2pm Sunday at 26811 West Twelve Miles, Farmington Hills. The seven acres on which it will be built is located between Inskter and Middlebelt on Twelve Miles. Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine, the Temple's founder, will officiate at the ceremony. The Birmingham Temple was the first humanist temple in the world ... The new temple will provide the congregation with a centre for its activities. 'It will provide a family type atmosphere which is necessary for the services we have', Rabbi Wine said. The 13,000 square foot structure will contain a sanctuary, offices, a library, kitchen and youth room. Three patios are attached to the building for outside services (*The Daily Tribune*, 19th November 1970: page unknown).

After being expelled from the Masons' Temple, the Humanist Jews found themselves searching to find a place where they could hold their meetings. To have a home of their own became an important part of Wine's vision. Wine's mother, Tillie Wine, tenderly referred to the members as 'gypsies' because they did not have a place of their own and were forever moving from place to place. In September 1971, services were held in their new building at 28611 West Twelve Mile Road, in Farmington Hills, Michigan (Kreger, 1976:9).

When Marilyn Rowens discusses the subject of the existence of the Birmingham Temple, she draws a very profound conclusion about the affirmation of the establishment of the Birmingham Temple. This is the conclusion she wrote:

Rabbi Wine's lectures and constant encouragement provided the environment in which the philosophy of Humanistic Judaism flourished. Humanistic Judaism was not created in a vacuum. Jewish history is the history of change. The secularization of America, the influence of Enlightenment, the impact of Zionism, the questioning of Jewish tradition after World War II and the Holocaust: all led to a need in the Jewish world for a Jewish identity that could blend with a personal philosophy of life. The early years of the temple had less to do with pulling away from God than with pulling together to form a community of 'believers' in a humanistic and rational approach to life. The members were a generation of searchers. They had had the opportunity of education and living in a free society. They wanted their children to soar; they wanted to give them wings at a time when having wings meant flying away from tradition toward a universal world of wonder, science and beauty. Rabbi Wine created meditations, poetry, and ritual to express congregates' deep human struggles and their attachments to the traditional Jewish world of youth (Rowens, 2003:60).

2.9 The Expansion of the Jewish Humanistic Movement

As Wine was attracting attention from the press as a result of the articles written about him, he was invited to visit different venues to speak and explain his philosophy. Not everybody who went to listen to him agreed with him: sometimes he was insulted or shouted at, but evidently he believed in the adage that there is no such thing as bad publicity. Wine was not intimidated and carried on with his campaign. Everywhere Wine spoke, he got people to sign in, to give names and addresses so the movement of Humanistic Judaism could start a national network (Rowens, 2003:32).

The message spread in other ways. For instance, John Franklin, who had been one of the original members of the temple, moved to Westport, Connecticut. Wine was invited to speak there, and the result was the birth of a new congregation (Rowens, 2003:32).

Rabbi Sherwin Wine wanted the movement to grow nationwide and in order to achieve his objective he invited other rabbis who were more or less like-minded to discuss the plans for the future of the movement. In 1967 Wine invited seven rabbis of a more or less like mind to discuss the formation of a national movement. 'We met at my sister Lorraine's home in suburban Detroit', Wine recalled, 'on Sunday, July 23rd. That was the day the riot began – about a block from my childhood home! – and there they were debating about theology, and the city of my birth was burning down!' One of those present on July 23 was Rabbi Dan Friedman, who headed a Reform congregation in the Chicago

suburb of Deerfield. Within two years he had converted it into the third congregation of Humanistic Judaism in America (Cook, 2003:29).

One of the important ways for the movement to spread its philosophy was to start printing information about the movement itself and what the Humanistic Jews believed in. In 1966 a special committee for Humanistic Judaism was established to disseminate service and educational material for all the people who were involved with the movement. As a consequence of a conference in Detroit in 1967, a statement affirming that Judaism should be governed by empirical reason and human needs saw the light; in addition, a new magazine titled *Humanistic Judaism* was created (Cohn-Sherbok, 1997:130).

'Plans for Humanistic Judaism'

Birmingham, Mich. – The plans to issue a magazine of professional calibre by the Birmingham Temple, whose philosophy is described as ignostic as contrasted with agnostic, have moved ahead to the point where the contents of the first issues have been announced. The publication will be called *Humanistic Judaism*, and plans call for issuing it semi-annually. Feature of the first issue, which will be published next spring, will be a debate on 'Can there be religion in which the concept of God is irrelevant?' Hope was expressed in the bulletin of the congregation that the magazine can become the voice of a new movement in the Jewish world. Although the announcement of names of the staff was made, the editorial board had been chosen. The magazine will include a presentation of the humanistic Jewish point of view as well as conflicting opinions representing a spectrum of thought. In addition to the debate, there will be single articles on a variety of provocative and pertinent subjects. The magazine will also contain a number of regular features including book reviews, editorials, news, and a special section devoted to scientific research and its ethical implications. The publication hopes to attract writers, professional people from the rabbinate and ministry, from colleges and universities, and from science and humanities (*National Jewish Post*, 14th October 1966: page unknown).

The printed material did not only consist of the semi-annual magazine. Sherwin was a prolific writer and his articles appeared monthly in the Birmingham Temple newsletter, *The Jewish Humanistic*, and quarterly in the Society for Humanistic Judaism's journal. He has written many books, including *Celebration*, *Judaism Beyond God*, *Staying Sane in a Crazy World*, and others (Rowens, 2003:64). With the Birmingham Temple well-established, Wine felt it was time to expand. In 1969, with the cooperation of Robert Marshall, the minister of the Birmingham Unitarian Church, a conference for humanistic ethics was organised on the campus of Oakland University in the Detroit suburb of Rochester Hills. It was not a Jewish event but it attracted many Jews who turned out to listen to people such as Joan Baez, Paul Goodman and Albert

Ellis. More than 600 people came together for this meeting and the message of Humanistic Judaism was spread. In that same year the three existing humanistic congregations (The Birmingham Temple, Westport Connecticut, and Deerfield Illinois) came together and founded The Society for Humanistic Judaism. It was in June 1970 that more than 150 delegates came to the society's first meeting, held at what was then known as Stouffer's Inn Northland (Kreger, 1976:10).

By 1976 the movement was celebrating thirteen years of existence and was not only confined to Detroit: the movement was outgrowing its first parish geographical limits. The Society for Humanistic Judaism had grown to include:

- *The Birmingham Temple* in Farmington Hills, Michigan. Leader Rabbi Sherwin Wine.
- *Congregation Beth Or* in Deerfield, Illinois. Leader Rabbi Daniel Friedman.
- *Westport Congregation of Humanistic Judaism* in Westport Connecticut. Leader Rabbi Philip E. Schechter.
- *Toronto Humanistic Congregation*, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Assisted by Mr Richard Neff.
- *Adat Haverim* in Los Angeles, California, Leader Rabbi Leslie Freund.

There are also chapters of the Society for Humanistic Judaism in Boston, Los Angeles, Miami, Philadelphia and Houston. The society has individual members from all over the world (cf. Kreger 1976:10). The movement proliferated and in this way new sub-organisations within the movement itself were created. As the movement expanded the demand for new branches was inevitable and out of the Birmingham Temple the list of organisations continuously grew:

- *Birmingham Temple* (BT).
- *Society for Humanistic Judaism* (SHJ).
- *Association of Humanistic Rabbis* (AHR).
- *Centre for New Thinking* (CNT).
- *North American Committee for Humanism* (NACH).
- *International Association of Humanistic Educators Counsellors and Leaders* (IAHECL).

- *TECHILA* (formerly *Israeli Society for Humanistic Judaism*).
- *Leadership Conference of Secular and Humanistic Jews* (LCSHJ).
- *International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews* (IFSHJ).
- *Voice of Reason* (VOR).
- *Conference on Liberal Religion* (CLR).
- *Clergy and Citizens United* (CCU).

All the above organisations started under the very close supervision of Wine, but as they grew stronger they became more autonomous but never lost contact with Wine or his influence (Jerris, 2008:71).

In 1981 a meeting was held in Israel at *Shefayin Kibbutz*. It was the beginning of cooperation between Israel and the society. In 1982, Sherwin called a meeting with other Jewish secular organisations as well as the *Society for Humanistic Judaism; The Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations, Polizion, and Workmen's Club, The Labour Zionists of America* and *Americans for Progressive Israel*. It was the start of the *Leadership Conference of Secular and Humanistic Jews*, which marked the first time that so many separate bodies of secular groups met together to support one another and cooperate in the creation of the publication of secular humanistic writing (Jerris, 2008:66,67).

In 1985 The International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism was created. It took place during a meeting in Jerusalem at the American Colony Hotel, with representatives from North America, Israel and Latin America. It had become obvious that for the movement to have a future it would be necessary to train its leaders. The Institute became the educational arm of what was the beginning of an international movement (cf. Feldman, 2008:21). The new congregations that were springing up needed leaders who knew how to handle special ceremonies and holiday celebrations. These were part of the services of humanistic congregations and so these future leaders would be trained under a programme that was created specifically to meet that need. It was called the Leadership Program, and became the most successful programme for leading the Institute into the 21st century (Rowens, 2003:69, 70).

Tamara Kolton was the first person to be ordained as a rabbi by the International Institute for Secular Judaism, in October 1999 (cf. Rowens: 2003:70). Mrs Kolton grew up in the Birmingham Temple, and decided to become a rabbi when she was thirteen years old, on the way to *bat mitzva*. She earned a BA in International Relations and English Literature from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She earned her master's degree in Clinical Psychology from the Centre for Humanist Studies in Detroit and received her Ph.D. in Rabbinical Studies from the Union Institute in Cincinnati (*Detroit Free Press*, October 1999).

In 1986 another important meeting took place, but this time the venue was the Birmingham Temple. Representatives from eleven countries came together and the result was the birth of The International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews. More than 350 people gathered for the federation's first leadership training seminar and conference. Speakers from Israel, North America, France and Latin America spoke about the Judaism of the 21st Century that embraced the culture, history and essence of the Jewish people. It should be a Judaism that did not rely on the power of the supernatural but on reason and the responsibility of human beings to promote and create better lives for themselves and others, a life of good deeds which could consequently provide a much better world to live in (Rowens, 2003:67).

The International Federation of the movement issued a proclamation stating its ideology and aims in 1986:

We believe in the value of human reason and in the reality of the world which reason discloses. The natural universe stands on its own, requiring no supernatural intervention. We believe in the value of human existence and in the power of human beings to solve their problems both individually and collectively. Life should be directed to the satisfaction of human needs. Every person is entitled to life, dignity and freedom. We believe in the value of Jewish identity and in the survival of Jewish people. Jewish history is a human history. Judaism, as the civilization of the Jewish people, embraces all manifestations of Jewish life, including Jewish languages, ethical traditions, historical memories, cultural heritage, and specifically the emergence of the state of Israel in modern times. Judaism also embraces many belief systems and lifestyles. As the creation of the Jewish people in all ages, it is always changing. We believe in the value of a secular humanistic democracy for Israel and for all nations of the world. Religion and state must be separate. The individual right to privacy and moral autonomy must be guaranteed to all, regardless of race, sex, creed, or ethnic origin (Cohn-Sherbok, 1997:130).

The 1970s, 80s and 90s were full of excitement in the growth of Secular Humanistic Judaism. Many things were happening inside the movement and it was spreading and becoming more structured. North American conferences were held, and meetings of the International Federation took place in Brussels, Chicago, Israel, Moscow, Paris and New York, where, in the autumn of 2000, a permanent office of the federation was established (cf. Rowens, 2003:68).

In September of 2003 The International Federation of Secular Humanistic Judaism met for the ninth biennial conference. People attended from different parts of the globe – Israel, France, Italy, Belgium, Sweden, Ireland, Latin America, England, Germany and North America. The people who met together were very interested in promoting Humanistic Judaism as an option for their communities to live by, and this indicated a promising future for the movement (cf. Rowens, 2003:70, 71).

As many people oppose Wine's teachings today as when he first began to express his views. He had come a long way from where he first started in 1963. He had broadened his horizons and his teachings have reached much further afield than many of those who oppose him would like. He achieved much more than his opponents and supporters could have expected. He made a name for himself, and his work, philosophy and theology have granted him a place of importance amongst the humanists of today's world. Even though it was not an easy walk for Wine, what he believed in and what he achieved through his life gained him the 'Humanist of the Year' award from the American Humanist Association in May 2003 in Washington DC (Cousens, 2002). The Humanist of the Year was established in 1953 to recognise persons of national or international reputation, who, through the application of human values, have made significant contribution to the improvement of the human condition (American Humanist Association, 2018). After so much achievement and hard work, Rabbi Sherwin Wine decided to retire at the age of 75. On June 27th 2003 a ceremony was held to honour him and at the same time to celebrate all he had achieved in his lifetime. Some of his critics said that the movement would never last. The movement which began with a congregation of eight families is now a movement of forty communities across the United States, claiming forty thousand members (Keys, 2003). Wine has been labelled eccentric,

iconoclastic, rebellious, intellectual and courageous. At the end of his forty years of hard work, Wine stated that he felt very gratified with the choices and achievements in his life (cf. Low, *Detroit Free Press*, 11th June 2003). Under his leadership and guidance the Humanistic Judaism movement has grown and matured and established itself. Wine left a tremendous legacy behind him. His followers know that the movement he has pioneered needs to carry on and everybody involved with it has an important role to play. Throughout his life he devoted himself to creating and promoting a structure that would grant the movement a future which does not depend on him, even though it owes much of its legacy to him. Wine is the father of the movement and he is undoubtedly the brain behind it all. Cook writes:

Wine summed up his role in the movement this way: "While in the beginning I could not envision all that is now, I had no idea it would not succeed. And it is not as if it has been easy, I was not surprised by the hostility I encountered, though I did not cultivate it. In fact, I enjoyed the challenge. There were, of course, surprises along the way. People can be very ambivalent. They respond to intellectual things, but traditions hang over them. They love what you say, but sometimes are unprepared to cross the bridge all the way." Enough people have crossed the bridge that today Secular Judaism is a recognized and respected alternative to the more traditional branches of Judaism. It is a movement still in the making, but for as long as memory lasts and history is passed down from one generation to another, Sherwin T. Wine will be known as the one who named the emerging movement and gave it its most public face (Cook, 2003:34).

On July 21st 2007 Wine and his long-term partner Richard McMains were vacationing in Morocco when their taxi was hit by another vehicle close to the coastal town of Eassouira. McMains was seriously injured but he survived the accident. Wine and the taxi driver died (<http://nytimes.com/2007/07/25/>).

Chapter 3

HUMANISTIC JUDAISM: DOCTRINES AND ETHICS

This study has thus far concentrated on the historicity of the movement. However, this chapter will discuss the beliefs and practices of Humanistic Jews, analysing their common belief and also their social and ethical practices.

Humanistic Jews are atheists, but that does not mean they do not have their own beliefs and practices: their doctrines differ from many other Jewish movements, yet one of the reasons why they congregate together is that they wish to educate and strengthen each other in those tenets. Within this chapter I will be analysing some of their basic beliefs.

3.1 Doctrine and Theology

It is no surprise that Humanistic Jews are atheists who do not believe in many of the existing religious doctrines and theologies. However, in order that those who are part of the movement will understand, accept and explain what they believe in, they have formulated a group of doctrines and developed some arguments to defend their beliefs. It is important to draw attention to the fact that, up to this present moment, no one has presented a book that contains what we could call 'The Systematic Doctrine of Humanistic Judaism'. They have strong beliefs and theories, and some cogent arguments to present, but to discover exactly what they believe it is necessary to study the whole movement and read as much as possible on the subject. Their beliefs are presented in a variety of articles that deal with different subjects, or themes discussed during their special conferences called Colloquiums. I will be looking at some of their cardinal doctrines.

3.2.1 God: Providence, Revelation and Prayer

Humanistic Jews have inverted the theory that God created humanity in His own image, and argue that it was people who created God in their own image. They project the image of God as the image of what people should really be like. The positive moral attributes of God in the Bible should be found in humanity (Katz, 1983a:19). The concept of a Supreme Divine Being who has the world under His control and demands obedience from his followers is an

alien concept to Humanistic Jews. They find such a concept pejorative and humiliating. Wine (1995:97-98) maintains that the recent history of the Holocaust is a supreme manifestation of the absence of God in all of the Jewish history. Some people would offer the defence that God used it to punish His people who were not living according to the teachings they had received, but Wine argues that it is morally wrong to bring forth such an argument, because during the Holocaust observant Jews were murdered too. Ironically, the people who supposedly discovered 'God' were the painful witnesses that divine justice does not exist. The Jewish people learned from their own experience that if they did not assume responsibility for their own destiny no one else in the universe would (Wine, 1995:31). Wine continues to explain that in the world of reason and technology that modern humanity inhabits, the idea of a Supreme Being has become an obsolete concept. The question is no longer whether God exists but whether humanity needs Him. God has been deposed from His throne, not through angry arguments but in a much more intellectual fashion. God has become too vague to be interesting. Modern people have lost interest in knowing and relating to a being that they do not need, nor even believe in (Wine, 1995:31). Instead of just believing in God because the *Torah* tells the Jews to do so, the Humanistic Jews observe the 'historical facts' and believe that history denies the existence of a loving, just God.

From a humanistic perspective, the existence, experience and survival of the Jewish people hardly demonstrate the existence of a loving, just God who is compassionately involved with the moral agenda of human beings. On the contrary, the very opposite is indicated. In the century of the Holocaust, after twenty centuries of continuous unprovoked Jew-hatred, the experience of the Jewish people points to the absence of God (Hillman, 2002:52).

Humanistic Jews accept that some people believe in the God of the *Torah*, but they raise a question for those who believe in Him. Why did the God of the *Torah*, who used His powerful hand to set the Israelites free from Egypt, not use the same powerful hand to deliver six million Jews from the hands of 'civilised' barbarians? Humanistic Jews do not pose such a question in order to trick believers in the God of the *Torah*, but the lack of an intelligent, rational answer to such questions causes them to deny the existence of this God (Hillman, 2001b:22).

Friedman (1983a:65-66) upholds that Jews are free to believe whatever they wish. He argues that Jews do not need to believe in God to be considered Jews. Jews are no more Jewish because they believe in God. The antithesis to this argument is that Jews are no less Jewish because they simply do not believe. Even though Friedman thinks that such freedom should be respected, he asserts that to believe in God is not beneficial. He reasons that such belief is dangerous because it distorts reality, inhibits human initiative, encourages muddled thinking, fosters irresponsibility, and substitutes myth for truth. Wine (1983c:67-70), knows that the concept of Judaism without God seems to be a surprising concept, but advocates the idea that such a concept is a perfectly appropriate one. It is a healthy kind of religion which does not start or finish with God: it is a religion that puts people in the centre of its morality, and it is derived from humans and not from God. Humans take the moral place of God, although humans do not need to become gods because there is no moral or physical need for such an action. The Humanistic Judaism movement has opted for atheism instead of theism. God is not in the centre: that is the place for humans (Klein, 1992:208-209).

Humanistic Jews do not believe all of the stories of the Bible but they do appreciate some of the lessons which can be learned from these stories. They do not believe in the story of Exodus, but they do see the beauty of the point of individuals fighting against oppressive regimes, be they spiritual or political. Although there is no God to answer prayers, there is no lack of thankfulness. Humanistic Jews do not fail to have meditations, but these are based on humans and not on God. Humanistic Jews are encouraged to develop their talents, find peace and live in harmony with other human beings. Kopitz (1999: 2-35), wrote a book which is a sort of devotional guide, in which prayer to a god is an alien concept, yet meditation based on human character is not.

Humanistic Jews not only refuse to obey the *Torah* but any sort of writing that demands obedience because of the claims of a divine authority. They do not believe in the divine, therefore they do not believe in divine providence or sanction. The prophets are seen by Humanistic Jews as an authoritarian group of self-righteous people who were never open for discussion. By hiding under the cover of Yahweh's voice, whatever they said could not be questioned but

obeyed without hesitation. Humanistic Jews find many of the stories contained in the books of the Old Testament very cruel. The stories are full of violence against their enemies and very seldom show any sort of humanitarian sentiment. The survival of the Jewish people was more important than any respect or dignity accorded to others. Wine (1995:43) says that, unlike the *Torah*, the prophetic books are more useful as clues to Jewish history than as moral directives. Humanistic Jews see many of the prophets as extraordinary people, but not as God's messengers. These prophets had a great understanding of human behaviour and could even predict the consequences if people carried on with their determined life style, but there was no divine inspiration or revelation (Goldfinger, 1996:54).

3.2.2 The *Torah*

Divinity does not exist, so divine revelation does not exist either. The role of *Torah* is a challenge for Humanistic Jews, as they do not accept it as divinely inspired, but they do see its historical importance and influence upon Jewish and Western societies (Fine, 1996:55). The *Torah* presents a problem, not because of confusion about the message, but because it is a theological book and people analyse it differently from the way that they would analyse other literature. It has been a work of literature used by religious leaders to manipulate the lives of their followers, and people are afraid of criticising it because of this theological association. The *Torah* is considered by Humanistic Jews to be an inaccurate piece of writing that has been proved historically and scientifically wrong; therefore it cannot be taken as the guide for people's lives (Cohn-Sherbok, 2003:245-246). It is a book of clues that can guide people to some important facts of Jewish history, but the facts should not be accepted as they are presented, because they are full of mythology (Wine, 1983a:13). The *Torah* puts *Yahweh* at the centre of the picture, as the One able to decide people's destiny. However, Humanistic Jews see it as non-beneficial because they believe that men and women are responsible for their own destiny (Wine, 1995:136-138). Humanistic Jews do not dispute the importance of the *Torah* within Judaism: it was a very important tool to unite the people and guide them towards the worthiest human goals. Nevertheless, the same goals can be achieved by pursuing humanistic values, so there is no need of *Torah* as a theological crutch to enhance humanistic social values (Hillman, 2002:52).

According to Katz (1982:15-17) it highlights to the Humanistic Jews how vital it is for them to study the *Torah* as he believes ignoring it will cause a great void in Humanistic Judaism itself. He sees the relevance of the stories contained in the *Torah* and finds that they have very important moral lessons to teach and should be recognised as having played a pivotal role in the development of society. He teaches that Humanistic Judaism is an extension of traditional Judaism. God does not receive the glory for the creation of the *Torah* – humanity receives it. It would seem that some Humanistic Jews try to romance the *Torah*, but Rabbi Daniel Friedman is quite extreme in his approach to the *Torah*, leaving no room for nostalgia. In common with other Humanistic Jewish thinkers he states that the *Torah* is not historically correct. He criticises some Humanistic Jews because they have no idea of the historical discrepancies contained in the *Pentateuch*. He challenges them to read biblical criticism in order to be literate about Jewish Humanism. Friedman does not see the moral relevance of the teaching the *Torah* today: its rule cannot be imposed in our modern society. He says that some people could argue the case of ‘Thou shall not murder’: he sees the importance of that not because of the *Torah* but because of its rationality. Similarly, he argues that we could not apply the law of death to homosexuals (Leviticus 20:13) as a rational law even though it is found in the sacred document (Friedman, 1983b:27-28).

Humanistic Jews define Judaism and Jewishness as a matter of cultural identification and not a matter of birth or conversion. Their acceptance of the *Torah* is just cultural and not authoritative or divinely inspired; the importance of establishing these two points takes away any sort of racial exclusiveness or doctrinal acceptance that is based on tradition and not on truth. Humanistic Jews have removed some of the ideological and philosophical fences that have kept Jews within their self-built ghettos, exposing them to theological and doctrinal truths that they believe to be more honest and truthful than those the Jews have been taught to follow till now. Instead of just pursuing a doctrinal truth, the commitment of the Humanistic Jews is to find the truth, and the truth is mutable according to them. For instance, they do not believe in the theory of creation but do advocate the theory of evolution. Suppose that in 50 years’ time this theory proves to be scientifically wrong and a new theory of origins appears: the new theory would defend the idea that humanity comes from extra-

terrestrial beings. This new theory is plausible and more acceptable than evolution, so the Humanistic Jews would change their minds, because what they desire, more than a set of doctrines, is a commitment to define and accept the truth. Humanistic Jews create a place for themselves where they are free to reason their beliefs, not bound by race or acceptance of any sort of divinely authoritative writings that place tradition before reason. Once belief in the *Torah* is excluded from their beliefs they feel free to follow different roads which can lead them to find honest and truthful answers to many different issues in human existence. Human beings do not need a judicial code, the primary concern of which is to satisfy God who has His own agenda, punishing anyone who gets in His way. This is the view that Humanistic Jews have of the *Torah* – law, but not justice.

The *Torah* is a reactionary document. It promotes a lifestyle that is morally offensive to most contemporary Jews, and is rejected by them on a behavioural level. While it is fashionable to lift individual commandments out of their social and supernatural contexts (e.g. you shall love your neighbour as yourself), the choice distorts the reality. The traditional *Torah*-regulated lifestyle was the world of family tyranny, female inequality, tribal exclusiveness, theocratic government and sacrificial ritual. It takes legal ingenuity and dishonesty to turn the *Torah* into a constitution for a liberal democracy. Even the Ten Commandments place the Sabbath observance on the same level as not stealing (Wine, 1983a:11).

3.2.3 Creation/Evolution

As previously discussed, Humanistic Jews do not believe in the existence of an Almighty God, so they do not accept the *Torah* and its teachings as wonderful revelation from God. The theory of creation as taught in the book of Genesis 1 is not a trustworthy account for Humanistic Jews. If anyone asked the question, 'Where did the universe come from?' the honest answer they would give is, 'We do not know.' Nevertheless they are optimistic about it and the fact that they do not have the answer at present does not mean they will never know it. Because they do not have a clear and intelligent answer to this question, they will not accept or be compelled to believe in biblical fantasies of creation instead. They are concerned about the methods used to find the answers and they believe that scientific methods and rational thinking will lead them to answers. The answers offered by religion that are not scientifically and historically proved are disregarded but can remain real obstacles for humanity finding the truth. Humanistic Jews think that the theory proposed by science, popularly called 'The Big Bang Theory,' sounds more plausible than the idea of an 'Intelligent

Designer' proposed by religious people. It is important to notice that the 'Big Bang Theory' was not proposed by an atheistic scientist, but by a Catholic Priest, Father Georges Henri Joseph Edouard Lemaitre, who is known as the father of the 'Big Bang Theory'. He was not a secular scientist, but a Catholic priest who taught physics at the Catholic University of Leuven. There is a misconception that Edwin Hubble was the first scientist to teach about the 'Big Bang Theory'. Father Lemaitre published his work in 1927, two years before Hubble did (Anon., 1979:135). William Evans (1974:15-18), a protestant theologian who writes on doctrines of the Bible, gives an explanation of what is called the Intelligent Design theory, the idea that the Creator is a moral being endowed with a supernatural intelligence, a will and a predestined purpose. According to Eva Goldfinger, Humanistic Jews see the teaching of creation as found in the *Torah* as a myth (Goldfinger, 1996:14-15). The story of creation as presented in the *Torah* is seen as a great embarrassment for non-Orthodox Jews, because they have not broken away from the *Torah* but find this story impossible to believe in. They are still bound by tradition, but this is not the case for Humanistic Jews, who are liberated from this yoke of tradition which is against human intelligence. They are free to create an alternative story that is linked to evidence and is flexible enough to face constant revision. Humanistic Jews believe that it is important that the story of life must be saved from the destructive embrace of creationism (Wine, 2000:3-5). The ways in which people think and live their lives is changing quite rapidly in the West: many of the moral principles once accepted without question because of religious teachings are now being challenged or modified. The reason for this is that people's attention has turned from the supernatural world to the natural world. Theology is replaced by physics, chemistry, biology and other sciences. Divine Creation is out and Evolution is in. Evolution gave humanity a new approach to science and also to religion; it opened the individual's mind to ask legitimate questions in order to find the truth and not to be deceived by religious arguments without scientific proofs. According to Wine, Humanistic Jews believe the following:

Evolution is the monumental epic story of the secular age. It is more than a story of the development of life. It includes the entire universe – from the moment of Big Bang to the present. It starts with the electrons and photons, gravitons and gluons. It moves on to atoms, stars, and galaxies. It features explosions, transformations, and glorious fires. It encompasses the birth and death of millions of suns, the formation of billions of moons. Nothing ever stops changing, always turning from one thing to another. The evolution of the earthly

life is only one small chapter in the saga of a changing universe (Wine, 1995:22).

3.2.4 Creation of Humanity

The theory of creation as presented in the *Torah* refers to the creation of all things, including humanity. Humanistic Jews see the story of Adam and Eve as an allegory: they do not believe that it represents actual fact; however, they do develop a theory based on this allegory. They do not believe in the facts as they are presented in the *Torah*, but appreciate that there are some lessons to be learnt from this well-known story. The fruit represents knowledge, and the serpent represents the curiosity of men and women. It is curiosity that can lead us to perpetrate good and evil. The challenge that God put to Adam (Do not eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge) was a challenge that God did not expect men and women to obey, because there was more advantage in breaking it than obeying it. Humans would become self-sufficient and independent beings, and would find true reasons for living. To be banished from the garden was not a punishment but a healthy alternative to a life of boredom in the Garden of Eden. Humanistic Jews believe that if it were not for Adam and Eve's disobedience none of us would be here today; that is, our existence is one of the consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience (Debbie, 1983:33).

One of the things that Humanistic Jews fight for is the equality of races and genders, and they make use of the creation of humanity to defend their idea. According to the *Torah*, God created the man and woman in his own image, so, if we trace our ancestors, all of us come from the same father, and so we are equal, as mythological as it may be (Katz, 1983a:19).

Another aspect raised by Humanistic Jews that shows inconsistency in the Genesis narrative is that when God finished His creation, He saw that everything was very good; but to be very good is not to be perfect.

But what is that purpose? It is revealed in the words of the God of Creation. Having judged at each stage of His work to be "good", He finds total creation to be "very good". But "very good" is not perfect. It implies room for improvement. Given this all-apparent reality, the author posts a deliberate shortfall between the quality of primal creation and the goal of earthly perfection. As purposeful core of God's plan in creation, the shortfall provides the purpose of humanity's existence. It is to complete the process of primal creation, that is, to raise the condition of earthly existence from "very good" to perfect. Thus the *Torah's* first charge to mankind is to perfect the earthly existence (Hillman, 2001a:42).

So, it poses a challenge to humans to aim for perfection, even though we are not perfect beings. There is room for improvement. Also, according to Hillman, God's creation of humans in His own image attributes to the male figure a supremacy over the female figure. Man starts with an advantage over woman because the Creator God in Genesis is male. Such a clear-cut physical likeness between God and 'man' would offer visual support for His reality (Hillman, 2001a:41). This sort of doctrine teaches women that they are inferior to men, not because of their moral and intellectual abilities, but because at their very core they were created inferior. Humanistic Jews note that this sort of doctrine is widely applied in religious circles and the consequence of that is what we see today: leadership in Judaistic religions and offshoots from them is predominantly male-dominated.

Humanistic Jews know that scientists do not have all the answers to how life evolved on our planet. They make use of other experts in order to try to find the truth about the origins of human life. But what they have been offered as answers so far, by the geologists, biologists, palaeontologists, anthropologists and others, has proved to be far more acceptable than the idea of the man being created by God and the woman being created from his ribs, as those believing in the *Torah* are teaching (Goldfinger, 1996:15).

3.2.5 Supremacy of Free Will

Humanistic Jews do not believe in the creation of humanity as the Bible declares in the book of Genesis; they appreciate its literature even though they do not believe in it as a factual account. They find it very significant that when God created humans, they decided to disobey God. Even though they do not believe in the story of creation, they see human rebellion against God as a beautiful occurrence that makes men and women truly self-sufficient beings. We have been given the mental capacity to make our own choices in life and this is called 'free will', which we are expected to exercise. What many theologians see as an act of rebellion that led humanity to destruction, Humanistic Jews see as an act that was natural for humans. It is not an act to be horrified by but is actually to be admired (Katz, 1983a:18-19). People who refuse to believe in the theory of divine intervention and choose to take their destiny into their own

hands achieve much in this process. Humanistic Jews do not believe that the Jews are a special race in the eyes of God and with greater privileges than other races. Humanistic Jews believe that the Jewish people are as important as any other people. Also, as it is expected of other races to make their own decisions, it is also expected of the Jews to define their own destiny through their choices (Malkin, 1988:11-27). Humanistic Jews do not believe in the Supreme Authority in the universe; this should not create a void inside of people but should be a challenge to them in respect of their responsibility in choosing what is right. The absence of a Divine Authority gives us the power to choose what we must be and do. The liberating central ethical message of humanism is that you own yourself. You decide and control your own actions, including the immediate and long-range consequences of your freely chosen behaviour upon yourself and others (Cousens 1993:21-24). In this line of thought, Zev Katz finds it morally impossible to accept the concept that 'free will' is a gift from God to humanity. Humanistic Jews see free will as human conquest and not as a privilege given by God, because if it were a privilege given by God, how could the Holocaust be explained or even understood? How could God allow someone like Hitler to make use of his privilege to destroy millions of innocent human beings? It becomes a moral dilemma to God, because humans will be tempted to question the fact that their free will overrules God's moral attribute of love (Katz, 1986:64).

3.2.6 Good and Evil

As the Humanistic Jews uphold atheistic views, the only moral being left for them to work with, in the whole of the known universe, is the human being. They do not find themselves accountable to anyone else except other human beings. In Katz's view (1986:64-65), for those who believe in God, everything morally good originates from God, and evil is the consequence of refusing to submit to what God established. However, Humanistic Jews believe that good and evil originates from humanity, and it is only the good in humanity that can be a foundation for a world in which evil will be diminished and perhaps ultimately eliminated. Humanity must find in itself the motivation to be good, not goodness in response to the fear of God's punishment.

The secular concept focuses on humanity and humanity alone. Secular people do not see moral goodness beyond the human race, and they do not accept the idea of a Deity that is good and passes this goodness to mankind. The same applies to the concept of evil: they do not see evil beyond mankind, and they do not believe in any evil spirit influencing mankind. In the rest of the universe there is neither good nor evil, it is neutral. Secular people believe that mankind will struggle towards the sublime good for the benefit and advancement of humanity (Radest, 2005:13). Modern secular individuals would not be embarrassed to be labelled non-believers, would not feel inferior compared to others, and would be willing to express their non-believer views. They do believe in ethics and social responsibilities and also that mankind passes on to other people what they should know about justice. The concept of disbelief contradicts religion, and it contradicts the concepts that religions teach. Religion teaches about a God who will judge mankind because of the evil we have committed, but the secular do not believe in this sort of judgment because they do not believe in God, so they cannot believe in Him acting as judge. Their lack of faith in God does not mean that they also reject the concept of good and evil; they believe that both of these exist, and they believe in the existential human need for hope, belief and meaning (Landau, 1998:20-21).

Wine sees good and evil as reflexes to basic human needs. Right actions will satisfy human needs. Good within men and women must be explored in order for us to be happy with ourselves and also to make a positive contribution to society to which we belongs. Therefore, if right actions satisfy human needs, wrong actions will truly inhibit them (Wine, 1986a:74).

This idea, that good starts with mankind and is developed by mankind, is echoed by David Oler (2004:19-21): there is no need to go beyond humanity to find good. The possibility of promoting good for the sake of mankind is greater today than in the past. The dualism between God and Satan, good and evil, is seen by Humanistic Jews as a purposeless theory, because only humans suffer the direct consequences of good and evil. Humankind simply needs to use its own intelligence and moral attributes to achieve what is best for humanity. It becomes a daring human challenge, on the path towards overcoming powerful and deeply rooted alienation (Chuman, 2005:11).

In Katz's view, we distinguish between good and evil within the framework of human society. A specific event that seems to be good to one society is looked upon by another society as evil. This event is happening at the same time and in the same space but the concept of evil differs. It shows that sometimes the concept of good and evil is a relative one. For instance, the Spanish Inquisition was good to the Roman Catholic Church but evil to the Jews at that same time (Katz, 1995:210).

3.2.7 Life After Death

Humanistic Judaism accepts life and death realistically. It does not promise eternal salvation and does not accept as true that anyone should live this life in the expectancy of any sort of life hereafter. It is part of the doctrines of many religions that people will go to a different realm after physical death and will live forever and ever. The belief in eternal life is the product of wishful thinking and scientists have found no evidence of life after death. To accept mortality is not to accept defeat but to pose the challenge that every man and woman must do their best to achieve fulfilment and purpose for life here in this world because they will not have a second chance (Cousens, 1993:17). Friedman argues that religious teachings about death are neither comforting to the living nor respectful to the dead, but insulting to both. That the death of a loved one had some higher purpose beyond human comprehension implies that there are values more important than life itself. Consequently for Humanistic Jews the teaching of 'eternal life' is a false comfort that leads people astray from the reality of the only life they will ever have (Friedman, 1989:3-4). Wine's analysis is that the clergy seizes upon death as a golden opportunity to lure people into their flock. Death can be a very powerful tool in the hands of preachers who use it on people who are susceptible and fearful or lack knowledge. To the religious mind, death is not real but an illusion, and there is the promise of another world. Religion is seen as the denial of death (Wine, 1982:39).

The Jewish humanistic alternative to 'life after death' or 'eternal life' is called Creative Resignation. Creative Resignation refers to the fact that we humans are mortal beings and will not be able to conquer mortality in the foreseeable future. It refers to the ability of human beings to deal with their limitations with

good humour and resourcefulness. There are four steps in Creative Resignation:

Firstly he, the humanist, respects his own body and the laws of nature. He recognises that his soul and his physical health go together, that his mind and brain are inseparable. Although he cannot eliminate death he can delay it. Secondly, he does not try to change the unchangeable. The past is the past and we cannot bring back the dead. Thirdly, the humanist chooses quality of life over quantity. While many lives have been too short, many other lives have been too long. Fourthly, the humanist prefers laughter to piety. The time of our death is not part of some overarching plan. Instead of paying tribute to the unconscious fates with solemn and endless complaints, we mock them. They have the power but we keep our dignity (Wine, 1982:40).

Since Humanistic Jews do not believe in eternal salvation, it is clear that they do not believe in heaven or hell. They view the Christian idea of heaven as a very boring condition with an authoritarian father figure over all. They believe that just as they can avoid humiliating illness (they defend euthanasia – this question will be addressed later on in this chapter) they can also elude a tedious God. For Humanistic Jews the concept of rewards and punishments seems to speak of unfair distribution. It would appear to be an attempt to bring peace to the human mind at any cost, even though it does not seem to be just. This sort of compensation or reward is unacceptable to Humanistic Jews (Wine, 1982:40). It is part of the Humanistic Jewish philosophy that only by accepting the finality of death can we face the reality of the world where we have to live and offer meaning to it and encouragement to make the most of our lives (Ibry, 1999:23).

3.2.8 Jewish People, Judaism, Jewishness and Israel

The general concept of being Jewish is that someone is born into a Jewish family or he is converted (proselytised) into Judaism. Eva Goldfinger, a *madrika*,² puts forward a different line of thought. She explains that to be a Jew is to be 'a person of Jewish descent or any who declares himself to be a Jew and who identifies with the history, ethical values, culture, community and future of the Jewish people' (Goldfinger, 1996:46). The terminology proposed by Humanistic Judaism is adoption. In secular Judaism becoming a Jew is similar to the process of being adopted into a family, except that the individual, and not the family, chooses to do so.

² The Hebrew word means 'guide.' This title is used to designate a pararabbinic leadership in Humanistic Judaism (Cousens, 1993:49).

Humanistic Jews do not see Jews as a unique group of people standing out amongst all other groups of peoples. They believe that they are as unique as any other nation. The unique cultural heritage of every people affects its history in a way that is specific to it, and each nation has its specific features – linguistic, geographical, racial and others, and the same applies to the Jewish people (Malkin, 1988:66). Such an approach destroys any sort of argument about racial supremacy, and the same applies to the Jews as to any other race, which is unique in its own right. Humanistic Jews put forward an argument to distinguish their religious belief from their cultural and Jewish identity. Many people have the preconceived idea that to be Jewish means to uphold monotheistic ideas and to identify with some form of Jewish religion. Hence, because you are Jewish, you do not have the right to decide what you believe in, because as part of the religious system you were born into, such a decision and belief has already been taken for you. Humanistic Jews abhor such arguments and they maintain that their Jewishness has nothing to do with religion; it is a cultural identification. If an Englishman decides to become a Hindu, he would not stop being considered English, because that is what he is. There is much more than a religious creed involved in making him English: there is his culture, history, up-bringing. Even though he converted to another religion it would not change the fact that he is essentially an English gentleman. Religion is part of Judaism but it does not define it (Free Judaism and Religion in Israel, explained by Malkin, s.a., 65,66).

It is important to make a distinction between Judaism and being Jewish. As the Zionist ideologue Ahad Ha'am revealed, the Jewish people existed before Judaism, and the ethnic desire to live preceded any theological formulations that justified it (Katz, 1995:234). Rabbinic Judaism cannot be credited with Jewish survival, although it did play an important role, but the same can be attributed in modern times to secular Zionism. Humanistic Jews observe that throughout the ages, all people made use of various strategies in order to survive, and there was a time when religion was one of the strategies used by Jewish people, but it is not the only option, because in a secular age they have secular strategies. These strategies are what Humanistic Jews are putting forward as an option for the survival of the Jewish people in a secular era. It is possible for people to be nostalgic about their religion, and Humanistic Jews

see the cultural importance of it, but they do not believe it is an effective option (Katz, 1995:236-240). Wine reduced the basic beliefs of Humanistic Judaism to five statements, and by reading them it is possible to conclude what the Humanistic Jews accept as their basic concept of 'Judaism and being Jewish' (Katz, 1995:236-240).

- Judaism is a culture of the Jewish people, which includes many religious and secular traditions.
- A Jew is any person who chooses to identify with the fate and culture of the Jewish people.
- After the Holocaust, it is clear that the meaning of Jewish history is that Jews must be responsible for their own fate.
- Every person is entitled to be the master of his own life, subject to final authority of his own conscience.
- The power to achieve human survival, happiness, and dignity is a human power.

It has become apparent, through the philosophy of Eva Goldfinger, that according to Humanistic Judaism anyone can become a Jew through the process of 'adoption'. It is interesting to note that there is also a process within the movement, which permits someone to 'cease to be a Jew'. Humanistic Jews call this process 'repudiation'. The definition of this is that if someone no longer identifies himself with the Jewish culture and is not interested in maintaining his Jewishness, he has the right to change. Secular Humanistic Judaism does not believe in perpetual identity. You cannot decide whether you will be born a Jew, but you can certainly choose whether you wish to remain a Jew or become one (Goldfinger, 1996:44).

Humanistic Jews do not see the nation of Israel as a favourite nation in the eyes of God and neither do they accept the idea that He performed many miracles in order to preserve and promote the good of the Jewish nation. They analyse their history in the same way as that of any other people who struggled for the construction of their nation. The Jews, like any other nation, needed to fight in order to shape their own destiny and identity. In the eyes of Humanistic Jews the survival of Israel cannot be attributed to a divine intervention but to humanistic conquest.

The Zionist founders were overwhelmingly secular. They saw religion as a reactionary force inhibiting the progressive development of the Jewish nation. Zionists saw Hebrew nationalism as a vital alternative to religious identity, (Wine, 1988:6).

However, after the Six Day War everything changed. The Orthodox Jews started supporting the government in greater ways because the army conquered the West Bank and East Jerusalem, where most of the Jewish shrines are located. The Orthodox Jews gained more and more influence, and started recruiting Jewish people to move into Israel. More and more settlements were created in the West Bank.

In his paper about the security of Israel the Humanistic Jew Rabbi David Oler discusses the issue of the importance of all branches of Judaism supporting Israel and her survival. Of course, he is against all the atrocities that are perpetrated in the Middle East or any other part of the world, yet he speaks about the responsibility of Israel to protect all her citizens against military invasion or acts of terrorism. Sometimes Israel will need to make use of force to fulfil this responsibility. One of the proposals to solve the conflict between Israel and the Arabs is to agree to land for peace and seek to coexist in a spirit of mutuality with the Arabs. To do so Israel needs a co-operative partner, not one who seeks her destruction (Oler, 2002:9-11).

Humanistic Judaism's presence in Israel started in July 1983, with the response that some academicians of the university gave in order to voice the opinion of secular Jews in Israel (Tal, 1985:11). Katz (1983b:35-36) speaks about the three principles that Humanistic Judaism in Israel is committed to:

1. An obligation to the survival of the Jewish people.
2. A positive attitude to the great Jewish tradition.
3. A positive attitude to Israel and to the nation's liberation movement, Zionism. There are some Humanistic Jews in Israel who are not Zionists, but the great majority of them are. Humanistic Jews do not coerce anyone into accepting Zionism in totality, but they do encourage a positive response towards Israel and its right to survive.

There is an important issue that many people do not want to discuss in Israel because it can convey an impression of anti-Semitism. Aloni, who is an attorney and a politician, a member of the *Knesset* in Israel, speaks about the Israelis depriving people of their human rights. She voices her opinion and defends the human rights of the Arabs in the land, not because they are Arabs but because they are human. She does not believe that the present form of Zionism is one that the Zionist fathers dreamed of. Aloni declares that the army is a need and not a value. It is an army of defence and not of occupation. She exhorts the Israeli people that it is important to teach their citizens to be law-abiding and to respect people's human rights. Aloni (1999:107-117) concludes that the 'fate of Israel is entirely in our hands'.

3.3 Ethics

The fact that Humanistic Jews deny the existence of God with the right to dictate laws by which He expects humans to live, does not mean they have no ethics (practice of conduct) within their movement. They uphold moral standards that will sometimes clash with religious principles, but this does not worry them, as their objective is not to please any religious group, but to provide principles that will satisfy those who are humanists and mainly, of course, Humanistic Jews. The central ethical message of humanism is that you own yourself. You decide and control yourself (Cousens, 1993:21). Humanistic Jews agree that making ethical decisions is not easy and sometimes it can prove to be very controversial. But they are not making their decisions based on traditions handed down to them from previous generations; it is imperative for them to make ethical decisions which will preserve human dignity. They believe in meeting people's needs for freedom, love, independence, security, purpose and happiness. It can be hard to make rules that will cover all human needs, but the point is that Humanistic Jews believe that these needs must be satisfied, and that this is possible because of human potential. Ethics needs to address the needs of humanity (Naimark, 1990:19-20).

Humanistic Jews say that people in a general way when approaching the subject of ethics have the tendency to defend principles, which are concerned just about 'morality'. However, within Humanistic Judaism it is taught that a

morality which is indifferent to human survival, human pleasure, and human dignity is no morality at all. When teaching principles that he believes are healthy for Humanistic Jews to base their lives upon, Wine sees three obligations that need to be met (Wine, 1984b:12-22):

1. The moral obligation to strive for greater mastery and control of one's own life.
2. The moral obligation to be reliable and trustworthy.
3. The moral obligation to be generous.

Humanistic Jews have made some strong statements that go against the mainstream Jewish religious philosophy. There are many areas that have received their seal of approval when others have set their disapproval.

3.3.1 Euthanasia

Humanistic Jews believe in life but they believe in death as well. However, they do not believe in life after death. For them, death is a process of life and for the foreseeable future humanity does not have the power to change it (Friedman, 1989:3-4). In his article 'Maintaining the Dignity at Life's End,' Cousens (1989:15) explains that the very concept of death needs to be re-interpreted because of the advances in medical fields. Previously, someone would be considered clinically dead when the heart did not beat and the person did not breathe, but this definition is not relevant any longer because today there are medical devices that can breathe for the person and keep the heart beating. This reality presents challenges to medical personnel, who have patients in their care who are living because of these machines. There are others who are able to survive without the aid of these devices but are in a vegetative state.

The very word 'euthanasia' alarms many people, causing condemnation towards the idea before it has been properly considered. People use the argument that humans cannot play God. Humanistic Jews do not believe in God, but they do believe in 'playing God', if this is the label that people want to give to those who believe in the practice of euthanasia. The word 'euthanasia' is a Greek word meaning 'good death' (*eu* = good and *thanatos* = death) (Cousens 1993:22). Humanistic Jews apply the same strict code of intelligence and logic to the question of euthanasia as to everything else. For instance,

they use the teaching of Richard Epstein, a professor of law in Chicago University, as a foundation upon which to base their acceptance of euthanasia. Richard Epstein defends the idea that all forms of voluntary euthanasia, active and passive, should be decriminalised. The consent of the patient should protect the family and physician against all criminal charges. When someone decides to terminate their own life with the help of professional people, their wishes should be carried out, in the same way that they could terminate any medical treatment that they are undergoing, bringing them to an earlier death. Of course this would require the person to be responsible for their actions and choices and would not include children who are not mature enough to make such decisions (Epstein, 1989:21). Humanistic Jews believe that if someone is suffering from an incurable disease or chronic illness, they have the right to choose to terminate their life under professional care. If there is no dignity or quality of life, the person involved has the right to ask for medical help to end their suffering. However, they do not believe that those who are suffering from depression should be allowed to have recourse to euthanasia, the reason being that although they do not have happiness, as long as they are mobile and without physical restraint they retain the possibility of dignity (Wine, 1996: 5-6). Friedman (1996:25) is in favour of assisted suicide – being able to have professional help to end their lives. However, he acknowledges that before it is legalised many details must be carefully considered: waiting periods, consultation procedures, family involvement, and competency. Humanistic Jews understand that there is a need for euthanasia and they are not afraid of approaching the subject and finding a human solution for it.

Subsequently, again and again, the professionals are faced with the challenge: shall we medically intervene or wait for nature to take its course? The position that Humanistic Jews maintain is that when euthanasia is practised it should be after much consideration and it should be done in the knowledge that it is the best possible alternative for the patient.

3.3.2 Intermarriage

This is a very divisive issue amongst the Jewish people. It is not a problem presented only in conservative Jewish circles; it has created many problems amongst Reform Jews. Some Reform rabbis are facing persecution due to the

fact that they have officiated at mixed marriages. Even amongst more liberal Jews who believe in women's rights and fight against other social injustices, there are people who cannot bear the idea of one of their family members marrying a 'gentile', that is, a non-Jew. Wine (2003:14) believes that the reason for this opposition is 'tribal allegiance'. He explains that it is not uniquely Jewish, and has been a serious concern for Jews to maintain their customs throughout history in order to keep their identity and guarantee survival. According to Wine, the ban on intermarriage dates from the sixth century B.C.E. when the Jewish aristocracy was taken into Babylonian exile and became a minority within the Chaldean society. The most effective technique for group survival in an alien environment was social segregation and compulsory inbreeding. Under the leadership of the Zadokite priests the new custom became divine law by inserting it within the *Torah*. When the Jews returned to Israel in the fifth century they carried on with their prohibition of intermarriage. Under the leadership of Ezra, the Jewish men who had married foreign wives were forced to divorce them. This custom is still perpetuating, even amongst Reform Jews, who have to find an excuse, as it were, for when they perform a mixed marriage ceremony. Humanistic Jews have made a sound point in stating that even though a man and a woman are Jewish they could still be incompatible in terms of belief. It is acceptable for an Orthodox Jewish man to marry a Humanistic Jewish woman, but they hold completely different views. However, it is possible that the Orthodox man would have more in common with a Bible-believing gentile wife. Many Jews who intermarry value their Jewish identity. Humanistic Jews understand **that** when a Jewish person chooses to marry a gentile, their motivation is 'love' and not rejection of their Jewishness.

For Cherlin (2003:21), Humanistic Jews welcome intermarriage and do not see it as a threat to Jewish survival; they advocate a Jewish identity that is based on openness. By believing in the practice of this openness, Humanistic Jews believe they will be breaking barriers and building bridges and consequently helping the ever-expanding Jewish civilisation. Humanistic Judaism sees people as people and not as labels. So, in the case of intermarriage, one of the questions that need to be addressed is, 'How is this intermarriage fulfilling the needs of the couple involved?' (Cousens, 1993:36-37.) According to Wine

(2003:16-17), marriage must be designed to meet the needs of the couple involved and not to satisfy cultural prejudices. The individuals are encouraged to pursue their own dignity in order to fulfil their own needs, as long as they do not harm the dignity of others.

3.3.3 Family

There is within Humanistic Judaism a consensus when analysing the family unit structure. There is agreement with the opinion of the majority of social commentators that 'family is not what it used to be'. The traditional family nucleus was a unit for survival and reproduction. Its members would be committed to the same sorts of beliefs and practices and they would look after the wellbeing of one another. In the rural setting where they belonged, it would be very difficult to survive and succeed outside this family unit. But urban industrial society has challenged this notion. It makes it possible for people to survive in a very comfortable manner outside the social sphere of the family; it has become more and more acceptable as the responsibility of the state social system has stepped in. The individual who is free from ties of spouse and children is more productive in contemporary, urban society. Women today are finding their own way of earning money and this gives them a greater sense of freedom. Accordingly they are not obliged to please their husbands because of the male financial control over their lives. Children are challenging parental authority more and more. They make their voice heard and are not as willing to submit as children once were. This sort of confrontation is causing problems throughout society and although this is the universal picture of modern urban families, Humanistic Jews do not accept it as a healthy situation (Wine, 1984a:9-10).

Wine (1984a:11-12) introduces four points he believes could help to reverse some of the damage:

1. The traditional family cannot be restored. Even if it were possible, it is not desirable to do so. The advantages the modern urban family has to offer to society are far greater than the traditional ones.
2. The liberation of women from male domination is a positive point. Even though their independence encourages divorce, contemporary modern society cannot afford to waste their talents.

3. Autonomy is not a birthright, it needs to be earned. Children need parents who will train them to be responsible adults. Sometimes parents need to show themselves as authorities for the children to gain in the long-term.

4. It is the responsibility not only of parents but also of children to strengthen the family. Children in the urban society are very dependent upon their parents and they need to develop a spirit of gratitude and not take their privileges for granted.

Friedman (1988:44, 45) explains that in a family based on Humanistic Judaism, parents do not own the child. No human being in the universe is owned by anyone else. Children are not servants of their parents, and they are self-owned human beings and are entitled to their human rights. Even though parents do not own the child they owe the child the conditions most likely to produce a healthy, happy, independent person. Humanistic parenting abhors the idea that a child needs to endure threats, parental force, punishment and ridicule as ways of preparing the child for adulthood. The parents must offer guidance but they must give the child room to make their own decisions and intervene only if the child's health or safety is jeopardised.

Humanistic Jews do not want to destroy tradition for the sake of it. If there is nothing better to replace the traditional way of life, it is wise to evaluate the tradition instead of ignoring it. Humanistic Jews are taught that thus far a desirable alternative to two parents has yet to be found. You may have only one parent functioning but two parents are better (Wine, 1994:10). If there are intrinsic values in tradition, values that are not based in prejudice but promote the welfare of human beings, this sort of tradition should be encouraged because of the fact that it will help people to develop their talents and gifts, and enrich society in the process.

3.3.4 Sexual Orientation

Homosexuality is seen by priestly and rabbinic Judaism as an abomination. Sexual relationships amongst religious Jews is under taboo, the impression being given that it must be directed solely for procreation (Cousens,1993:69). The philosophy of Humanistic Judaism is inclusive and celebrates love wherever it is found. On the basis of this principle they accept and officiate at

ceremonies confirming same-sex commitment. They regard the responsibility of their organisation as being to provide for the emotional and physical needs of the individuals and not to judge their sexual orientation (Jerris, 1997:72).

Some people oppose same-sex marriage on moral grounds. They would say that it is against the moral teachings of the Bible and also that it is an unnatural behaviour. Humanistic Jews say that this argument seems to be an excellent one until it is analysed a bit further. Friedman (1997:7-8) calls to our attention the fact that gay people are not allowed to get married, but rapists, child abusers, and violent men are allowed to get married. No one would challenge their ability to get married even though they have proved that their behaviour is unacceptable. However, if two gay men or lesbians want to get married they would face considerable problems. No one would look into their social behaviour to approve or disapprove of their union, they would be judged simply on their sexual orientation. Friedman says that such a decision is the product of ignorance, prejudice and faulty reasoning.

In examining the prejudices towards homosexuals, Wine (1997a:5) observes that what we experience presently is a tradition that has been passed on to us. The origins of this homophobia are linked to the need for procreation when infant mortality was very high. Families were traditionally from an agricultural background and big families were important, so that each family would provide workers of its own. Any sort of sexual behaviour that would endanger procreation was seen as immoral and should not be accepted.

Humanistic Judaism stands against biblical Judaism and *Halakhic* Judaism in defence of homosexual rights and homosexual freedom. The biblical judgement on those who practise homosexuality is the death penalty, which, in itself, is a major stumbling-block to Humanistic Judaism, which does not see it as a moral solution. The discussion of the genetic nature of homosexuality is relevant in Humanistic Judaism. If people believe that homosexuality is wrong or a genetic disorder, it would cause homosexuals to segregate themselves and be eternally victimised in their societies. From a humanistic point of view, the choice of a homosexual lifestyle is ethically appropriate, as individuals

have the right to be masters of their own lives as long as they do not harm others (Wine, 1997a:7-9).

Humanistic Jews believe that society is undergoing constant changes in an ongoing process that will never stop. Friedman (1997:9) explains that not long ago in America the definition of 'citizen' was a white male over the age of majority. This definition today is unacceptable. When a definition is too narrow to accommodate reality, it is the definition that needs to be changed and not the reality. One element in support of Humanistic Judaism is contained in this very argument. Even if people disagree with their views about same-sex marriage, Humanistic Jews do offer equal opportunities to heterosexual and homosexual couples within the movement. Homosexuals are allowed to attend the services and they may also have a role of leadership within the movement. Humanistic Judaism gives homosexual people the same treatment that it gives to heterosexual people (Goldfinger, 1996:92).

3.3.5 Feminism

The rabbis have been present at many critical times in Jewish history; they have been available to offer their moral and spiritual support, but they have not always used their leadership in a positive way. Throughout the centuries rabbis have relegated women to the back of the synagogues and they have not been allowed to touch the *Torah*. The injustice committed against women in traditional Judaism was not a personal matter but a consequence of bad, institutionalised teaching: men were taught that they were superior to women. According to Kolton (1997:5) this sort of distorted view can be found in *Mishnaic* texts, the sacred teaching of the rabbinic scholars.

We need only to read the sacred text, the *Mishnaic* teaching of the rabbinic scholars. The text clearly states: "These are the tasks that a wife must carry out for her husband: she must grind corn, bake, wash, cook, suckle her child, make her husband's bed and knit with wool". In the story of the Israelites receiving the Ten Commandments at Sinai, the men were warned to stay away from women lest they be defiled. Indeed, the list is too long to enumerate here (Kolton, 1975:5).

Humanistic Jews do not agree with the oppression and exploitation of women and see their release as ethically necessary (Wine, 1997b:3).

Respect for the dignity and equality of women is certainly humanistic, yet these two important factors, dignity and equality of gender, are not found in traditional forms of Judaism. Humanistic Jews see traditional Judaism as an enemy of feminism, and this is no different from traditional Christianity, traditional Islam and other mainstream religions. In *Torah* Judaism, women are seen as the source of sin and impurity; no good can come from granting women freedom and equality. *Torah* Judaism does not approve of feminism and is a continuing barrier to the successful flourishing of the feminist movement. Feminist Judaism will not find support in ancient laws because these laws were designed to govern a group of people in a different age. These laws are out of date and so it is necessary for Jewish feminism to find support for their movement in the modern world. Jewish feminism has no significant past; it has only a present and a future (Wine, 1997b:3-4).

Shapiro (1981:11-13) proposes Humanistic Judaism as a far superior option for Jewish women who are trying to overcome the barriers imposed on them by the stronghold of Jewish patriarchal religion and lifestyle. If these women do not summon the courage to challenge the prevailing patriarchal system, it will always be perpetuated. How can they seek to work within and thus support a system that has suppressed women for so long? Humanistic Judaism is where those who believe in Jewish feminism should be involved, because it is inductive, empirical and incorporates feminist responses to 3500 years of oppressive patriarchal and religious traditions. Humanistic Judaism offers an option that has been denied to Jewish women so far. Wine summarises what is happening at the moment by saying that there are two roads that feminists can take, including Jewish feminists:

The first is the path of indignity. This procedure involves the vain attempts to find feminist models in the past, whether they are in establishment religion or in the older paganism. A desperate search for ancestral approval is not dignified. And pulling traditional texts out of context to make them mean what they do not mean is not moral. The second path is the path of dignity. Being strong enough to admit the truth and to act on it is an essential ingredient of self-respect (Wine, 1991a:24-25).

Goldenberg (1991:16-17) says that there are Jewish feminist women who decide to continue within traditional faiths. She finds it incongruous because the whole traditional religious setup is against what they are fighting for. She

argues that up until now Judaism has not been reformed sufficiently to grant women equal status and dignity as men. Goldenberg firmly believes that Humanistic Judaism is a form of Judaism which allows women to have the same rights as men and embraces feminism also. She is talking about the other main branches of Judaism, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist. She is a Humanistic Jew and she firmly believes that the best option for Jewish Feminism is found in Humanistic Judaism.

3.3.6 Abortion

Humanistic Jews see abortion as a right that belongs to the woman. All women have the absolute and complete control over their own bodies and reproductive choices. Women should be allowed access to legal abortion, just as they should have access to any safe intervention, surgical, medical or mechanical, to prevent or aid reproduction (Goldfinger, 1996:31). All the emphasis of choice, rights and responsibility is placed upon the woman. Humanistic Jews do not deal with the rights of the baby or the rights of the father. The father's thoughts should not be above the mother's choice. If a woman decides to have an abortion but the father wants the baby to be born, his wishes should not be carried out since he is not the carrier of the baby.

This puts the man in a disadvantaged position, but Humanistic Jews do not consider the viewpoint of the father and abortion is not seen from his perspective, it is seen as a woman's right. It is the intention of Humanistic Jews to participate actively with others in defending the woman's absolute right of free choice in all matters of reproduction and abortion. This is part of the statement of the *Congress of Secular Jewish Organization* (Goldfinger, 1996:90).

3.3.7 Organ Donation

The approach taken by Humanistic Jews on this subject is a very broad one. They encourage all acts which benefit humanity (Goldfinger, 1996:53). They do not have any prejudice towards organ donation. It is seen by them as an act that will help others to live a longer and more comfortable life. Of course when dealing with this subject there are some questions of legality to be considered

and people should be aware of what they are doing. The kindness of someone donating their organs should not be a means of financial gain for others.

3.3.8 Ecology

We are living at a time in the history of mankind where much emphasis has been placed upon respecting and saving the environment. Large sums of money have been spent on education and propaganda in regards to our environment. Expressions such as 'the greenhouse effect', 'destruction of the rainforest', 'preservation of the natural environment' and many other ecological issues are becoming more and more common, playing an important role in people's lives. Humanity is trying to undo the destruction that has been wreaked on the environment and some drastic measures need to be taken in order to save the planet. A new consciousness of the importance of respecting nature is necessary in order to grant mankind a future.

In view of what is happening in terms of saving the environment, it is quite surprising that, as yet, Humanistic Jews have not done more to promote such ideas. As individuals they have a first-rate environmental perspective; however, the movement itself has not yet dedicated a great deal in terms of educating and promoting the idea to its disciples. There is a distinct lack of literature within Humanistic Judaism in this specific area. In her book *Basic Ideas of Secular Judaism*, Eva Goldfinger touches upon the subject in a very superficial manner. She (1996:30) exhorts people to consider the importance of reversing the damage that humanity has caused to nature, but this specific exhortation is not the conclusion of an in-depth teaching. This subject will certainly gain more and more attention from the Humanistic Jews, in conjunction with the subject gaining more attention from the educated people in general.

Abraham Arnold presents the idea that ecology is not a new concept within Judaism. According to him, in Jewish tradition there are four New Years in the lunar calendar. The *Tu b'Shevat* is the New Year for the trees. It is celebrated usually in February and is the day on which the sap begins to rise in the fruit trees of Israel; it is marked by eating fruits and nuts that come from Israel. The Bible does not make any mention of *Tu b'Shevat*. It is not one of the biblical

festivals taught in the Bible. From ancient to modern times, the planting of trees on *Tu b'Shevat* has a special significance. According to the *Talmud*, when a boy was born a cedar tree was planted and for the birth of a baby girl a cypress tree. When a man or woman was to be married, branches from these trees were cut and a canopy made, under which they were married. There is a rabbinic legend that says, 'If the Messiah arrives while you are in the midst of planting a tree, finish your planting before you go to greet the Messiah' (Arnold 1995:170-171). Deuteronomy 20:19 prohibits the cutting down of fruit trees even in times of war.

Arnold (1995:172) says that one thing Wine was concerned about was the danger of people becoming nature worshippers instead of just taking moral responsibility to look after the environment. The ecological challenge is prominent amongst secular Jews, and in October 1993, during the *Congress of Secular Jewish Organisations*, Humanistic Jews made a Social Statement which contains their concern for the environment: 'As members of the human race and of worldwide Jewish people, we are committed, as well, to the interdependence of all life on our planet and to defence of its ecology' (Goldfinger, 1996:93).

3.4 Religion

Some humanists prefer to consider their beliefs as secular philosophy (Cousens, 1993:34-35). Humanistic Jews prefer to consider their philosophy as religion. The reason for this is that their definition of religion is not linked to the relationship between humans and the supernatural. For Humanistic Jews religion is a movement that exists to serve communities. It provides rituals and ceremonies by which the community expresses its worldview and dramatises and transmits beliefs. Humanistic Jews believe that their movement provides for the community, enabling them to express their religious feelings, so they consider themselves a religion and not just a philosophy (Cousens, 1993:62).

Wine (1995:220-221) explains that religion was born as a result of the experience of suffering and death. It became of supreme importance for people to overcome death: this they could not achieve as ordinary mortals, so they appealed to someone more powerful than themselves. Thus the gods

were created, and in the attempt to find satisfaction for their souls, humans have gone from worship to devotion. But the Secular Revolution undermined the credibility of spirituality and supernatural power and replaced it with ordinary power. Reason replaced faith, and scientists' teachings became more attractive and believable than what the religious priests were teaching. Religion is much more a matter of ancestral legacy than of personal choice. It starts as personal choice but it goes on to develop into an ancestral legacy. Most Christians are Christians because of their families; the same applies for Muslims, Jews, Buddhists and many other religious organisations. Their attachment to their roots remains very strong. If Judaism is seen as an ancestral religion, then Humanistic Judaism is comfortably a religion. Even though Humanistic Jews consider Humanistic Judaism as a religion, they consider themselves less religious. It refutes any sort of mysticism (Wine, 2002:6-7). One of the obstacles that Friedman perceives as standing in the way of Humanistic Judaism being accepted as a religion is that traditional religions have the monopoly on the spiritual market, the main currency being faith. Humanistic Jews are committed to reason rather than faith, but their non-mystical approach to life gives the appearance that they are concerned purely with material things. Wine highlights the need within Humanistic Judaism to develop the aesthetic side of its spirituality (cf. Rosen, 2008:35).

The design of the Jewish Humanistic programme is intended to satisfy the religious need within people and it is directed towards fulfilment as a person and not towards adoration of a Supreme Being. It encourages people to express their inner feelings of love, anger, and creativity, but instead of directing these feelings towards God they apply them to life, in order to make it the best possible life (Freund, 1979:9). Rabbi Wine, the founder of Humanistic Judaism, teaches that humanists are a religious people.

In one sense, the designation "secular religion" is a dramatic way of conveying the truth that Humanistic Judaism plays the same role in the lives of humanistic Jews that conventional Judaism plays in the lives of its adherents. It provides a worldview and a basis for decision-making. If we define religion as a philosophy of life, then humanists are religious (Wine, 1995:219).

The commitment of Humanistic Jews to reason rather than faith, and their tendency to be relatively non-mystical, gives the illusion that they are 'un-spiritual', and this misconception is a challenge for Humanistic Jews. This

misconception is initiated outside the movement but can be found inside the movement as well. Because of this there is the risk of losing people who consider themselves non-humanists by virtue of their recognition of the spiritual dimension of life (Malkin, 2004: 54).

People need to know how to balance their knowledge and their faith. People who practise their religion and ignore knowledge and reason can cause a lot of harm to themselves and others, but the same can happen to those who seek only knowledge but have no belief.

Yet knowledge without faith is no less dangerous. To know that information and to know skills is not to know why. That's to know what one's information and skills are used for. This requires belief. As faith needs knowledge to test the realism of its aspirations, so knowledge and knowledge-getting needs beliefs – to help choose a field of study, to set goals, and to evaluate the relative importance of items of knowledge to human welfare (Malkin, 2002:22).

If Humanistic Judaism is a religion, as its followers proclaim it to be, it is important for them to see that this religion will satisfy all the needs of its followers. The Jewish Humanistic Rabbi Robert B. Barr believes that something more spiritual needs to be offered in their Jewish Humanistic services. Some people have commented that the services are very boring and the lack of emotion and expression within the services is disappointing. Barr believes that passion, emotion, spirituality, and transcendence are human and natural experiences, which are significant and therefore need to be expressed. He teaches that the rational and emotional together make us who we are. Avoidance of either aspect means that we are losing part of ourselves (Barr, 1986:21). It should be noted that this article was presented in 1986 and that services have been altered as a result. It was one of the objectives of Rabbi Barr when he presented this study, that a new and more contemporary liturgy would be proposed and practised during Jewish Humanistic services.

Chapter 4

HUMANISTIC JUDAISM'S BID TO PRESERVE JEWISH CULTURE APART FROM RELIGION

Humanistic Jews see the traditional holidays and life cycle as part of their Jewish culture. They provide a link with Jewish history and a bond with other Jews. However, most of these celebrations have been associated with worshipping God. How could Humanistic Jews find a way of keeping such meaningful traditions without compromising their atheistic beliefs? Humanistic Jews call to our attention the importance of remembering that these holidays have not been created by the priests but have been appropriated by them. Humanistic Jews believe that celebrating them in a humanistic way is rescuing them and restoring them to the purpose they were created for: to enhance, enjoy and celebrate life (Cousens, 1993:33).

Rabbi Sherwin Wine, commenting about holidays, says:

For traditionalists, most Jewish holidays are divine inventions, creations of God at Mount Sinai. For humanists, Jewish holidays are human creations, developed over many centuries of popular experiments. In the traditional perspective the theistic elements are intrinsic to the holidays themselves. In the humanistic perspective, theology was imposed on the holidays by clerical establishments. Humanistic Jews are just as comfortable, if not relieved, in a secular setting as in a religious one (Wine, 2003a:209).

The traditional Jewish holidays celebrated by Humanistic Jews can be divided into five kinds of holidays in the Jewish calendar. The first is the ten-day New Year Festival at the beginning of the year. It is called *Rosh Hashana* and is completed by *Yom Kippur*. The second kind is the three great seasonal festivals – *Sukkot* for the autumn, *Hanukkah* for the winter, and *Pesakh* for the spring. The third kind of Jewish holiday is *Purim*, which provides an opportunity to honour not just Mordecai and Esther but all the Jewish heroes throughout history. There are another two holidays that are part of the third kind that are not so prominent but are celebrated by traditional and Humanistic Jews as well. They are *Tu BiShvat* and *Shavuot*. There are two contemporary one-day holidays after *Pesakh* which belong to the fourth kind. They celebrate the two most important Jewish events of the twentieth century: *Yom Hashoa* – the Holocaust Day – and *Yom Ha'atsma'ut* – Independence Day. The fifth kind is

Shabbat, which has no place in the Jewish Lunar calendar. In the ancient agricultural calendar the number seven plays a decisive role (Wine, 2003a: 207-208). Humanistic Jews do not celebrate all of the Jewish holidays. They have chosen the ones they consider most important and meaningful for them to observe. They have also reinterpreted their meaning according to atheistic beliefs. They do not celebrate the following four events:

1. *Simchat Torah*

This holiday falls on the last day of *Sukkot* and is a celebration of the *Torah* and its teachings. Some Humanistic Jewish congregations recognizing the historical importance of the *Torah* in Judaism would celebrate *Simchat Torah*. The Humanistic Jews, who celebrate it, commemorate all great Jewish literature, including the *Torah* (Cousens, 1993:72).

2. *Yom Yerushalayim*

This holiday is celebrated in late May or early June. It commemorates the reunification of Jerusalem in Israeli hands during the 1967 war. This is a very sensitive holiday to celebrate because of its political implications (Rich, 2011:7).

3. *Tisha B'Av*

This is a fast commemorating the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and other tragedies. It occurs in late July or August (Rich, 2011: 8). Humanistic Jews do not observe this because they do not look forward to the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem. They prefer to celebrate the rebirth of the Jewish *Eretz Israel* (Cousens, 1993:78).

4. Fasting

In the rabbinical tradition this is self-mortification or abstinence from pleasure. Most Humanistic Jews do not uphold this sort of philosophy concerning fasting. They do not see moral value in it. Nevertheless, they see fasting as part of a sensible diet. It must be for the well-being of the individual and not to humble oneself before a deity. It must be regular and effective and not impulsive (Cousens, 1993:23).

Apart from the traditional holidays, Humanistic Jews observe their own holidays. The first part of this chapter addresses the five kinds of traditional Jewish holidays and how Humanistic Jews see them. Humanistic Jews have created their own rituals in celebrating these holidays.

4.1 Traditional Holidays

4.1.1 *Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*

Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year, celebrated by Orthodox Jews everywhere, on the first two days of the seventh month Tishri of the Jewish calendar (Schauss, 1996:112). According to Muraskin *et al.* (2002:5) the meaning of *Rosh Hashanah* is 'Head of the Year' and *Yom Kippur* is the 'Day of Atonement'. *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, collectively known as the High Holidays, are inseparable. They mark the beginning and the end of the *Yom Noraim*, the 'Days of Awe'. On *Rosh Hashanah* God opens the book of life and traces the fate of the Jews for the coming year. On *Yom Kippur* He closes it. There are ten days between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, a period which gives the Jews time to repent of their misdeeds. Wine (1995:159-160) teaches on why some Jews are so strict in the way they celebrate *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* and his teachings are accepted by the Humanistic Jews. He explains that *Rosh Hashanah* has pagan origins. It was a day for appeasing the rain god, upon which the agricultural society of ancient times depended for survival. *Rosh Hashanah* ended up on the first day of the Hebrew month of *Tishri*. The Jews were so afraid of a possible drought, therefore it was a very anxious time for them. During this day a shepherd's ram's horn would be blown and the level of anxiety would rise. In the *Torah*, *Rosh Hashanah* is not the New Year celebration. *Tishri* (September-October) is the first month of the civil year, but the seventh of the ecclesiastical year. The new moon of the seventh month would be seen in the same way that superstitious people in the west see Friday 13th. The priest designated a day – *Yom Truah* – when the *shofar* would be blown as a sign of admonition to the people. Wine believes that historically *Yom Kippur* preceded *Rosh Hashanah* and *Sukkot*. It was a day when the sacred places would be cleansed of any spiritual defilement that could hinder the celebrations. In the *Torah* it follows *Rosh Hashanah* and it is the day of the year when the priest approached *Yahweh* face to face through a curtain of incense to intercede for forgiveness of communal sins and to ask for reconciliation. In rabbinic Judaism we have what had become known as the 'High Holidays'. They constitute the beginning and the end of *Yom Noraim*, the 'Days of Awe'. *Yom Truah* has become the 'New Year'.

For secular Humanistic Jews, there is an important ethical component that must be separated from the religious aspect of the holiday. According to the *Talmud*, if one person abuses another only the injured party can grant forgiveness. *Yom Kippur* is a time for people to seek repentance and to make reconciliation. It is in perfect agreement with the philosophy of Humanistic Judaism to seek reconciliation, not only amongst Jewish people but also wherever there is need of it (Muraskin, 1998:37). Humanistic Jews interpret *Rosh Hashanah* as a time for self-judgement and as an affirmation of human power and dignity. It is time to meditate upon the areas that you can improve, for happiness, and which human beings can create for themselves. *Rosh Hashanah* marks a turning point between what was and what will be. Humanistic Jews see *Yom Kippur* as the climax of the self-examination that began on *Rosh Hashanah*. It is a time for self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others (Cousens, 1993:63-85).

4.1.2 Sukkot, Hanukkah, Pesakh

Hartman (1990:3) gives a Humanistic Judaism historical background to *Sukkot*. The Jewish people have gone through great changes during the centuries. The primitive Hebrews were hunters and gatherers, later they tended flocks of different kinds of animals. They celebrated their New Year in the spring, because it was the time nature appeared to come alive again. Jewish society went through a social metamorphosis and became an agricultural non-nomadic society. These new ways of economic development led to changes within the calendar. Thus, at the time of the major harvest, when the fields yielded their grain and orchards their fruits, a new festival was created: the 'Harvest Festival', which was the end of the agricultural year. According to the old order this festival was celebrated in the seventh month. Now, with the new social and economic system emerging, a new time to celebrate the New Year was designated. Lowing (1990:6) says this was the 'Great Festival of Ingathering', which we know as *Sukkot*. The festival of *Sukkot* is known also as the 'Feast of Booths' or 'Feast of Tabernacles'. It lasts for nine days and it starts on the fifteenth day of *Tishri*.

Humanistic Jews recognise the traditions and historicity of the *Sukkot* festival and they have different ways of understanding and celebrating it. Friedman (1990:13) sees this festival as an excellent opportunity to have Jewish

celebrations outdoors. He sees it as a great opportunity for people to celebrate and show the beauty of the Jewish culture. People must be creative in the ways they celebrate it for it is the most joyful of the Jewish holidays.

Wine (1995:162-163) presents a theory that what was purely an agricultural festival became tinged with religiosity during the priestly period when they found a way of attaching the Jewish Exodus from Egypt to this agricultural festival. The booths people move into during this festival of harvest time were shelters from the scorching sun. The priests say that these booths, *sukkot*, were a symbol of the tents the Jews lived in for forty years during their journey through the desert. Humanistic Jews see *Sukkot* as a wonderful celebration of human development and achievement. Mankind was now able to find ways and invent technologies to subdue the environment and make life more prosperous. It was a massive step for the Jews to leave a nomadic life and to settle down and dominate nature; to see the transformation they could achieve by tending the land was something worth celebrating. There is no need for any spiritual excuse to make this celebration meaningful. It is meaningful in its own right.

Theology may seek to turn *Sukkot* into a tribute to divine providence. But experience teaches us that if tributes are to be paid, they should be paid to the millions of unsung experimenters and inventors who struggled to make the earth yield a decent living (Wine, 1995:163).

The *Hanukkah* festival today, also known as the Festival of Lights, lasts for eight days and is the Jewish winter celebration. It did not start with the Maccabees, but existed before them and was called the festival of *Nayrot* – lights. It was designated to celebrate the rebirth of light (Wine, 1995:164). The word *Hanukkah* means dedication. This refers to the rededication of the Second Temple after it had been captured from Greek hands by the Maccabees in 175 BC. This is a historical fact, that the Maccabees led a victory over the Greek king Antiochus Epiphanes who tried to impose Greek culture and religion upon his Syrian empire, including Judea. Under the leadership of Judas Maccabaeus an independent Jewish state was established and the Temple in Jerusalem was rededicated to *Yahweh*, the Hebrew God, and the new annual celebration of *Hanukkah* became part of the Jewish calendar (Bilber, 1999:29-30). An explanation is given by Barr (1983:10) as to why, during this holiday, the *Menorah* is lit and why it lasts for eight days. As part of the tradition there is a

tale of a miracle attached to it. It is accepted as part of the historicity of this victory led by Judas Maccabaeus that when he entered the Temple he found the *Menorah* lit up and there was oil in it to last for just one day. A miracle happened and the oil kept burning for eight days. These two details help Humanistic Jews to understand the tradition of the lighting of the *Menorah* and also why the festival lasts eight days. Humanistic Jews have no problem with celebrating *Hanukkah*; however, they have a problem with the non-truthful details they believe have been added to the narrative to make it more dramatic and divine. Rosenfeld (1983:17) says the *Hanukkah* celebration does not need to be only about what the Maccabean brothers achieved. There are many other battles which Jewish people have fought and which need to be incorporated as part of celebrating *Hanukkah*. For Rosenfeld it is not a matter of celebrating a historical occasion, it is a matter of celebrating the fact that the Jews were descendants of heroes and they could become masters of their own destinies, instead of passively accepting the dominance of others.

Wine (1983b:20-21) points out that in more traditional circles it is taught that the Maccabees fought for freedom of religion. Nevertheless, when they were in power freedom of religion was an alien concept for them. What they wanted was the power to impose one religion upon others; they had no concept of understanding and accepting pluralism. Wine argues that the *Hanukkah* story, quite obviously, does not realistically yield the ethical message of religious freedom and mutual tolerance. At best it yields the moral value of national liberation. Wine (1995:165) also argues that today in modern America *Hanukkah* has become the Jewish festival, particularly in households with children. He makes a parallel of the resurgence of *Hanukkah* with the totally non-Jewish Christmas. During Christmas it seems that lights become the focus of decoration, and *Hanukkah* also focuses on lights. The Jews, then, can make a connection between the lights of Christmas and the lights of *Hanukkah* and both of them occur at more or less the same time of the year.

The *Humanistic Judaism Journal* volume 11, number 3, pages 25-36 deals with the *Hanukkah-Christmas* dilemma. In these pages are found testimonies of Jews who try to celebrate both festivals. It does not mean they call a Christmas

tree' a *Hanukkah bush*, it means they try to celebrate both festivals but with the principle of *Nayrot* in their minds (Cousens, 1983:25-36).

Humanistic Jews recognise that the roots of *Hanukkah* precede the Maccabaeun period and are to be found in *Nayrot* and this they are celebrating. Fire was a symbol of human survival and competence. It was necessary for people to dominate fire in order to exist; it became a sacred symbol that denoted power. *Hanukkah* is the celebration of human power, the increasing power of people to use the world to enhance the quality of life (Wine, 1995:166-167).

Pesakh, commonly known as Passover, is the first festival in the Jewish calendar. It is a holiday that reminds people of redemption. It starts on the fourteenth day of the Jewish month of *Nissan*. In the past it lasted for eight days, but now only the first two days and the last two days of the holiday are fully set apart in order to celebrate Passover (Schauss, 1996:38-55). Humanistic Jews believe that what we today call *Pesakh* is the result of the fusion of two ancient celebrations. *Pesakh* was a shepherd's holiday celebrating the birth of new lambs. At twilight they would cook a lamb and eat it in haste, with the blood of the lamb they sacrificed being sprinkled on the doorpost in order to prevent lambs dying. Alternatively, a skipping dance was performed either by the entire community or by maidens eligible for marriage. A second celebration appears after the people settled in Palestine. To mark the beginning of the harvest the peasants would eat only bread without yeast. It is called The Festival of *Matsos* – unleavened bread. They would throw away anything in the house containing yeast. They believed such practices would protect the crop. So, Humanistic Jews believe superstitious celebrations gave birth to *Pesakh* (Cousens, 1983:55-56).

The moral argument is another reason why Humanistic Jews find the celebration of *Pesakh* according to the *Exodus* tradition appalling. Wine (1995:171-178) teaches that the deliverance of the Hebrew people from Pharaoh's power is unacceptable because it was a very high price to pay. The killing of the innocent firstborn and also of the Egyptian soldiers makes this whole story a testimony against *Yahweh's* moral attributes rather than of his

power. Moses, when leading the people in the desert, became a dictator as strong and abusive as Pharaoh in Egypt.

The Humanistic Jews do celebrate *Pesakh* but from a different perspective. They believe the Jewish people had many 'exodus' experiences throughout history and do not need to depend upon an 'old fiction' to celebrate *Pesakh*. They celebrate the ancient times when the Jews went through different 'exodus' experiences. Even in more modern times Jews have gone through 'exodus' experiences which should be used to celebrate *Pesakh* rather than trying to adorn it with some divine miracle in order to make it more meaningful. What Humanistic Jews celebrate is the true story of freedom: men and women fighting against injustices of their day and doing something in order to achieve a better and safer place for themselves and their descendants. To have the courage to fight against any sort of oppression, this is what the Humanistic Jews teach when celebrating *Pesakh*. It is not just one small historical fact but something that has happened many times throughout Jewish history and people should be encouraged to celebrate these 'exoduses.'

The exodus moved Ashkenazic Jews from an economic and social system of poverty and class rigidity to a bourgeois setting of affluence, technological luxury, and social mobility. Never have so many Jews been so rich, so well-educated, and so intellectually powerful as they are in contemporary America. Going from the opportunities of Egyptian slavery to Bedouin poverty hardly compares. This exodus was so powerful in its social consequences that the Jewish lifestyle of twenty centuries was replaced by a new one in a matter of months. What twenty centuries of feudal persecution could not alter, urban secular society changed in a flash of historic time. This exodus was truly an exodus to freedom. Only in countries influenced by the political patterns of Western Europe have Jews experienced the opportunities of individual liberty and free inquiry (Wine, 1995:178,179).

Pesakh has become a celebration of human dignity and of the freedom that make dignity possible, and this is what Humanistic Jews have in mind when they celebrate their *Pesakh* (Cousens, 1993:56).

4.1.3 Purim, Tu BiShvat, Shavuot

There is a book in the *Torah* called Esther. This book relates the story of a Jewish girl called Hadassah, also known as Esther, who became Queen Esther of the Persian Empire. Under the guidance of her uncle Mordecai she fought against a man – Haman – who was trying to annihilate the Jews. She was victorious and *Purim* is the day when the Jews celebrate the victory. It is

important to notice that the book of Esther does not once mention the name of God. “The authenticity of Mordecai and Esther is entirely doubtful, for their names closely resembles the names of the god Marduk and the goddess Istar of the Babylonians” (Schauss, 1996:237-240).

Humanistic Jews see the origin of the *Purim* festival from a different perspective. In an article entitled ‘*Purim* Facts and Fancies’ Hersh H. Hartman (2001:6) explains that although the *Purim* story has no basis in fact, and is simply a fairy tale, there are connections with Jewish history. The book of Esther was excluded from the *Torah* by the priests, but pressure from the people forced the priests to reconsider and include it in the Bible, and also to celebrate *Purim*. Hartman teaches there have been many *Purims* throughout Jewish history. The Jews have fought many times against those who tried to destroy them. All these victories encouraged people to celebrate their own *Purim*. According to local legends, these crises occurred during *Adar*, the month of *Purim*. Hartman (2001:6) asks, ‘could it be relevant that Good Friday, with its anti-Jewish passions, often falls during the month of *Adar*?’

Despite the adaptations the Jews have done to incorporate Purim as part of their celebrations, its origin is not as Jewish as some people believe. Some scholars defend the idea that it has a close parallel with the Babylonian New Year Festival. Mordecai could well be *Marduk*, the patron god of the Babylonian capital. Esther could be another name for Ishtar, the mother goddess. Others argue that Purim originated in pagan New Year rites long before the Jewish exile in Babylon. Aspects of the *Megillah* (*Megilse Ester* – the Scroll of Esther), demonstrate that the selection of a queen, the parade of a commoner in royal garb (Mordecai), a fast and the distribution of gifts occur in ancient celebrations of the New Year, usually marked in spring. Noisemaking and revelry, too, are ancient customs which survive in *Purim*, as they do in Christian Mardi Gras and in both Western and Eastern New Year celebrations (Hartman, 2001:60).

Wine (1995:175-176) sees the book of Esther as a novel and the characters presented in it as pagan gods turned into people. Today there are many real Jewish heroes, and there is no need to invent them. He affirms that in the whole Jewish existence some people became real heroes and fought against the evil forces who tried to destroy or harm the Jews. All these people are taken into account when Humanistic Jews are celebrating their *Purim*. *Purim* started with Mordecai and Esther but need not stop there. Friedman (1992:7) considers *Purim* to be Judaism’s most humanistic holiday as it can be celebrated without changing any of its features:

It is the only biblical Jewish holiday with no theistic component. In essence, it is a story about human courage and ingenuity in the face of evil. It is a fable about how we humans can save ourselves (Friedman, 1992:7).

According to Friedman, this holiday mocks the concept of a god who can intervene to save people. Friedman concludes that even if all the other Jewish festivals were to cease, *Purim* will never cease, because the *Purim* principles teach that more profound than prayer is passion, and more effective than faith is action. It is a festival where humanity is the centre-piece and not God.

Tu BiShvat is considered by the Humanistic Jews to be of pagan origin. Its roots go back to an ancient festival called *Hamisha Asar BiShevat* which was devoted to the nature goddess *Asherah*. It was an agricultural festival concerned with the fertility of the ground. Because of its lack of theistic connections it fell into obscurity until the birth of Zionism, when it became a day Zionists dedicated to highlighting the importance of *Eretz Israel*. In rabbinic Judaism, *Tu BiShvat* is celebrated on the 15th day of the month of Shivat. It was celebrated as a prelude to spring, a time for planting trees and enjoying their fruits (Cousens, 1993:80).

In his book entitled *Celebration, Wine* (2003a:260) wrote a special service for young people concerning the festival of *Tu BiShvat*. It reminds young people how the Jews had their own land and were expelled from it by their enemies. They were without a homeland for more than two thousand years but they always kept alive the dream of going back to their own homeland. The people who ruled over Palestine during those days abused the land and destroyed it. The Jews went back and worked hard to restore it, the desert becoming productive once more. Today Israel is a political reality: it is a dream come true.

Once Israel became an independent nation, *Tu BiShvat* once again went through a process of metamorphosis. Instead of being about the independence of Israel it became a day of Environmental Awareness. It started in the 1960s, not with the Humanistic Jews, but in the 1980s its flame started to burn more ardently, and Humanistic Jews seized its wonderful opportunity to increase the awareness of the need to save and respect our planet and its natural resources. To save the planet became more important than capitalism. The survival of the

human race and its quality of life is directly connected to the way that nature as a whole is respected. Unfortunately some mysticism has crept into this important task of saving the earth. People became confused and some nature worshippers started misrepresenting what the environmentalists were saying. The Humanistic Jews have adopted *Tu BiShvat* as an environmental day, a day to plant trees and discuss important environmental issues. They do not fundamentally agree with nature worshippers but they do go along with the scientists who placed upon humanity the responsibility for saving the planet, as its rescue will not come from some sort of nature god (Wine, 1995:167-172).

Shavuot, also known as Pentecost, occurs fifty days after *Pesakh*. The ancient Hebrews celebrated it as thanksgiving to God for the wheat harvest. This holiday was not really focused upon until the rabbinical period. The rabbis who taught this holiday marked the anniversary of the day when Moses received the *Torah* from God. *Shavuot* became a time of spiritual affirmation (Schauss, 1996:88). In the nineteenth century, Reform Judaism gave a new meaning to *Shavuot*. Instead of group affirmation it became the personal *Bar Mitzvah*. This festival became a time when Reform Jews would publicly affirm their allegiance to Judaism (Cousens, 1993:71).

For Humanistic Jews, the connections between *Torah* and *Shavuot* alone are insufficient reason to celebrate, but if people are prepared to look at the *Torah* as the beginning of Jewish literature then this holiday assumes a different character and Humanistic Jews have good reason to celebrate it. Humanistic Jews use *Shavuot* to celebrate Jewish literature.

The major of the Jewish people throughout the past two thousand years has not been wheat. It has been the written word. From the secular perspective, that "harvest" is not the creation of God. It is the creation of the Jewish people. It is a tribute to human ingenuity and human effort. Celebrating Jewish literature is a way to celebrate the creative energies of the Jewish people (Wine, 1995:181).

4.1.4 *Yom Hashoah, Yom Ha'atsmaut*

Wine (1991b:66) explains why his followers do not celebrate *Yom Hashoah* at the same time as the other Jews. This day is to remember the six million Jews who were murdered during the Holocaust. The date chosen by the Israeli government is the 27th of the month of Nissan, some twelve days after the beginning of Passover; Humanistic Jews have the option of choosing a date

that is most meaningful to them. They have adopted April the 19th as the day to celebrate *Yom Hashoah*. The reason for this date was that it saw the beginning of the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto. It was a time when people who had been oppressed and destroyed had the courage and determination to stand up and fight against those who were, militarily speaking, much more powerful than they. They did not rely on God or outside help to rescue them but became owners of their own destiny. As Wine puts it,

We remember six million innocent victims who were brutally murdered by a heartless enemy. We remember six million men and women who died because they were Jewish. The assault was unprovoked. The fury was without reason. The crime was immeasurable. It is too late for justice. If there was divine providence, it failed to rescue the condemned. If there was human help, it never reached them. The past is regrettably unchangeable. We cannot bring the victims back to life. We can only remember and never forget (Wine, 1991b:66-67).

In an interview Albert Memmi gave to Susann Heenen-Wolff, he said something about the Holocaust that is very important. He does not disagree that the Holocaust was a horrendous event that directly descended upon the Jews, but for them to concentrate only on the negative side of the Holocaust is to ignore the other, the positive side of the same epoch and history. He does not consider a negative approach to be educationally sound. For instance, the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto is a very positive side of Jewish history in a time of unprecedented and most brutally cruel persecution. This sort of demonstration of courage should be remembered. Why remember only the Holocaust? (Heenen-Wolff, 1991:34). The whole sad episode of the Holocaust needs to be analyzed in order to give people the right historical picture. There are many other important facts that should not be forgotten. This part of history should not be studied with only the genocide of the Jews in mind.

Many British families took in refugees before the war. They too deserve to be remembered, and their stories told. For some time now it has been known that two future British Prime Ministers, Harold Macmillan and James Callaghan, had refugee children in their homes. In August 1990 it was revealed that, after the German annexation of Austria in March, 1938, an Austrian Jewish refugee, Edith Muehavauer, a teenager, had been given a home for two years by a grocer and his two daughters in the British town of Grantham. One of those daughters was Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990 (Gilbert, 1991:41-43).

Humanistic Jews when celebrating their *Yom Hashoah* also remember those who have shown much love to the Jewish people during this horrific part of their

existence (Wine, 1991b:67). In Poland near Belzec death camp, a monument records the murder of six hundred thousand Jews, and fifteen hundred Poles who were killed for trying to help them (Gilbert, 1991:42). Humanistic Jews defend a different viewpoint. Wine (1995:180) stresses that those who are of a religious persuasion need to follow the road of irrationality in order to find God's purpose in the Holocaust.

The Holocaust is the "final straw that broke the camel's back". It is the final unmasking of the bankruptcy of rabbinic theology. After the senseless systematic murder of six million Jews, it is difficult to talk about a just God and a well-run world. The odour of absurdity and chaos is too pervasive (Wine, 1995:180)

Theology does not present an argument that can appeal to human intelligence in order to explain such a tragedy. Discussing *Yom Hashoah* he concludes that if we celebrate anything on this day of tragic memories, we celebrate the human dignity that gives human meaning to an uncaring world.

Yom Ha'atsmaut (Israel Independence Day) is the celebration of the political establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, celebrated on the fifth of the Hebrew month of *Lyyar* (Cousens, 1993:84). Kaplan (2002:42) teaches in his article entitled 'Twelve Ways You Can Help Israel' that one of the ways one can help Israel is by making *Yom Ha'atsmaut* a more meaningful day. He encourages people to be creative in ways of celebrating this important day. For Humanistic Jews *Yom Ha'atsmaut* is a time for them to show their support and concern for their Israeli brothers and sisters. It is a day when they will show their commitment to Israel. Humanistic Jews may join the wider Jewish community in the Israel Day fairs, parades, walks, talks and many more activities.

Another important date that is celebrated just a day before *Yom Ha'atsmaut* is *Yom Hazikaron*. This is a Remembrance Day, to commemorate those who died fighting for the State of Israel. In Israel, sirens sound several times during this day and all activities cease. Humanistic Jews may choose to join in these ceremonies (Cousens, 1993:85).

4.1.5 Shabbat

The predominant feature of the *Shabbat* is that it is a day of the week when all work and commerce stops. The concept for the *Shabbat* is found in the book of

Exodus, chapter twenty. Priestly Judaism linked the *Shabbat* observance with the creation week, when God worked six days and rested on the seventh. It became a day dedicated to the worship of God (Cousens, 1993:69).

For the Humanistic Jews the *Shabbat* is not a day dedicated to worship. It is people's choice whether they will work on *Shabbat* or not. It is a day that can be set apart for people to reflect, meditate and find peace. It is a day for families to spend together. It is a time for Humanistic Jews to affirm and celebrate their Jewishness (Cousens, 1993:69).

Schauss (1996:27-30) explains that in the past it was possible for Jews to observe the *Shabbat* without any problems. When problems arose they were of a political nature and this sort of persecution made the Jews more rigid about keeping the *Shabbat*. It was a way they found of expressing their identity. Nevertheless, by the nineteenth century the world economy had changed things drastically. If the Jews wanted to prosper it was vital for them to change some of their traditions and adapt to the new ways that the economy was developing. The *Shabbat* tradition was not compatible with the ceaseless productivity being developed in the modern, industrialised world. In view of the changes in society it became increasingly difficult for Jews to keep *Shabbat* and some innovations were suggested, though without much success. The *Shabbat* posed a difficulty not only for the Orthodox Jews but for the Reform ones as well. Previously, Jews had decided to observe it as a demonstration of their identity but now it became financially inadvisable. How could this problem be solved? The political and financial innovations that were taking place in the nineteenth century made it difficult for Jewish people to keep the *Shabbat* in its strict orthodox ways. As the Jewish people came out of their social ghettos and started to have a stronger participation in the economic affairs of the non-Jewish people, it became harder for them to keep the *Shabbat* regulations. This new reality weakened the *Shabbat* observation. Chalom (2004:3-4) said that Humanistic Jews did not encounter the same problem: "Jewish traditions are our traditions. They are ours to celebrate. And they are ours to innovate."

There is no doubt that Humanistic Jews are unafraid of being innovative in their celebration of Jewish holidays. They are not slaves to a tradition that goes

against human intelligence and dignity. According to convention there is a list of thirty-nine activities which the Jews are not allowed to perform on *Shabbat*. Muraskin (1994:11-12) says Humanistic Jews can reduce it to one, and that is that Jews should not work on *Shabbat*, and by work he means working for economic gain. Instead of automatically rejecting a Jewish tradition, Humanistic Jews try to improve traditions by seeking out their humanistic values and adapting them to modern conditions. It is important to have traditions and values for Humanistic Jews to pass on to their children. Humanistic Jews celebrate their *Shabbat* and they hold on to many of the traditions such as the lighting of candles, blessing over the bread, blessing over the wine and other traditions. They maintain a humanistic understanding of the *Shabbat* and not just an observation based on the Jewish tradition.

Some Jewish Humanistic congregations use the *Shabbat* as a special day for learning. It is time to study and resurrect the old traditions of the *Shabbat*. It should be a joyful day with enjoyable activities in which the Humanistic Jews consciously apply themselves to learning, understanding, and perpetuating their culture. It is not a reclusive day, it can be a family day, and may involve a visit to a museum, the discussion of a book, or many other activities (Cherlin, 1994:18). Wine (1995:158-159) sees a need for Humanistic Jews to celebrate the *Shabbat*. It is a weekly time for Humanistic Jews to gather together to celebrate and affirm the importance of their Jewishness. Humanistic Judaism needs the *Shabbat* not for the same reasons that accompany the evolution of holiday. The most liberal Jews today have some distinct aims for this holiday. It is a day for Jews to express their identity and culture, and to express Jewish solidarity. It is fundamental to find creative ways of using the *Shabbat* as a day when these aims can be achieved.

4.2 Humanistic Holidays

Part of this chapter will study holidays that are not traditionally Jewish, but are nevertheless celebrated by Humanistic Jews. Wine (2003a:290) believes that all Jewish holidays are the creation of human ingenuity. According to the need and social occasion there is no reason why Humanistic Jews should not be able to create their own holidays. There are five holidays that the Humanistic Jews celebrate which are not part of the traditional Jewish calendar. They are New

Year's Day, People's Day, Humanism Day, Word Day and Thanksgiving Day. Humanistic Jews have their own format of how to observe these Humanistic Jewish holidays. They have their own readings and songs. The pattern of the services resembles that of a British chapel, but the crucial difference is that in the chapels the services are designed with God at the centre whereas the Humanistic holidays, as expected, are designed with people at the centre. Even though there is a section in the book *Celebration* that considers strictly the Humanist holidays, this chapter deals with these holidays more in line with thematic services. Wine, in the introduction of the chapter titled Humanist Holidays, concludes by saying, "other humanistic holidays have been created and are being tested all over the world. Only time will tell which ones will capture the imagination of the humanistic public" (Wine, 2003a:289).

4.2.1 New Year's Day (January 1st)

New Year's Day was the creation of the Romans. It was the opening festival of the Roman year. Subsequently, Christians adopted the sun year of Julius Caesar as their way of counting time. This became the manner which every civilised nation started counting time. It became a universal celebration and the Humanistic Jews see the importance of celebrating this day as a way of identifying with other peoples. The Humanistic Jews' celebration of the gentile New Year does not mean that they do not celebrate the Jewish New Year. They celebrate both. The beginning of the year according to the Roman calendar is a time for celebration for all the peoples of the world. Humanistic Jews also celebrate *Rosh Hashana*, the Jewish New Year (Wine, 2003a:291-292).

4.2.2 People's Day Service (May 1st)

This is also known as May Day. It is a day of hope and is deeply rooted across many different religions. Different nations of the world had different meanings and different ways of celebrating it. In Rome it was a festival of love. In England they sang and danced around the Maypole. In Israel they held archery competitions. In Germany the workers dedicated it as a day to commemorate the working classes. It is a day that Humanistic Jews celebrate as a day of hope (Wine, 2003a:295). The service in this modern day elaborates different humanistic perspectives of humanity. It deals with human needs, human success, human dreams, human power, heroes and many others. Humanistic

Jews use this service to encourage people to trace their own destiny and make use of their own human power (the only one they have) in order to fulfil their needs, turn their dreams into reality and their efforts into true success.

4.2.3 Humanism Day (June 21st)

In his book *Celebration* Wine speaks about the importance of Humanism Day and he even plans a service to celebrate this specific holiday. The height of the summer is the chosen time for this celebration because summer is a time of light and the season of light is the season of humanism. Wine makes a comparison between the light of the sun and the light of human wisdom. He says that the light of the sun is not under control, but the light of human wisdom is. And so is the light of human self-esteem (Wine, 2003a:303).

During this Humanistic Jewish holiday, the Humanistic Jews celebrate the beauty of reason and the importance for men and women to deploy their intelligence in order to obtain knowledge and happiness. Blind faith is not acceptable and it is an enemy to the power of reasoning. It is a day when the Enlightenment Age is celebrated, a time when people had the courage to look into science and not religion in order for humanity to acquire happiness. It is a day when Humanistic Jews will ponder the great human conquests throughout the history of humanity. It is a day when freedom is celebrated. To be free for the Humanistic Jews does not only mean that you have the power to do what you want, it also means acquiring the determination to take control of your own life. It means the willingness to be responsible for the consequences of your own actions and choices (Wine, 2003a:300-303).

4.2.4 World Day Service (November 1st)

This is a day when the Humanistic Jews celebrate their world citizenship. It is a day to dream of banishing the barriers that separate people, and about all the peoples of the world being part of one nation. The day celebrates the birthday of the United Nations, a very important organisation because it is the baby of humanistic beliefs and dreams which encourages all the peoples of the world to strive for peace. It is a day when people will learn again that to be human is infinitely greater than to belong to any race or nation. World Day is a day when

Humanistic Jews pledge their loyalty to the people of the world, whom they see as their human family (Wine, 2003a:304-307).

4.2.5 Thanksgiving Day Service

Thanksgiving Day is a very theistic holiday for most Jews, when they will thank God for all the blessings they have received from him. However, Humanistic Jews have turned it around to suit their own humanistic doctrines. Instead of giving thanks to God, Humanistic Jews would thank others for all of their love. Humanistic Jews move horizontally, driven by the power of our need and affection. Humanistic Jews believe in gratitude as a humanist virtue, so on this holiday instead of saying 'thank you' to God they direct their thanks to other human beings, channelling their gratitude to individuals and not to a deity. This gratitude should not be regarded as an impulsive gift: it arises from necessity Wine (2003a:308-311).

This is one service that does not have a universal connection. Thanksgiving Day takes place in America on the 4th Thursday of the month of November. This day is not considered a holiday everywhere in the world where there are Humanistic Jews, so Humanistic Jews do not take a day off to celebrate it. However, it is up to Humanistic Jewish communities around the world to think of a date that would be suitable for them to have their Humanistic Thanksgiving day. The service proposed in Wine's book cannot be used in other parts of the world because it was designed with the American Jews in mind. If any Humanistic rabbis in other parts of the world want to hold a Thanksgiving Day service, they will need to create their own ceremonial wording. As Rabbi Wine says, 'This is an American holiday' Wine (2003a:290). It is worth noting that the book *Celebration* has been written by Wine as a manual with guidelines for the Humanistic Jews to use as part of their services. It is not like the book of *Leviticus* to the Humanistic Jews. People within the movement are encouraged to improve things and use their own creative power.

4.3 Life Cycle

Unlike the Jewish and Humanist holidays, which may point to Jewish historical events or to important dates for humanists, the life cycle describes universal events of the human condition. Some groups will put more emphasis on some

parts of the life cycle than others. Nevertheless, the emphasis on a certain life cycle does not take away the reality that these events belong to human existence. Humanistic Jews celebrate life cycle but do not base it on the rigid guidelines of Rabbinic Judaism. They believe that the world is going through many changes which are neither resisted nor approved unconditionally. They test both the old and the new with the measuring stick of dignity. Humanistic Jews have their own understanding and celebrating of the life cycle. For each life cycle they have their order of service. *Celebration*, written by Wine, is similar to a manual that provides guidelines for all occasions that Humanistic Jews meet together to celebrate, creating new celebrations as the need arises. One example of this can be found in the *Humanistic Judaism Journal* (Volume 27, numbers 1, 2, pages 77-80). A special celebration ceremony called 'The Wise Person' has been created in order to celebrate those who reach retirement age and at the same time to support them in this new phase of their lives. In the book *Celebration* (pages 355–359) another ceremony has been created to celebrate Educational Achievement. These celebrations are not obligatory, but they show the flexibility of the Humanistic Judaism movement, which works according to the needs of the people and not in order to satisfy tradition.

4.3.1 Birth

Jews, like most people, celebrate the birth of a child. Rabbi Silberman (1999:5,6) explains what Jews do in traditional Judaism. A boy is given a name during the ceremony of *Brit Milah*, or circumcision. A girl receives her name in the synagogue on *Shabbat*. These two ways of naming the child would also initiate the baby into Judaism, and the child is forever bound under the obligations of the community religion. The parents become responsible for looking after the well-being of the child in the area of moral, ethical, and religious upbringing until the child is mature enough to make responsible choices.

Miriam Jerris (1999:7), an ordained rabbi within the Humanistic Jewish movement, explains that there are some points to be noted when planning a ceremony to celebrate the birth of a child.

1. Female and male children are to be treated equally.

2. Medical or moral decisions about circumcision should be considered separate from decisions about welcoming and naming ceremonies.
3. There are ancestors who deserve recognition and honour.
4. The commitment to the child on the part of the parents and the responsibility of the community in looking after the welfare of the child.
5. Siblings should be identified and included in the celebration.
6. It is important to reflect the name of the child, both in English and in Hebrew or Yiddish.

Wine (1995:186-187), speaking about birth celebrations, calls our attention to the fact that circumcision was a way of protecting the baby from the anger of the gods. Instead of offering the whole male child as a sacrifice, circumcision was introduced as a token to please the gods and spare the boy's life. A ritual was invented to protect the males but the females were provided only with blessings amulets, because their lives were not as important as the boys. These views are not accepted or practised by Humanistic Jews, who defend the idea of female equality. For them it would be impossible to adopt a birth ritual that would exclude women. Adding clitoral circumcision to phallic trimming does not seem a reasonable alternative to intelligent people. While circumcision as private surgery may be appropriate, and has its hygienic advantages, it should be performed by doctors in a proper clinic and not in a public naming ceremony.

In terms of time it is customary in traditional Judaism to circumcise the boy and name him after eight days, the girls being named after four weeks, and this takes place in the synagogue. Humanistic Jews prefer to name their babies around a month after the baby is born, to give the parents and infant time to adjust to their new life together. The celebration does not necessarily need to be held in one of their meeting places. It can be held in the home, temple, or public place. It is not necessary that a rabbi officiates at the ceremony: however, it must be officiated by a certified leader, as sponsorship by a Humanistic Jewish leader serves the valuable purpose of providing communal recognition of the event (Cousens, 1993: 9).

Schauss (1950:13-14) highlights that circumcision is not an exclusively Jewish rite. Many people from different parts of the world used to practise circumcision

and continue to do so today. In ancient Israel many of its neighbours practised circumcision, including the Egyptians, Phoenicians, Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites and Arabs. The Philistines, Syrians and Canaanites of Palestine were not circumcised. The Jews are the ones who turned circumcision into a religious ritual. It became a covenant between God and them. The development of the church amongst the non-Jewish population attracted men who were not circumcised and it became a problem for the Christian Jews to accept them because of they were uncircumcised. Christianity started drifting away from law-keeping Judaism (Maddox, 1985:42).

4.3.2 Bar Mitsva and Bat Mitsva

The *Bar Mitsva* ceremony is conducted when a Jewish boy becomes thirteen years old, marking his arrival at adulthood and his eligibility to abide by all the commandments of the *Torah* (Bain, 1999:28). Humanistic Jews have their own way of celebrating *Bar Mitsva*. They have developed their own ceremony because there are things they do not agree with, such as, on the basis of present knowledge of child development, the age at which a boy is deemed to become a man. They also reject the celebration which derives from male chauvinism and which denies girls the honour that is accorded to boys. They recognise the importance of the *Torah* as a piece of Jewish literature and those participating in the ceremony may read a portion for the *Torah* if they choose to, but it is not essential (Goldfinger, 1996:50). Humanistic Jews regard the age of thirteen as very important for boys and girls, not the age at which they become adults but when they become teenagers. At the age of thirteen many things will change in their lives and it is the time to celebrate this new phase in their lives. It is a time when their emotional needs and aspirations will change. Humanistic Jews see the age of thirteen as the right time to hold a public ceremony to celebrate adolescence, not adulthood (Wine, 1999a:25).

Bar Mitsva is a ceremony only for boys. Humanistic Jews also celebrate *Bat Mitsva*, which is a celebration for girls. The *Bat Mitsva* is not something exclusive to Humanistic Judaism: Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism have been practising *Bat Mitsva* for many years. Instead of being a ceremony that is designed only for boys, it has been changed with the objective of accommodating girls as well. The word *Mitsva* in Hebrew means

commandment, in *Yiddish* it means good deed; it is therefore a very good opportunity to encourage those who are participating in the ceremony to do and promote good deeds (Wine, 1999a:26).

Humanistic Jews defend the idea that *Bar Mitsva* has changed throughout the years, so to create further changes is not inappropriate. They do not read a passage from the Bible, because it is essentially a theistic and narrow-minded book. Humanistic Jews ask those who will be participating in the *Bar/Bat Mitsva* to choose a Jewish person from the past (not necessarily a biblical personage) and research the life of that person. On the day of the ceremony the teenager will read about the person he or she has decided to research (Wine, 1995:190-191).

Wine (1999a:27) suggests another ceremony that he calls Confirmation. He suggests the best time is when the boy or girl is sixteen years old. The objective of this ceremony is to celebrate their debut into adulthood. *Bar/Bat Mitsva* without the Confirmation ceremony is incomplete, for one complements the other. The confirmation ceremony does what *Bat/Bar Mitsva* was first designed for. *Mitsva* and Confirmation ceremonies are good opportunities to reinforce Jewish identity, humanistic behaviour and community solidarity (Wine, 1999a:27).

4.3.3 Marriage

Humanistic Jews see marriage as an ancient human institution and not a divine one. They believe that marriage was created as a consequence of the male need for help in farming the land, “when the idea of personal property became strong, and production of more and more children became desirable. Men acquired women as their personal property and used them for the production and rearing of children” Cousens, 1993:49). Men would then get married and keep their wife/wives under their dominion. Jewish culture was a chauvinist one and a woman was regarded as the possession of her husband. Women were bought from their fathers and brothers and the whole situation was one of humiliation. They were supposed to produce children and if they failed to do so, they were dismissed (Cousens, 1993:49).

Partial relief came from Jewish contact with European culture. In the eleventh century monogamy was instituted for *Ashkenazic* (German and Eastern European) men. But what brought changes into Jewish marriage was the advent of capitalism and urban culture. Women started going out to work and acquired some level of independence, children became expensive and parasitic, and the old family structure started going through a process of metamorphosis. Humanist Jews see these changes as positive, giving women more control of their own lives and dignity. The negative consequences of it are the number of single parents, the problem of divorce and that loneliness has soared. Nevertheless this is less negative than the burden of restrictions that women endured under traditional marriage (Cousens, 1993:49-50).

Wine (1995:192), in his teaching about marriage, states that in a patriarchal society like rabbinic Jewish society the procedures of marriage were unrelated to love and romance. If these sentimental virtues emerged, they appeared by accident, not by intention. Humanistic Jews are not against the institution of marriage. They see that a marriage of love and commitment is good not only for the couple but also for the community. The marriage ceremony is a celebration of the mutual commitment (Cousens, 1993:50).

Humanistic Jews reject the idea that marriage is a licence for people to have children. They defend the idea that two people can choose to get married even if they do not want any children. And they may rightfully choose to have children, even though they are not married. In the eyes of humanistic morality, marriage is more than living together. It is a public promise by two people to live together and offer each other mutual support and exclusive sexual intimacy. The birth of children is a choice that the couple can make. "Bonding becomes an end in itself, not a means to a reproductive end. Children may be chosen. But they complement the relationship, not define it" (Wine, 1995:193).

Jerris (1999:43) declares that Humanistic Jewish weddings are non-theistic, emphasising the relationship between wife and husband rather than the relationship between a couple and God. It is not necessary for both partners to be Jewish; the only requirement is that the two people have the desire to unite

their lives in marriage. It is a matter between two persons and there is no room or need for any sort of deity in it.

Wine (1999b:39-41) defends the position that a Humanistic Jewish marriage insists on equality, an equal sharing of power and decision-making. A lot of work needs to be done in order to achieve this objective because people are essentially different and some have a stronger personality and viewpoints than others. Nevertheless it is a goal that is worth pursuing. A Humanistic Jewish marriage involves increasing levels of commitment. Verbal pledges can produce what experience can create. A Humanistic Jewish marriage believes in the exclusiveness of sexual relationship. It does not approve of any sort of infidelity which goes against friendship, trust, commitment and human dignity. As discussed in the previous paragraph, Humanistic Jews believe in intermarriage. Also, a Humanistic Jewish marriage is not a prison. When two people commit themselves to one another, they will experience good and bad surprises along the way. Divorce is one of the rights they may have to choose to correct some mistakes. It is a practical way of ending suffering. People should not think that divorce is a demonstration that the relationship was thoroughly bad, but in many cases the needs and expectations change with the experience of being married. A Humanistic marriage is not commitment 'till death do us part'. Couples are encouraged to work on their differences, but there is no obligation to lifelong commitment.

Humanistic Jews want a wedding ceremony that will express their Jewishness and at the same time reaffirm their beliefs and convictions. The Humanistic Jewish movement has created a ceremony where tradition is redefined but not ignored and also where two people can express their commitment to each other within the frame of their humanistic beliefs. In a Humanistic Jewish wedding people will find canopies, a broken glass and wine cups but all these symbols have new humanistic meanings attached to them. At the heart of the wedding ceremony is the pledge of both partners in the presence of friends and family. What they say to each other should be no ritual formula. It must be a statement they have created or chosen (Wine, 1995:194). In one of his articles about Humanistic Jewish marriage Rabbi Wine concludes:

Humanistic Jewish marriage, although it has its roots in traditional marriage, rests on radically different premises. It recognises the right of men and women to freely choose their marriage partners. It affirms the equality between husbands and wives. It recognises that love and friendship are legitimate reasons for bonding. It sanctions singleness as a moral alternative. The test of its validity will be the happiness and dignity that will be found by men and women who live within this framework (Wine, 1999b:42).

Humanistic Jews provide wedding ceremonies for people of the same sex.

Rabbi Jerris, speaking about the same sex issue, stated:

The philosophy of Humanistic Judaism is inclusive and embraces and celebrates love wherever it is found. In this spirit, we are responsive to the needs of gays and lesbians who want to ceremonially celebrate the love they share with their partners. Same sex ceremonies offer the opportunity for formal and public recognition of their partnership. Many Secular and Humanistic Jewish leaders are delighted to work with gay and lesbian couples in creating ceremonies to celebrate and acknowledge their lover (Jerris, 1999:72).

4.3.4 Death

Rabbi Friedman (1989:3, 4) finds no evidence to believe in life after death. Consciousness and thinking are reflections of the brain. If we remove the brain or even parts of it our consciousness is gone. When people die their brain deteriorates with the rest of the body, and any kind of immortality is just impossible. He sees the religious approach to death as a disgusting one. When people use the excuse that the death of a loved one has some kind of higher purpose, beyond human comprehension, it is no comfort to the living but is insulting to both the living and the dead. Such an ideology implies that there are things more important than human happiness, human fulfilment, and indeed more important than life itself. The acceptance of this religious approach is regarded as a way of cheapening the real value of life. A humanistic philosophy of death concerns itself with the living and at the same time is respectful of those who passed away. It does not provide the mourner with the false comfort that the deceased is in a wonderful blissful place. Even though death is always a tragic time for the living, there is no reason whatsoever to fear death. One may be afraid of the pain that sometimes precedes death, but pain at any stage of life is always an unwelcome agent. A humanistic philosophy will provide a funeral service with the objective of helping the living cope with their dreadful loss. The objective of the funeral service is not to bless in the name of an unseen deity but to cherish the precious memories the deceased left behind as part their legacy to those still living. In contrast to religious philosophy, humanist

philosophy does not offer a way out of death. They hold out no hope of the possibility of a better place to rest forever, but even though there is no hope of eternal life, neither is there need to despair at all. Those living need to face death with courage and deal with it honestly and effectively. Friedman goes on to teach that as human beings we need to accept that we are mortals. We need to acknowledge that we have limitations which do not compromise our autonomy but define the parameters of life. Once a baby is born he will undoubtedly die one day. Death is beyond anyone's control. To recognise one's mortality is not to admit defeat but to distinguish between fact and wishful thinking.

Wine (1989:34-35) makes a comparison between how traditional Judaism deals with death and how Humanistic Judaism deals with it. In traditional Judaism they have *Shiva*, a period of seven days, immediately following the death of a family member, set aside to comfort the living and remember the deceased. In Humanistic Judaism the *Shiva* is also a time to stay at home to receive and be comforted by friends. It is a very important time for people to talk about the dead and share stories that will bring great comfort. There is the annual *Yahrzeit*, the anniversary of the death. A flame of remembrance is kindled and the mourners' *Kaddish* is recited. Thoughts of remembrance are inevitable. Humanistic Jews also have their *Yahrzeit*. The anniversary of the death of our loved ones is a time to remember them. In this way they can show that their memories still live on. There are different ways of expressing *Yahrzeit*. Some people will choose to light a candle, others will have a special reading in the *Sabbath* service, and others will go for a long walk and do many other things. In traditional Judaism, this service would take place four times a year, on *Pesakh*, *Shavuot*, *Yom Kippur* and *Shemini Atseret*. *Shemini Atseret* is celebrated straight after *Sukkot*, which lasts seven days, and the eighth day is *Shemini Atseret*. During these days the souls of the dead would be remembered and prayed for. As Humanistic Jews do not believe in the eternity of the soul, it is obvious they do not pray for the dead. Nevertheless, they have found another way of celebrating *Yizkhor* (memorial prayer for the dead). Humanistic Jews renamed it as *Nizkhor*, which they celebrate on *Yom Kippur*. At this service the continuing generational cycle of receiving and giving is acknowledged and celebrated. There is the *Matseva*, when a memorial stone is placed on the grave of the

deceased, often inscribed with words of love and respect in the form of biblical quotations. Others would give gifts to the synagogues in memory of those who had passed away, which would be displayed in public places. Humanistic Jews observe their *Matseva* by doing things which were important to the deceased when they were alive.

Humanistic Jews face death in a very natural way; it is a fate they cannot avoid, so it is important for people to make intelligent decisions about it. In an article entitled 'Rest Assured' by Segal (1989:87-90) we find plenty of practical advice that people should follow in order to prepare them for their inevitable day. She stresses the point that when someone passes away there are many important and costly decisions to be made. Many problems could be avoided if people would make their decisions now when they have control of the situation. Very often the person who is responsible for making such decisions after the death of someone very close, because of the loss they are suffering, may not be thinking clearly enough and could make decisions that would be regretted later on.

Humanistic Jews find religious beliefs that promise a deliverance from death an insult to human reason. It undermines life in order to accept death with a false comfort of paradise. The religious approach to death is seen by Humanistic Jews as an offensive procedure. Since we are not eternal beings and each life will come to an end one day, human beings must pursue happiness as a matter of urgency, because it will not be available after we die. Humanistic Jews are encouraged to live courageously and generously in the face of every individual's personal tragedy. People must make the most of their gift of time and not waste it. When going through the period of mourning, people should not rely upon any sort of divinity but find within life itself reason to be comforted and strengthened. Within the humanistic culture, followers will not devote their time and resources to serve the needs of the dead, but seek to mobilise the living for the living. Humanistic Jews use their creativity to provide a memorial service that will satisfy the needs of the living and at the same time bring their tributes about the life of the deceased. This service is an opportune time for humanists to show their philosophy of life (Wine, 1995:196).

What will people do with the body of the deceased friend or relative? Will it be a burial or cremation? Wine speaks about the prejudice against cremation and why people avoid it. In Rabbinic Judaism the cremation of the body is prohibited and is seen as a pagan and detestable act. Cremation is not an acceptable way to dispose of a human body. The official reason why people cannot be cremated is found in *Shulkhan Arukh*, the sixteenth century code prepared by Joseph Caro. The cremation of the body is prohibited because of the resurrection of the dead. Without a body there can be no resurrection, and no resurrection means there can be no access to Paradise. Humanistic Jews accept cremation not because they disbelieve in the resurrection of the dead, but because they see no difference between the ashes of someone who has been cremated and the dust of someone who has been buried. To avoid cremation because of the principle of resurrection is an irrational explanation which Humanistic Jews cannot accept. Cremation is becoming more popular amongst Jews and is seen by Humanistic Jews as a perfect and holy alternative to burial. Those who want to be cremated need to make it clear to their families and also seek legal help in putting it in writing. The reasons that people have presented for condemning cremation do not convince humanistic philosophy as an intelligent reasoning, which maintains that where reason and tradition conflict, reason has the right to override. Both laws and customs ought to be responsive to human needs and human welfare (Wine, 1999c:94).

Humanistic Judaism is quite different from traditional Judaism but at the same time tries to keep a Jewish identity. It has created a structure that tries to accommodate the intellectual and emotional needs of its followers. We can find that the adaptations and interpretations Humanistic Jews have given to the traditional Jewish holidays and life cycle have helped people to break from the yoke of theism and enjoy the cultural side of the Jewish celebrations. According to the historical facts and social needs they have even created 'humanistic celebrations' because for them they are as important as the traditional ones. They meet their present needs and highlight facts in history and society that did not exist when the traditional holidays were created. They have reinterpreted Jewish holidays and created new ones in a humanistic light. For Humanistic Jews these holidays and celebrations revolve around humans and not God. Humanistic Jews put humanity and not God at the heart of their philosophy.

These holidays and celebrations are intended to please and praise people and are not created to satisfy and honour any divine figure.

Chapter 5

THE QUEST TO FILL THE SPIRITUAL AND SOCIAL VOID OF ATHEISM

Wine can be named as the person who founded the Humanistic Judaism movement, but many of his contemporaries were tremendously influential in the formation of the movement. This section comprises some of the leading figures in today's movement for Secular Humanistic Judaism, and discusses members of the movement for Secular Humanistic Judaism and some contemporaries who share the same ideology, or have some input into the formation of the Secular Humanistic Judaism ideology.

It is important to make a distinction between Jewish humanists and Humanistic Jews. The formation of Humanistic Judaism does not represent the efforts solely of Humanistic Jews but also of Jewish humanists. Jewish humanists are Jews who believe in the doctrines and ethics of Humanistic Judaism but have not embraced the movement as their spiritual identity. Nevertheless they have offered their support in different ways to the Humanistic Judaism movement around the world. There are many Jews who are humanists who are not associated with Humanistic Judaism. They are not associated for different reasons: either they do not know the existence of Humanistic Judaism or they do not want to be part of any established form of Judaism, be it theistic or non-theistic.

The ideological pillars that hold together the movement and give it a certain formalised direction can be attributed to a group of thinkers who propose a humanistic approach towards many important aspects of Judaism. Among them is Mordecai Kaplan (1881-1983) the founder of the Reconstructionist Jewish movement (Goldsmith, 2000:23).

5.1 Atheistic Theology

Wine was not the first rabbi to break away from the mainstream of Judaism and start a new option within Judaism, differing from any sort of Judaism proposed by the religious leaders of the day. Rabbi Kaplan preceded Wine. He received a religious education as well as a secular education at the City College of New York and Columbia University. He was ordained by the Jewish Theological

Seminary and became rabbi of an orthodox synagogue. After many years working as an Orthodox rabbi he was appointed the dean of Teachers' Institute of the Seminary, where he also served as professor of *Talmud* and religious philosophy. He was innovative in his approach to the existence of the synagogues: for him, worship was only one facet of the synagogue. He was in favour of the synagogue being more active in the life of the community. With this view he organised the Jewish Centre in Manhattan, but when his views became too liberal for his congregation, he left to organise the Society for the Advancement of Judaism in 1922 (Goldsmith, 2000:23).

Kaplan was now involved with a group of followers to whom he introduced new views of Judaism, challenging what were at the time the current forms of Judaism. He proposed a reformulation of Judaism that combined a scientific worldview with a democratic and rational reformulation of the Jewish identity. In 1934 he wrote *Judaism as a Civilization*, in which he explained through his philosophy what he thought to be true Judaism. In 1935 he started publishing a journal called *The Reconstructionist*. He advocated building a new form of Judaism and went on to write a prayer book that differed from the traditional text and also gave a new interpretation of the *Passover Haggadah*. He was in reality introducing new theological thoughts into Jewish theology. He was a person of action, continuing to publish books throughout his life. In 1968 the movement opened its own rabbinical college in Philadelphia (Goldsmith, 2000:24).

Kaplan followed Ahad Ha'am and Simon Dubnov in describing Judaism as a civilisation, seeing Judaism not only as a form of religion but also as a great source of culture (Wine 1978:7-9). Kaplan was calling for a new concept amongst the Jews around the world to perpetuate both their secular and religious identity. He proposed a process that would invigorate Judaism and a formal covenant that would define Jews as a transactional people that included those of the Diaspora as well as Zion. Even though he had some advanced ideas Kaplan was not a secularist. He saw religion as an important factor confirming the identity and maintaining the structure of what would otherwise be a very disparate group, made up of people whose nationalities and cultures would have been drawn from all over Europe, Russia, America and other countries of the world. He saw in the symbols and rituals of religion factors of

great importance to those who belonged to that caste: they were expressions of their identity, and he felt that such items would inspire reverence within the group and help the flux of their history. Rabbi Cohn-Sherbok thinks that, while Kaplan was a humanist in much of his philosophy, he would never relinquish the need to pray, although he redefined God (Cohn-Sherbok 1997:76-77). His philosophy created a leading pathway in Jewish theology and beyond. In years to come Kaplan was bitterly opposed by the Orthodox establishment and was excommunicated because of his heretical views – theism based on naturalism and disbelief in a god according to Jewish orthodox theology. Kaplan has had a profound impact on the life of many modern Jews who were desiring to live their lives in a secularised world, in which Kaplan survived until 1983. Humanistic Judaism would follow, until it reached the point where it would have to deviate, abandoning Kaplan's residual belief in God. Kaplan would not embrace atheism, and as much as his ideas were admired by Humanistic Jews, at this point they needed to take different roads in terms of theology. Reconstructionist Jews did not have the courage to pursue an atheistic doctrine of God (Goldsmith 2000:25).

Humanistic Jews have a great admiration for Rabbi Kaplan, but they do not agree with everything he taught. Wine observes the tremendous influence he had upon the Jews of the 20th century, but he reflects that Reconstructionism is a form of 'Chicken out Humanism'. Rabbi Wine defends the idea that Reconstructionist Jews try to please religious and non-religious Jews at the same time, instead of making a clean break from religious forms of Judaism. He believes that they made many compromises and because of that they failed to go all the way, whereas the Humanistic Jews succeeded in doing so (Wine, 1978:6-9). The lack of agreement in theology, philosophy and ethics between Humanistic Jews and Reconstructionist Jews should not hide the fact that Humanistic Jews witnessed the tremendous influence Rabbi Kaplan had on them. They see that, like themselves, he had the courage to break away from Orthodox Judaism and to offer a new option to those who were dissatisfied with the current ways of interpreting Judaism (Goldsmith, 2000:23-28).

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is another important thinker who contributed to the formation of Humanistic Judaism's atheistic theology. Freud is called the 'father

of psychoanalysis'. He came from humble beginnings but because of his achievements in school his parents encouraged him to pursue better education. By the time Freud graduated from the gymnasium he was a confirmed atheist and refused to celebrate the Jewish holidays that his family observed. As a student at the University of Vienna he encountered a lot of anti-Semitism, which had the contrary effect of making him holding fast to his Jewishness because it gave him courage and self-confidence. Freud graduated from Medical School at the University of Vienna (Reef, 2008:25-30). This is a strong point that the Humanistic Jews can identify with, an atheistic view but a desire to keep the cultural side of Judaism; it is part of their identity as individuals and as a group of people. Once, when talking about his Jewishness, Freud said:

The fact that you were Jews could only be desirable to me, being myself a Jew, and it has always seemed to me undignified and even senseless to deny it. My ties with Judaism were – as I am obliged to confess – neither true faith nor the national pride, for I have always been a non-believer. In addition there was an insight that I owe to my Jewish nature alone, the true character traits which have supported me in my difficult life course. Being Jewish, I found myself free from many prejudices which hamper others in the exercise of their intellect, and as a Jew I was prepared to go into opposition and to renounce agreement with the solid majority. Thus I became one of you and took part in your humanitarian and national concern (Katz, 1987:68).

Freud published his research on the unconscious mind in 1900-1901, and this turned out to be quite successful. His book *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* was a success. It allowed readers to play psychoanalyst by deciphering simple accidents, incidents of forgetfulness, and slips of the tongue. Through the popularity of his theories he started gathering around him some disciples – all Jewish – and as knowledge of his theories spread, he exercised great influence in America. In one of his works, *Totem and Taboo*, Freud spoke of religion as an illusion, maintaining that it is fantasy. Freud linked the origin of religion in prehistoric time to the *Oedipus* complex (Reef, 2008:26-28).

Freud remained in Vienna until 1938 but the growth of Fascism caused him to move to London, where he died a year later. Freud had been suffering from cancer, and when he could no longer bear the pain he asked his personal physician to visit him in his home in London. Freud's death was by physician-assisted morphine overdose (Schur, 1972:215-218). Humanistic Jews defend the idea that people who are living without dignity and who are suffering from a

terminal illness should have the right to choose to terminate their lives (Anon., 1996).

Through his theories Freud was teaching mankind to look to themselves to find answers to their problems and also to their way to happiness. This is one of the things taught by the Humanistic Judaism theology: people should not be looking for a supernatural force to solve their problems or bring them happiness. They advocate the idea that men and women must find their pathway to happiness and meaningful life within themselves, that people are intelligent enough to be able to give guidance and purpose for their own existence.

Another psychologist who influenced the ways of Humanistic Judaism is Abraham Maslow (1908 – 1970) who was born in New York, the oldest of a family of seven children of Jewish immigrants from Russia. Maslow taught at Brooklyn College and the Western Behavioural Science Institute, and was chairman of the American Psychological Association (Maslow, 1986:1).

Maslow made a great contribution to the understanding of human behaviour and in his paper entitled *Self-Actualizing People: A Study in Psychological Health* he made a distinction between basic needs and meta-needs. Basic needs consist of food, shelter, and security, while meta-needs consist of beauty, justice, goodness, wholeness and order in life. He defended the idea that human beings needed both kinds of needs to be met in order to achieve happiness (Kogel & Katz, 1995:374-376). According to Maslow's theory, 'self-actualisation' is achieved after all the other needs are fulfilled – basic needs, *and* meta-needs. 'Self-actualisation' needs involve the continuous desire to fulfil one's potential – to be all you can be, to become the most complete, the fullest 'you' – hence the term 'self-actualisation'. This theory of 'self-actualisation' is linked with the theology of Humanistic Judaism in the area of dignity, happiness, maturity, fulfilment in life and others.

Humanistic Jews believe we are in a race and for this race to be perfected our basic needs and meta-needs both have to be met so that we can find satisfaction and happiness in our lives. Humanistic Jews do not believe that mankind will ever find God, because He does not exist. He cannot fulfil human

needs because He does not exist. To live in order to meet only basic needs would deviate humanity from the real purpose for their lives. The quest and ability for mere survival does not adequately highlight human dignity. Maslow emphasised that psychology should be moving towards holism in its thinking. He asserted that human nature is fundamentally good, and his ideas have had an enormous impact on thinking in this field (Thorsen, 1983:47-48).

Religious relativism is not acceptable to Humanistic Jews. Humanist pluralism cannot be relativist; it respects each person's ideas and beliefs as long as everyone fulfils their duties to society while allowing others to exercise their human rights. Humanism avoids the claim of relativists that there is no such thing as truth or morality (Malkin, 2004:73). Values can differ from one culture to another and what is highly regarded by one people group is not necessarily held as highly by another group of people. Values are objective or subjective depending on the people who pursue them; the same values may not be applicable to others outside that specific sphere. This is a great reality that is contended when looking into atheistic theology. For instance, someone can appreciate Greek philosophical values, understand them, and see the light they are shedding on life. However, for different reasons this same person cannot live by them. Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997) was a distinguished British philosopher and historian of ideas. Berlin was born in Latvia but his family later moved to England, where he was educated in St Paul's School and then at Corpus Christi College (Kogel & Katz, 1995:282). Berlin stated that sometimes, even if we wish we could abide by these values, we are just unable to do so. He said that even though he was prepared to respect people's values, sometimes he needed to be honest with himself and admit that not everything people are doing is valuable. He did not believe that everything people are doing is of equal, intrinsic value. Rabbi Wine explains Berlin's argument that if a man worshipped a tree, not because he saw it as sacred or possessing divine powers but simply because it was made of wood, he would then ask, 'Why do you worship this tree?' and if the person said, 'Because it is made of wood, and not for any other reason', Berlin would find such an answer unacceptable and would not respect it at all. Berlin considered the importance of such values so highly that he doubted that someone bereft of a value system should be thought of as a human being (Kogel & Katz, 1995:283-284). Wine shares the same view. For

him it is important for human beings to find that their existence is meaningful in itself. Human beings do not need any sort of divine figure to make their lives meaningful. Mankind is in the centre of humanistic theology, it all starts and finishes with humanity (Wine, 2007:5).

One philosophy that goes against humanistic theology is called 'idealism'. There are some idealists who would say that there is no need for conflicts to exist, and that there is another world where we would be free from them. Their intention is to convince people of a perfect world where all good things harmonise in principle. Rabbi Daniel Friedman says that people who approach us with such an ideology, though they try to label it in different ways, should be reminded that the world they are trying to convey is not our world. We live in this world, here and now, and the conflict of values belongs here (Friedman, 1999:80-82). There is no room for heaven or hell in humanistic theology, and there is no belief in life after death. Death is the ultimate end of one's existence. Berlin does not believe that it is possible for a place of bliss to exist; he does not believe that this ideology is attainable, because it is conceptually incoherent. He considers people who believe in such things as happy people. He considers them fortunate to be able to obey their leaders because of the unbreakable principles. Some people are induced to these convictions and others come to them by their own effort. He defends the idea that those who are in such a comfortable situation are in it because they are victims of self-induced myopia, wearing blinkers made for contentment, but not understanding what it is to be human. The humanist understands that to be able to believe in God it is necessary to kill the power of reasoning and just accept what is put in front of you. People who tend to have a simple faith and who are resistant to any sort of philosophical argument can cause a lot of damage to themselves and others. Utopias have their values, and are in themselves tremendously creative, but if used as guidelines to lead people they can have fatal consequences. People who close their ears to philosophical arguments and embrace an ideology that demands the death of their reasoning power, thus going against human reason, are potential fanatics, and fanatics who in any walk of life betray reason cause social and emotional disaster (Kogel & Katz, 1995:285).

Religious people put God at the centre, but humanists put humanity at the centre of human concern and endeavour. They see individuals as autonomous, and humanity as creative (Rapp, 1987:80). A religious individual thinks that God created humanity; a humanist thinks that people created or invented God or the idea of a god. Humanists argue that since men and women created art, science and many other things, they also created religion. It has proved to be a great invention and humanists admit its historical relevance, but they do not accept that the creation of religion should have the power to demand people's complete obedience in our modern world. An example of this is the Ten Commandments, which a humanist sees as an important guide for people because of their ethical emphasis. These were imperative laws for the time, but there were similar laws amongst other nations in the ancient world. Those who advocate the implementation of the Decalogue need to consider it carefully before defending or adopting it as the law humanity should live by. In reality it is neither applicable nor practical for today's modern society. An appropriate example of this can be seen in the fact that the Ten Commandments include 'You shall not covet', and continues to explain it: 'You shall not covet your neighbour's house, wife, servant, ox, or his mule'. It begins with what is deemed to be most important and continues in order of importance to the things which are deemed of less value. Mankind is in an ever-changing process. Cultures are going through different and profound metamorphosis, and principles long established are being challenged because they are misunderstood or truly irrelevant to our present modern world. Human beings need laws that are relevant for their time in history and not laws that bind them to the past without presenting any benefits for the present reality they are living in. Humanistic Jews do not see the need of a divine figure to dictate laws to mankind; they believe that intelligent and creative human beings know what is best for them. Human beings are entirely competent to create humane laws that will promote the best for individuals and communities, and that will promote justice and harmony. Mankind should not be bound by laws that are passed down from generation to generation and are perpetuated because of tradition and superstition and not because they are laws that envisage the best for those who abide by them.

The Humanistic Jews find it impossible to accept the Ten Commandments, even with all their ethical values, as a document that is applicable today. The first commandment, 'I am the Lord your God', causes any humanist to cringe, because the humanists believe in a moral obligation towards humanity and not towards a God that they do not believe in. Humanistic Jews say that much wrongdoing has been done in God's name and authority (Hillman, 2001a:200-201). People will use the name of God to sanction their cruelty and injustice towards other human beings. It seems that if evil is done in God's name, it is acceptable and is not seen as evil.

Humanistic Jews see atheism as a legitimate option. Atheism denies the existence of God, but Humanistic Jews approach this from a different perspective. They defend the argument for agnosticism – which means doubt of God's existence. Not being satisfied with just atheism and agnosticism, the Humanistic Jews established a new perspective and line of thought to describe and affirm their theology, for which they coined a new term, 'ignosticism'. 'Ignosticism' is the assertion that God's existence is meaningless, because it has no verifiable consequences (Cousens, 1993:5). Humanistic Jews defend the argument that theism died or is dying a natural death. God has become a very uninteresting subject to be given attention. There is room and need for 'ignosticism' to prosper. 'Ignosticism' is a philosophical approach used by Humanistic Jews in their endeavour to establish their religious atheistic movement.

5.2 Humanistic Judaism and its Religious and Social Structures

As we have seen earlier in this thesis, Humanistic Jews see their movement as a religion. They understand that religion is a movement that exists to serve communities. It provides rituals and ceremonies by which the community expresses its worldview and dramatises and transmits beliefs. Humanistic Jews believe that their movement is a religion because it enables their community to express their religious feelings, so they consider themselves a religion and not just a philosophy (Cousens, 1993:62).

According to Rapp, those who are involved in religion and consider themselves to be religious are so engrossed in their beliefs that, when involved in a

discussion, the primary desire is to convert the humanist. Basically, the believer neither intends to listen to explanations of humanism nor to relate to them. Humanism actually means that humans must come to grips with problems and solve them with their own creativity (Rapp, 1987:45). People are seeking religion because they are trying to find meaning in their lives. They want to find values they can hold on to in their lives. They want to be part of a community where they know they belong and are accepted. This highlights a weakness in humanism: humanists are failing to present to seekers their views and win them over to their side. This is a gap which the Humanistic Jewish movement needs to find a way of breaching in order to gain adherents (Wine, 1986b:13-16). Humanists defend the idea that the possibility of promoting good for the love of humanity is greater today than in the past. Men and women are liberating themselves from doing good to score points with God or to please God. What really matters is people, and any good action should have people at the centre. The humanists see the proposal to overcome evil and to become ever increasingly good as a daring human adventure on the path towards overcoming powerful and deeply rooted alienation. Humanistic Jews think that theistic religions have hijacked good social and moral behaviour as a means of serving God, and for Humanistic Jews good and social behaviour is not a religious matter, but a matter of helping others. Helping others is practical living and not a religious expression. Humanistic Jews believe that mankind can find in the very existence of mankind enough and genuine reasons to promote good amongst them. Humanistic Jews believe it to be a wrong assumption to think that only God can guide us to do good to others.

What makes a doctrine secularist is not its readiness to respect religious tradition, but its refusal to accept that tradition on its own terms. The early secularists in Israel took the wrong path to make their philosophy understood and accepted. They stood against tradition in an unwise way. When the secularists started to bring new interpretations of *halakah* – a collective body of Jewish religious laws derived from the written and oral *Torah* – instead of challenging its historical or theological foundation, they robbed it of its obligatory content. The early pioneers of secularism failed because what they were proposing and expecting was unachievable. Their idealism rendered their targets unobtainable. They wanted a sudden change and conscious rejection of

the past and its patterns of thought. Despite its failure to achieve its aim swiftly, secularism survived and became a reality, mainly because of thinkers such as Ahad Ha'am, who interpreted the *halakah* in new ways. He started reinterpreting it in anthropocentric and ethnocentric ways instead of theocentric ways. He started to demonstrate that in studying and reading the traditions under such influences they would be able to acquire the real meaning behind them. They would not be based on mythology but on facts, which had to be appreciated (Malkin, 2004:10). Schauss (1996:28-29) compared it with the times of Ezra in the Old Testament. Ezra read the law and interpreted it for the Jews and therefore a new era started for them. Schauss thinks that the secularists have used the same methodology. Secularists have found a way of compromise with the *halakah* by accepting it as a collection that recorded important traditions. With this new understanding in mind and being able to pass it on to others, the humanists were able to challenge the *halakah* as the supreme authority (Schauss, 1996:28-29). The *halakah* needs to defend itself as people are now free to think and to disagree with it. The Jewish people are becoming increasingly more secularised for different reasons, but the main one is based on social reasoning. To other Jews, the secular Jews were able to offer to other Jews a wider range of living choices, based not only on the *halakah*, as the extreme Orthodox Jews advocate (Penslar, 1997:256-258).

The process of secularisation was completed by the great destruction of European Jewry during World War II and by the subsequent success of Zionism. The events of World War II destroyed Jewish centres across Europe, centres which had been the places where the Jews were founding guidance for their lives, and which were based on the *halakah*. The war not only destroyed the actual places where people met but also shattered the faith of those who survived, along with their respect for the rabbinic institutions. It paved the way for Zionism because the survival of the Jewish people came to be seen as more important than the survival of those who escaped the concentration camps. All the Jews around the world in a general way became survivors. The Jewish humility and humiliation must be replaced by the Jew of action and dignity. They witnessed the atrocities that had happened to people who belonged to the same race as they did and they also became survivors of a plan that, without doubt, included their destruction. Jews around the world decided to take their

destiny into their own hands instead of waiting for a divine deliverance (Wine, 1995:76). Zionism was ready in terms of historical events and also in terms of doctrine: the Jews had the doctrine of Aha Ha'am in hand. Zionism was not the most popular subject in the synagogues before World War II, but now it flared up so strongly that it seemed to become a religion itself. It is true to say that, while synagogues are still being visited today, there is a particular influx of people during High Holidays. Jewish parents are still choosing to give their children an insight into Jewish culture, but synagogue attendance and Jewish education are now motivated by secular cohesion and not by the *halakhic* ideal of trying to please God. Therefore, it is possible today to evaluate why the rabbinic establishment was set against Zionism: they were opposed to it because it was a secular movement. The Jewish nation was ultimately established by a group of people who did not see themselves as fulfilling the divine will. Rather, they saw themselves as people responsible for their own destiny. The social conditions of the Jewish people pressurised them into pursuing a secular approach to life. A *halakhic* concept of life, whether anti-state or ambitiously aiming at total control of the state, cannot live in peace with the democratic state of Israel (Malkin, 2004:11-12). Humanistic Jews think that the Jewish people owe a great deal to the values that may be called humanistic, and therefore the problem of Orthodox Haredi Judaism has assumed great significance today. Humanistic Judaism sees the instrumentality of religion as an oppressive factor upon any people who submit to it, and even worse when it is collective submission, thus creating a society that demands its people to adopt the religious systems, not out of conviction but out of fear. It can be out of social fear or fear of God. If any motivation for obedience is fear, the obedience is forced and not an exercise of free will. Humanist Jews see the *halakah* as an imposed system. In *halakah* there is no room for pluralism as the right and only way for people to behave. Humanists see pluralism as the right option for any society. It is in pluralism that citizens find opportunities to exercise their will to make their choices. People have the right to make choices: it is a basic human right which is taken away when *halakah* is implemented. So Humanist Jews do not agree when it is said that the sole reason for Jewish survival was religion (Muraskin, 2003:44).

Even though Humanistic Jews do not agree with pure Zionism and believe in a pluralistic society, they do acknowledge the importance of Zionism, as it is the fruit of a humanistic movement and not of a religious movement. The credit for the formation of the nation of Israel goes to Humanistic Jews and not to religious Jews. Zionism is a political form of rebellion against Jewish orthodoxy, because Orthodox Jews believe that for the Jews to return to the land they need to repent of their backslidden spiritual condition, as only then would God bless them by granting them the land of their fathers. Zionism put aside religion and inspired Jews to fight for their own future and not wait for divine intervention. Their teaching incorporated the theory that humanity was responsible for its own destiny, and was not to be passive about it (Levy, 1998:39). Humanist Jews respect those who headed the Zionist movement, but not for their political convictions or social aspirations; rather their admiration is evoked by their courage in standing for what they believed in and for fighting against the odds, within Judaism and outside the boundaries of the faith, in the context of history and not of religious mystical views. They identified themselves as being responsible for fulfilling their aspirations, not sitting and waiting for a Messianic miracle to deliver them.

Zev Katz says that 'the Jewish religion was and still is a major strength for Jewish survival'. This is a very important statement and even the most secular and humanistic person would accept the importance that religion had to play in the Jewish survival. It does not make them believers and neither does it contradict what they stand for. They perceive how important religion has been in keeping people together, especially during times of struggle and bitter persecution, when people could find hope in their faith. It would encourage them and it would give them hope. The religious leaders used their influence to keep the communities together and encourage them to look after each other. However, Humanistic Jews would not accept the statement that 'the Jewish religion is the sole force for Jewish survival', because when studying Jewish history and the 'big events' that religion claims as actions of God, there are many facts which will not withstand historical and critical examination. When studying the history of Israel we will find numerous times when the Jewish people did not remain true to the God of Moses. More than once they went astray and built altars to other gods; even King Solomon was guilty of this. Even

when they were in such a backslidden state, they still survived. When the world was dominated by religion it was the Jewish religion that was the greatest force for Jewish survival. Nevertheless, in those days to be Jewish meant to embrace the Jewish faith (Katz, 1986:76-77).

However, during the last few centuries a new breed of Jewish thinkers has appeared and they have refused to conform to such parameters. Secular and Humanistic Jews relinquish the idea of God and Judaism but they understand themselves to be Jews nevertheless. There is a great number of Jews who have been promoting Jewish culture in the modern world and who are not religious Jews. Many of those who fought for the rebirth of Israel as a political, national, and geographical entity were not religious Jews. Humanistic Jews do not believe that in our modern world it is religion that has granted the survival of the Jewish nation, but secular ideas held by secular people (Malkin, 2007:61-64).

There is another theory presented by Ahad Ha'am and Jabotinsky called 'the Inborn National Jewish Survival', and it can be viewed as the antithesis of the religious theory. This theory was offered by Ahad Ha'am and paradoxically by Jabotinsky. The former was known as the father of 'Spiritual Zionism' and the latter as the founder of Revisionism. 'Spiritual Zionism or Cultural Zionism' was an ideology championed by Ahad Ha'am who saw the crux of the problem in Judaism, which he believed had lost its spiritual assets – its source of creative and national might. Ahad Ha'am did not believe that Palestine could accommodate the Jews of the entire world, and he thought a Jewish state would not solve the Jewish problems (Jewish virtual library, 1998:1). Revisionism was a political ideology that created relentless pressure in Britain, including petitions and mass demonstrations, for the creation of Jewish statehood in Palestine. After the State of Israel was established, the Revisionist Zionist Organization merged with the *Herut* movement (founded by the *Irgun*, the National Military Organization) to form the Herut Party, a component of the Likud, one of Israel's two main political parties (Jewish virtual library, 1998:1).

They were at opposite poles in almost all other subjects. In this instance both of them proposed basically the same theory. The explanation they had to offer

brought the 'religious theory' to its knees. They argued that it was not religion that was the cause of Jewish survival, but the Jewish people's will to survive, using religion as the means of their survival. The Jewish people had shown since early days that they had a tremendous will to survive in great difficulties, because of this inherent desire to survive. During Roman times the Jewish population was composed of 5 to 8 million Jews but in the 15th to 17th centuries the population had fallen to 1.2 million. However, with the emancipation and the flourishing of secularism and modernisation, religion became weak and the modern and secular Jewish identity broke through and flourished, proving once again the great willpower for survival that exists in the Jewish race (Katz, 1986:75-78).

The fact that religion plays a very strong role in Jewish life cannot be denied. Whether people are religious Jews or humanistic Jews, they will recognise the importance of religion within a Jewish society. The humanist Jew, who does not believe in God, cannot deny the important role of religion within any Jewish community. It is not just a matter of individual belief; it is part of the community that the Jews belong to. Throughout life the humanistic Jew will continually encounter religious Jewish traditions. These encounters will challenge the atheistic Jew who refuses to believe in God but it does not mean the end of him as a Jew. There are authors who have concluded that there are Jews without Judaism and without Jewishness. Religion is part of being Jewish but it is not mandatory. Albert Memmi, relating his own experience, says that he does not believe in God, but he knows that he belongs to the family, for he considers himself to be a Jew. Memmi and some of his friends have celebrated traditional feasts of the Jewish calendar, though they did not consider them as mystical elements; such things kept them together so that in the end they had reaped their heritage. As modern Greeks are able to relish Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* without believing themselves obliged to believe the gods, Jewish people can relish their traditional literature without believing in *Yahweh* (Memmi, 1990:75-77).

Humanistic Jews believe that religion is linked strongly with traditions that have been passed from one generation to another. Often important questions are not asked and a whole community can be bound up in beliefs that slow their

progress, which also causes them social harm. Jewish history and tradition maintain that Jews are a peculiar people and Judaism is their religion. This philosophy needs to be seen as just one of the aspects of the Jewish culture. The historical importance of such facts is undeniable and all can see the benefits of their working as social glue in Jewish communities. Nevertheless, if anyone were to concentrate solely on this aspect, it would be narrow-minded and would lead to missing out on other very important aspects of Jewish life. It is even possible to miss the point and accept the idea that this is the sole reason for Jewish existence or the sole explanation for Jewish survival. These convictions could lead to the confirmation of other orthodox beliefs, or the fear that, if Jews do not accept their exclusiveness as a race and do not embrace their orthodox religion, Judaism will inevitably disappear (Seid, 2001:203-206).

5.3 Connection Between Judaism as Religion and Judaism as Civilisation

There are other views that combine both concepts and regard the Jews as a religious people and Judaism as a civilisation. It is important to elaborate on this statement and develop its meaning. The secularists among the Jews –which would include also most Zionists, especially those who pioneered and built Israel – agree that the Jews are more than just a religious group, and that they are part of the world's people. It is important to accept that, because Jews are part of a worldwide group of people, there is room for diversity of opinion, which of course includes the views of Humanistic Judaism, which does not subscribe to the tenets of religion or organised religious affiliation (Rosenfeld, 1989:11). Humanism removes the emphasis from the supernatural, but does not leave a moral vacuum in its place. Humanists emphasise the need for ethics and the ideals of brotherhood and social justice. These principles are present in Humanistic Judaism and are also present in religious Judaism. To promote Jewish education without teaching the Jewish holidays, folklore and traditions would be a deficient teaching. Therefore, Humanistic Jews do teach about the holidays, folklore and tradition in their educational system. These are understood in a different light: their values are acceptable because of their historical and social importance and not because of God (Seid, 2001:55-56).

The USA is the birthplace of Humanistic Judaism and also a haven for millions of Jews from different parts of the world. Jewish people have migrated to

America from the four corners of the earth with a variety of motivations. Even though they remained Jewish and therefore had a different cultural and social background, it was necessary for them to assimilate and integrate into the reality of living in America. A clear result of the development of secularism amongst the Jews in America is the formation of Humanistic Judaism. Through his writings Saul Goodman has addressed the subject of secularism amongst Jews in America. He underlines the importance of this subject, because secular American Jews need to understand that they are still Jews, even though their mindset is secular. Secular Jews are truly living in the Diaspora of secularism because they cannot affirm theistic religion or that Judaism is God-centred. The secular Jew will on occasions long for the values that gave meaning and sustenance to their ancestors. If they are sensitive people they need to acknowledge that this longing does not contradict their secularist position. In other words, secularism in itself does not mean much. It defines a starting point but not a goal (Wolfe, 1996:22). It means they are being sensitive to the religious creativity of their people and admire its beauty. Their position as secular Jews is as important as that of theistic Jews. Their experience as secular persons bears the imprint of the collective Jewish experience (Dershowitz, 1998:177-178). There are times when people will face a crisis and they will be in need of solace. At times such as this Jewish humanists and secularists realise that this solace is to be found in their people's unique experience, which must be rooted in the spiritual soil of their ancestry. This attitude of mind will give to those who embrace secularism or humanism a sense of belonging. They know that there is an identity that has been established through different experiences that have marked the saga of their people and they can identify with it. It belongs to them and they are part of it. This identity is very important to them and for modern Jews it is the mooring that they seek (Goodman, 1989:33).

To secular Jews, the chief characteristic of religion in general and Judaism in particular lies in a personal faith in a divine power that rules the universe, though they do not impose that faith upon themselves by virtue of being born of Jewish parents. Even though they cannot accept such faith as part of their life, it does not make them strangers to the historical background of their ancestors. They will have the head knowledge of their past experiences and it is possible

for them to experience some moments of spiritual awareness that transcend the material world that they are living in. It seems that the God their ancestors spoke about is closer to them. It is a real experience but they do not want to bind their life or the direction they are taking to these sorts of experiences. The Jewish secularist embraces the traditional observances and customs in a voluntary manner and not in an obligatory one. We can speak of what seems to be a contradiction in terms: 'religious secularism.' This oxymoron can be easily solved when the interpretation of secularism given by Dr Chaim Zhitovsky is understood and accepted. For him secularism is not synonymous with anti-religion.

In public life secularism suggests that both religion and anti-religion are private matters. In the educational system, and in general cultural activities, secularism connotes the exclusion of everything pronounced in the name revealed, superhuman, supernatural authority, and any divinity. Atheistic materialism, which is often thought of as the essence of secularism, is only one of its variants (Goodman, 1989:28-33).

In view of this definition, we learn that Humanistic Judaism emphasises openness to, and respect for, all people. Religious secularism differs from traditional religions in that it aims to promote the general welfare of people and not just of its adherents (Oler, 2000:34-35). Miriam Jerris says that Humanistic Judaism is a religion because it provides to its members rituals and ceremonies by which the community expresses their secular beliefs. Jerris also considers Humanistic Jews a religious people because of their desire and response and promoting the good of others. Rabbi Jerris differentiates between 'religious' and 'religion'. 'Religion', she says, signifies dogmas, institutions, precepts and practices, whereas 'religious' denotes an attitude, a disposition, a commitment. This is the concept of religion that Humanistic Jews accept (Jerris, 1985:50).

One of the subjects that are discussed amongst humanist and secular Jews is 'a secular view of Jewish life'. American Jews have been debating 'Jewish values' and their meaning for the continuity of American Jewish Life. Humanistic Jews approach this subject with certain uneasiness about the ways in which religious Jews are manipulating this expression in order to promote their ideas. With their ideas comes a feeling of superiority, that Jewish values are better than those of other ethnic groups. This sort of attitude is putting off secular Jews and instead of making secular Jews stronger they are becoming weaker.

Secular Jews are challenged to face and debate the argument about their Jewish values without preconceived ideas or hesitation. Wine encourages secular Jews to stimulate debate and study their values in order for them to formulate their views on this subject (Wine, 1990:13). Every group of people develops its values according to its experience throughout history. The Jewish people are no exception to this rule: they also have a rich historical past and through their experience they have developed values which are important to them. The Jews have known social conflicts, as have any other group of people. The prophets in the Old Testament provide a classic example: they denounced social injustice in Israel, a social conflict that needed to be addressed. Throughout their speeches they spoke of ideologies which would make their societies better because the prevailing situation was demanding a re-evaluation of their values. Now this approach of appreciating these sorts of social values can be fully analysed from a secular Jewish perspective. To the religionist the values derive from God, but for the secularist the values arise from the needs of the people and the experiences they are going through; their desire is not just for a better living but for a better life (Dershowitz, 1998:178-180).

The Jewish secular concept is an attempt by secular Jews to identify themselves with cultural and historical aspects of Judaism without becoming theocentric. It is not norms and regulations that need to be obeyed, but aspects that are voluntarily embraced and appreciated without any connotation of religion (Wine, 1990:14-15). It is true to say that various groups of people will undergo similar experiences and that their experiences can lead them to have the same sorts of values. These values will be not just traditional values, but international values, though it would be wrong to assume that the values of any group of people will be accepted as irrevocable and unquestionable. When teaching about values we are talking about principles and ethics established by different groups of people. It is important to accept that these values have an international connotation; the democratic Jewish values are those of an international community, but they are born of historic Jewish experience (Malkin, 2004:4-6).

Katz sees secularism in Jewish life as closely associated one way or another with workers' movements and social trends. He sees it as a natural

philosophical consequence of what was historically happening in the workers' movements. He does not see it as a philosophical fashion that passes away but he believes that this political progressivism is still necessary as part of Jewish secularism (Katz, 1998:14-18). Humanistic Judaism is still developing its approach to religion and it has influenced the structure of society by teaching different principles and ethics. One of the needs Humanistic Judaism saw and tried to fill is the need to give spiritual orientation to those who embrace the movement. Wine tried his best not to leave his followers lost in a void. He wrote a book called *Celebration – A Ceremonial and Philosophic Guide to Humanists and Humanistic Jews*. It was written to supply a demand within the movement and elsewhere for those who value their Jewish identity but do not want to be linked with the conventional religion. It deals with issues in the area of humanism – ambition, hope, honesty, love, leadership, self-respect and many others. It also covers many of the traditional Jewish celebrations but from a humanistic perspective. This book can be used as a manual for Humanistic Jews to hold their ceremonies at different stages of life without linking them to any sort of religious belief and at the same time to retain Jewish identity amongst secular Jews. The book *Celebration* provides both a practical resource for Humanistic Jews but also a philosophical resource. It removes the religious side of the Jewish ceremonies of the cycle of life and also of Jewish holidays, replacing them with something equally valid but ultimately secular. It explains to Humanistic Jews that what they are doing is philosophically correct and does not allow tradition to alienate them from their right to celebrate Jewish festivals. It gives to the secular and Humanistic Jews a teaching that will appeal to the emotions and intellect by showing that Humanistic Judaism does not steal anything from the Jewish heritage but gives a new meaning to it.

The structure of Humanistic Judaism resembles that of any theistic religious organisation. It has its own temples, doctrines, and headquarters, teaching programs, formation of leaders and many other aspects. Humanistic Judaism is against any belief in any sort of deity or any sort of mysticism. However, it has created an atheistic religious system which has a religious framework. Humanistic Judaism has not invented an organisational structure that is unique to them, but has imported its present structure from theistic religious organisations. I reached this conclusion after analysing how the movement is

organised and how the followers are indoctrinated. There are weekly meetings for the followers and songs are sung, candles are lit up, and a lecture on a specific subject is given. This whole structure has been looked at in section 2:9, 'The Expansion of the Jewish Humanistic Movement'. Humanistic Judaism has indeed a religious structure. It has also a missionary vision for the development and expansion of the movement and its ideology in America and beyond. Humanistic Jews are committed to their cause and the success of its ideology.

5.4 Paradox: Spirituality Within Humanistic Judaism

Rabbi Daniel Friedman has helped in the formation of the Humanistic Jewish philosophy by defining some of the terms which are often used but not always explained. Some of the terms have been explained mostly by individuals who were non-humanistic in their approach to the subject. Rabbi Friedman had a considerable input when he decided to engage in the study of spirituality. When he started studying this specific subject he was amazed to notice how little had been written on the subject. He found a quantity of material, however, most of which was in the form of anecdotal testimony concerning how important spirituality is, how much it is needed in our day, and how profoundly it has influenced certain people. Nevertheless, the word 'spirituality' has not been defined in a coherent and intelligible manner (Friedman, 2001:99).

Mitchell Silver teaches philosophy at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. He says openly that he does not believe in God, but he wants to remain Jewish in culture and identification. He approaches the subject of spirituality by saying that secular Jews cannot ignore the stuff of religion. Spirituality is precious amongst people and it needs to be addressed seriously by Humanistic Jews (Silver, 1998:61). Rabbi Friedman (2001:99) took on the task of defining spirituality in a Humanistic Jewish light:

The word spirituality is of course, derived from spirit, which, in its most basic meaning, signifies that which is non-material. Matter and spirit are opposite. The most useful way of understanding the word spirit, as it has come to be understood, is to contrast it with matter; to contrast the spiritual with the material. It is alleged that there are two kinds of reality: the ordinary, material, physical world, which can be experienced by means of the five senses; and another realm, the spiritual, which cannot be touched, tasted, seen, heard, or smelled but can be experienced by means of other non-sensory 'faculties', such as intuition or faith, or by means of consciousness-raising, techniques such as meditation or the use of mind-altering chemicals.

Furthermore, Rabbi Friedman, commenting on theistic theology, says, 'It is said that the non-material world not only exists but it surpasses the material world. The spiritual world is eternal but the material one will pass away.' The reality of the non-material world is much greater than the reality of the material world, since the material world will pass away, but the non-material will remain forever. It is the spiritual world that gives meaning to the material world and people should not concentrate their attention and desire on the material world because they will be blinding themselves to the beauty and supremacy of the spiritual world. It is in the spiritual world that immortality can be found and an explanation of what lies beyond death (Friedman, 1986b:17). Friedman does not agree with what is said about the spiritual world and how philosophers or believers try to explain it. He does not believe that there is any evidence of life after death, and this is central to the humanistic concept that people can live without fears. Consciousness, thinking, awareness are functions of the brain. If the brain stops working, or, if it dies, these qualities disappear, so awareness after death is utterly impossible (Friedman, 1999:80). In people's minds there is a stereotype by which they define spiritual people. It seems that a poet, composer or a religious leader fits into this category, but a businessperson does not. It is incredible because many people who are materialistically minded still have some sort of reverence for those who fit in to the spiritual stereotype. Spiritual stereotype people seem to be those with an aura of mysticism about them – people who will find inspiration for their lives beyond the physical world that we are living in. It seems that these spiritual people have achieved a stage to be envied. It seems that their abnegation of the material world is something supreme to the reality of those who are involved with the reality of the material world. So, this brings us to God, and, since He abides in the spiritual world, in order to find Him it is necessary for people to develop their spiritual talents, such as prayer and meditation. There is a very close link between the spiritual and religious worlds and sometimes these two expressions mean the same thing in people's minds (Friedman, 2002:61-63). As a result, the question can be raised, 'What is the definition of spirituality for Humanistic Jews?' The sort of spirituality that relates to mystical and irrational experiences holds no interest for Humanistic Jews. Yet Humanistic Jews believe in spiritual experiences that are related to the grandeur of nature or the beauty of human creativity. Humanism enables people to feel these experiences more deeply because they

are responsible for their own feelings. There is no need for mysticism to enjoy the beauty of the world or to enjoy the serenity of a sunset or to be touched when an orchestra is playing. All of these are human feelings that need to be encouraged and developed and humans have the control of these feelings as they are the results of reactions of the brain (Seid, 1990:66-67).

Humanism seems to exclude the spiritual or spirituality; however, Rabbi Friedman explains that this is not the case. He explains that even though Humanistic Jews deny mystical spiritual experiences, they are at the same time aware that human beings are much more than just physical material. We are more than just chemical mass, we have a unique personality, will, self, essence, soul – all of these things are part of what make us human. This is what Rabbi Friedman calls the 'human spirit' (Friedman, 2001:101-102). Dan Cohn-Sherbok asserts that secular Humanistic Judaism offers a spiritual framework for Jewish living, a spiritual pathway akin to the non-theistic spiritual approaches of Eastern religious systems. Humanistic Judaism seeks to make sense of human existence without the appeal of the supernatural. Humanistic Jews accept that there are individuals who will make use of mysticism as a way of being spiritual, but claim that those who make use of such crutches will be undermining the true spirituality that can be found within humanism. Human beings must learn to live without the illusion of a divine reward (Cohn-Sherbok, 2001:41-43). Rabbi Friedman is against the theists who affirm that moral beauty and natural beauty are objectively beautiful because they are divinely authored and sanctioned. Rabbi Friedman states that inside every individual lies the capacity to appreciate these things and to enjoy them, from a naturalistic understanding of spirituality, beauty being entirely a human construct (Friedman, 2001:104).

Why is it that people who are secular in their approach to life can be caught in the web of religion? People who appear to have their life in order and who have successful careers can be drawn into religion and they become advocates and promoters of religion. It is possible for people to sometimes become involved in a highly emotional experience which seems to transcend their rational faculty and which they cannot explain or understand. Even though they cannot understand it, or they are encouraged to believe that they cannot understand it, people cannot deny that they have gone through a very strong experience. The

emotional experience may have been caused by different things when visiting one of the world's wonders, witnessing the birth of a child or many other things in life which can cause deep emotional feelings. People are encouraged to find the answers to what they have experienced or are experiencing in the conventional ways of religion. Religion is able to provide one with faith, and this may be the ingredient that is missing in one's experience. Rabbi Friedman sees this as a big challenge for Humanistic Jews. The challenge lies in religion's seeming monopoly in the spiritual market and the perception that anything that opposes it is not genuine. Humanistic Jews need to convince people that a person can be secular in mind and spiritual at the same time. Spiritual does not mean mystic or secular materialistic. A secular person has emotions that react to the beauty of this world and also to its sadness. The Humanistic Jewish commitment to reason rather than to have faith, and their tendency to be in a non-traditional, not to mention non-mystical movement, gives them the appearance of being unspiritual. Humanism can be, and usually is, misunderstood to have business only with the material world – that which is accessible to science, and they are accused of being narrow-minded (Friedman, 1986b:18-20). This is a problem which Friedman specifically addresses, as he sees how serious the ramifications of this issue can be. It is pushing away people who are humanistically minded but prefer to see themselves as non-humanists because of the spiritual sphere. To address this question Rabbi Friedman divides spirituality into two different categories – theistic spirituality and humanistic spirituality.

5.4.1 Theistic Spirituality

Firstly, it is important to break with the idea that theistic religion has the monopoly on spirituality, that everything that is good is just a pale reflection of God, and that everything that seems beautiful in the world (a sunset, a great symphony, a beautiful painting and many other things) is just a reflection of the glory of God. Rabbi Friedman believes that humanists have the right idea about the non-existence of a god, but he argues that humanists do not have the right to manipulate the stage as if their beliefs are the only way. Humanists need to learn through history that we live in a pluralistic world with different sets of beliefs and creeds. Humanists believe that their ideas are correct and better and that is why they embrace them. However, they cannot ignore that there are

those who believe in a deity; they should be respected, and must become partners in building a better world (Friedman, 1983:23).

Even when dealing with 'theistic spirituality' Humanistic Jews put humanity in the centre. In explaining their view of theistic spirituality, Humanistic Jews teach that God was born in human minds and has no existence beyond them. In other words, people created God and not vice versa.

God was born in man's minds and has no existence beyond man-made literature and art. The evidence for the gods having been created by man is their being found only in man-made things – in books and paintings and theologies. The human mind knows only man-made gods. The 'God' we know is a character in literature, a figure fashioned by story-makers and then represented to a believing public by every other art form humans have devised – painting, sculpture and mask, dance, performance and theatre. There is not a religion in the world that has not recourse to literature and the arts to represent its god and there is not a god in the world that has not been described in words or depicted in figure or form. Man's arts fashion the god's image and render its life and deeds in exciting narrative. They endow it with features and traits of character, with commandments and statutes (Malkin, 2004:67).

Jewish theistic spirituality needs to be challenged not just because of its irrational and mystical approach to spirituality, but because of the very nature and moral qualities of the God they worship. Humanistic Jews argue that *Yahweh-Elohim*, the God of the Bible, is just the result of human creativity. Humanistic Jews do not believe in the God of the Bible or any other sort of god or gods. For them the God that is shown in the Bible can be seen as a modern superhero. He cannot be seen as a supreme creator but as a character created by mankind's incredible capability to imagine things and bring them to life through literature and art. In terms of morality, when reading some of the biblical narratives we can see that God does not abide by His own words and approves of things that are against His own teachings; for instance, the sacrifice of Isaac, Jacob cheating on his blind father and other narratives that can be found in the Bible. Theistic Augustinian theology labels Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden as 'original sin'. Humanistic Judaism attributes such a label to God, because He is the one who sinned against the man and the woman by depriving them of the knowledge of good and evil. It is a turning point in the history of humanity. Humankind learns morality and with it shame, the foundation of conscience (Malkin 2004:60-71).

Humanistic Jews believe that there are times when a common point is found between them and those who uphold theistic spirituality. In the quest for the truth and spiritual fulfilment, they can arrive at the same place even by going down different roads. Theistic spirituality and humanistic spirituality can draw strength and comfort from the same text, work of art, ritual or tradition, because of its power to raise us above the solitary human condition (Malkin, 2004:59).

Humanistic Jews believe that theistic Jewish spirituality would be more acceptable if, instead of over-spiritualising biblical texts, theistic Jews would be presenting and interpreting them as they are. Biblical works should be presented as complete works of literature. The literature used to defend theistic Jewish spirituality is often also used by Humanistic Jews to defend humanistic spirituality. It is the mindset of how to approach and read this work that makes the whole difference (Malkin, 2007:190). Humanistic Jews believe that those defending theistic spirituality are misusing Jewish literature to make it fit into their own theology and philosophy. This theistic approach needs to be challenged because the Bible is just a fascinating piece of Jewish literature. However, reading it through the theistic lenses can cause people to try to obtain a spirituality that is unobtainable and unpractical. Theistic spirituality is full of mysticism and can mislead people to a path that will prevent them from seeing the beauty of the essence of true Jewishness (Malkin, 2007:59).

5.4.2 Humanistic Spirituality

In order to establish their teaching on spirituality, Humanistic Jews do not depend only on Humanistic Jewish rabbis. They have gone much further afield to gather information from people who have been pioneers in the history of mankind. For instance, Albert Einstein, an eminent Jewish scientist, has been referred to as one of those who influenced the formation of the doctrine of spirituality within Humanistic Judaism. Humanistic Jews believe that Einstein was a humanist in every sense of the word. He respected science and had a great love for the simple things of life and for those who were in search of the truth. He loved music and played the violin, and it is said that he had a great sense of humour. In his writing Einstein testified that he believed in God, but we should not conclude that he believed in God in the same way Spinoza did. He did not believe in a god who was interested in individual people's lives. Einstein

did not consider Judaism a religion or an expression of faith. He thought the idea of the Jewish God a deplorable one that would cause people to act out of fear and not moral attributes. He saw religion as one characteristic product of the Jewish community, therefore the Jew who gave up his faith would not stop being Jewish (Muraskin, 2006:23-24). This idea that Judaism is much more than a belief in God and is confined to religious rituals is strongly defended by Humanistic Jews. It does not deny the emotions which a sunset, a great symphony, or the birth of child can bring, but does affirm that each of these deserves its own glory in its own right. There is no need to transport this glory to a second person, God, for it to be appreciated and understood. Humanists can celebrate it and enjoy it.

Theistic, mystical religion does not have a monopoly on spirituality. Far from it! There are such things as love, compassion, integrity, meaning, purpose, beauty, joy, exhilaration, wonder – and appreciation thereof. The awareness of the grandeur of nature and of human creativity. The sense of wonder at the birth of a child. The thrill of achievement. The glory of Beethoven. There is an infinite variety of experiences that are spiritual – in the natural humanistic sense. These experiences cannot be reduced to physical sensation, to material functions. They are the experiences that make life beautiful, rich, adventurous and significant. We do not deny them. We affirm them. We celebrate them (Friedman, 1986b:19).

The unconventional ways of Humanistic Judaism seem to have created a lot of problems, misunderstanding and rejection by fellow Jews. It has been necessary for Humanistic Jews to reinterpret what Judaism is, in order first to explain but also to defend the Jewishness of the movement. Humanistic Jews, such as Yaakov Malkin, approach this subject of redefining Judaism according to a humanistic understanding (Malkin, 2004:3).

Friedman thinks that the well-known and often-quoted expression 'Jewish heritage' is very rarely defined clearly and precisely; he sees the need to explain it in an intelligent and satisfactory manner. He suggests that there are two ways of seeing Judaism.

1. The first is the popular, conventional approach, which views Judaism either as a religion or ideology – a system of beliefs, practices, and rituals or a system of ideas and values. With this definition, the Jewish people are defined as a religious community that upholds the same religious values, or as an ideological community united by the same Jewish values. Rabbi Friedman believes that the acceptance of such a concept is a mistake; he

goes on to explain that this concept is not empirically verifiable. There is no idea, belief, or value that the Jews always have accepted that constitutes and causes their Jewishness. He proposes a different way of Jewish heritage, and he thinks it is a more acceptable one (Friedman, 1986a:5).

2. He suggests a historical approach that views Judaism not as a belief system or ideology but as the experience of the Jewish people. The experiences that they have been through during their 4000-year history are what made them to be what they are. Of course it encapsulates their beliefs but it is not defined or limited by them. The Jews are an evolving historical not ideological people. There is no such thing as an exclusive idea or group of ideas that are more Jewish than others. Truth occupies a universal, not an ethnic, domain. What the Jewish people experienced is part of their identity, and it is not only confined to the Jewish ethnicity, but applies to all peoples (Friedman, 1986a:6):

According to its historical view of Judaism, Jewish people are Jewish not by virtue of their beliefs, values, or commitments, but by virtue of their presence within Jewish history. They may be born into it or they may choose to participate in it. In either case, Jewishness is not a religious or ideological identity. Nor it is a national, racial, or cultural identity. It is a historical identity.

Judaism does not include only a single set of beliefs and values; it also includes authoritarians and libertarians, Zionists and non-Zionists, theists and humanists; it encompasses people from all walks of life. It becomes a relative situation that is based on people's experience and it is they who decide how true it is for them and the value of it. The freedom of this decision is part of our Jewish heritage, says Rabbi Friedman. He does not see such freedom available to Christians or Moslems, who are bound by a doctrine that takes precedence over the people. It is not possible to have a set of beliefs that will remain because our beliefs follow and flow out of our experience. As such, they are subject to change as our experience changes. This applies to all existing religions, for people and cultures will suffer changes and consequently also religious movements. Rabbi Friedman sees this concept of 'Jewish heritage' as an experience of emancipation that will free individuals from all prior doctrine, from inherited dogma and from authoritarian structures. The objective is for people to be themselves (Friedman, 1986a:5, 6). Humanistic spirituality is all about people finding in themselves reasons to live fulfilled lives. It is not about people having experience outside the human body or illogical emotional storms. It is 100

percent confined within the human body and under the control of human intelligence. It is the emotional responses to different kinds of stimulations that appeal to our human feelings. It is not authorised or authenticated by any sort of deity. It is totally human and for that reason it is called 'humanistic spirituality'. Humanistic Jews see it as genuine and fulfilling. It is better than theistic spirituality because people are encouraged to develop their own emotional abilities to achieve instead of depending on an outside spiritual influence to cause it to happen.

Humanistic Jews defend the idea that their spirituality is the only one that is genuinely able to meet the spiritual void in our modern Western society. Today, there is a great spiritual void in the Western world and many secular people are trying to fill it by searching in the Eastern religions. Humanistic Judaism does not see these Eastern religions as a valid alternative. Therefore, the reason why secular Western people are engaging with Eastern religions or other religious movements is because the level of spirituality in the West is inadequate (Malkin, 2004:40). This challenging spiritual situation also proves to be a golden opportunity for Humanistic Jews to present their spirituality to secular seekers. The Humanistic Jewish spirituality does not depend on any sort of mysticism to make it original or truthful. It starts and finishes with mankind. Any sort of theology or philosophy that is mystical and non-rational is beyond the scope of humanistic interest. Mysticism is foreign to Humanistic Jews, who rely upon reason as their guide to truth (Cousens, 1993:53). However, a spirituality that motivates people to develop their own ability to love, to be generous, to help others, and to exercise many other good attributes is the sort of spirituality Humanistic Jews are interested in and promote. Humanistic Jews defend the idea that human beings are responsible for their own feelings (Cousens, 1993:72-73). It is a spirituality that is fully controlled by human beings and there is not an outside spiritual agent able to influence or control their human spiritual experience. Any sort of mysticism is foreign to Humanistic Jews, who believe that the way to know the truth is via rational roots, so mystical feelings distract people from having a true human spirituality (Cousens, 1993:53). Humanistic Jews see mysticism as an intruder in the way of a true spirituality and not an endorser of it. People who opt for finding spirituality through mysticism are deceived by the wrong teaching and the consequence of it is a false experience

of spirituality. Those who opt to find spirituality through the path of intelligent reasoning will ultimately experience what true spirituality really is. Humanistic Jews do not see themselves as people who deny spirituality; they see themselves as people who encourage true non-mystical spirituality. Malkin concludes that the secular agenda must include a reaffirmation of spirituality in humanistic education and a sense of community and culture.

One of the grave dangers facing secularism in general, and Jewish secularism in particular, is the apparent loss of spirituality or even the perception of its need, as if spirituality somehow needed to be 'religious'. However, secularism, in the full sense of the word, welcomes and even generates spirituality in manners that are worth noting. Disregarding the obvious human need for spirituality will only open the door for religion. The secular agenda must include a reaffirmation of spirituality in humanistic education and a sense of community and culture (Malkin, 2004:37).

Chapter 6

AN EVANGELICAL CRITIQUE

An evangelical believer, such as myself, upholds the doctrine taught in the gospels: salvation through the sacrifice of Christ, the authority of the Scriptures as a true word inspired by God, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart. Salvation is granted because of God's grace and not because of human merit. These convictions are encapsulated in the *solas* of the Protestant Reformation: in Latin *solus Christus, sola scriptura, solo Spiritus, sola gracia* (Chung, 2003:199-201). Evangelical believers do not simply belong to a certain denomination. They believe that there are particular biblical doctrines that make the Christian faith distinct from all the others (Boa, 2010:1).

The Humanistic Jews do not believe in any sort of deity and they certainly abhor the idea of the Jews being a people chosen by YHWH, who would fulfil his own purposes among mankind. YHWH is the name of the God of the Israelites, revealed to Moses as the four Hebrew consonants called the *Tetragrammaton*.

At the headquarters of Humanistic Judaism in Detroit, USA, the *Torah* is exhibited in a glass cabinet as an important piece of Jewish literature but not something that should be given credit or followed. However, Christians believe that the Bible is the word of YHWH and that it contains clear teachings about the Jewish people and the important part they have to play in YHWH's plans. They are chosen but not favourites; YHWH has chosen them for a purpose (Richards, 2002:60)

Humanistic Jews do not believe in following the *Torah*. The *Torah* is considered by them to be an inaccurate piece of writing that has been proved historically and scientifically wrong, therefore it cannot be used to guide people's lives (Wine, 1995:136-138). Evangelicals take a very different view. They believe the Bible is the Word of God and that God inspired men and women to write it down and convey his will as to how mankind should manage their lives. The Scriptures give us guidelines on how to live our lives and we submit to these teachings even when our emotions are dragging us in a different direction. John

Stott teaches that the Bible is primarily a book that instructs men and women about their salvation:

Its primary purpose is practical. It is more a guidebook than a textbook, more a book of salvation than a book of science. This is not to say that the biblical and scientific accounts of the world are in conflict, but rather that they are complementary. Further, God's purpose in Scripture is not to reveal facts which can be discovered by the scientific method of observation and experiment, but to reveal truths that are beyond the scope of science, in particular God's way of salvation through Jesus Christ (Stott, 1992:165-168).

6.1 A Biblical Perspective on What Happened to Israel When She Stopped Following YHWH

In this chapter, in keeping with the nature of a normal Evangelical critique, I assume the accuracy of the claims and teachings contained in the Old and New Testaments. Time and again I will provide sufficient context for the reader to discern what actually the consequences were whenever Israel stopped following YHWH.

The Bible teaches that Abram and his descendants, the Israelites, were chosen by YHWH to bring about his purposes for mankind. In the very beginning, when YHWH created Adam and Eve, YHWH created them with the intent of having fellowship with them. YHWH never created mankind to be out of fellowship with him (Evans, 1974:127, 128). Straight after the fall of mankind YHWH promised a Redeemer. YHWH was going to provide for mankind a Redeemer who would strike Satan on the head and rescue mankind from Satan's dominion. YHWH would make a way for them to return to Him and for them to have fellowship once again. This promise of redemption can be found in Genesis 3:1-15. Isaiah 59:2 teaches that sin makes separation between mankind and YHWH. The Hebrew Bible was first concerned with the people who were later in history called Jews. The prophet Isaiah was in this passage addressing directly the people of Israel. Sin was not created by YHWH or even allowed by Him. Sin is the consequence of disobeying YHWH's command (Finney, 1976:434). In general, evangelical theologians defend the doctrine of 'original sin'. Adam and Eve were not originally created in sin. However, since Adam and Eve sinned, sin entered into the world (Romans 5:12). Since then, mankind has been born in sin and this has been passed down throughout all generations because of Adam's fall (Braaten & Jenson, 1990:382). In the Garden of Eden YHWH did

not want Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Even though Humanistic Jews do not believe in the Bible, they take great pride in the fall of mankind. What Evangelical Christians see as a tragedy is seen by them as good fortune (Evans, 1974:129-130). In Romans 5:12 Paul wrote, 'Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned...'. The view of traditional Judaism is that Paul's concept of mankind inheriting Adam's sin is wrong. Traditional Judaism disagrees with what Paul wrote in *Romans* 5:12.

Nowadays we know that Paul was wrong to understand the sin as that of a particular individual, Adam, and not the generic sin of the entire human race. We also believe that St Augustine was wrong to suggest that this 'original sin' was handed on through sexual intercourse (it has been difficult for Christian theology to develop a healthy understanding of sexuality as a consequence of this) (Cohn-Sherbok & Grey, 2005:99-100).

Humanistic Jews see human disobedience as a positive feature. It means that men and women are just human. It is not an act to be horrified at but actually to be admired.

What is the first deed of Man after his creation? He revolts against God. This deed that was so long presented as the original downfall and sin of Man, does not it express supremely on the greatest force of Man: ultimate independence of spirit, refusal to be denied something that he believes should be his by right, readiness to challenge even his Creator and take risks in order to perfect himself? (Katz, 1983a:19).

However, far from being the positive thing Humanistic Judaism claims, when Adam and Eve ate of the fruit, the whole of mankind was condemned to eternal separation from YHWH. The Humanistic Jews believe that in all the rebellions against the God of Israel mankind always gained something important instead of losing something primordial (Katz, 1983a:19). The Evangelical perspective, however, is that mankind lost a lot every time they rebelled against the Creator. YHWH in his great love and mercy provided for us the promise of redemption through a Redeemer who would destroy the works of the evil one. "He, the woman's offspring will crush your head and you will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:15). We read in Genesis 2:25, "The man and woman were both naked and felt no shame." After the fall humans lost their innocence and needed to be sanctified in order to be forgiven and have fellowship with God (Finney, 1976:384-397). Through the sacrifice of Christ we find redemption for our souls: "He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12). Wiersbe maintains that the Jewish

ceremonial law could provide only an outward cleansing. “But the blood of Christ, shed once for all, purges the conscience and gives the believer an unchanging and perfect standing before YHWH” (Wiersbe, 1995:701). Reading Genesis 3 to 11, it is clear that humankind went from bad to worse. The first murder took place, then the Flood, then the Tower of Babel scenario with its confusion of the languages. In the midst of this entire dreadful situation YHWH had not forgotten his promise of redeeming humankind. Disobedience brought humankind under Satan’s dominion. Since men and women rebelled against God many tragedies came upon humankind. All these tragedies were the consequences of disobedience to YHWH’s commandment that is found in Genesis 2:15-17. However, when the fall of humankind took place YHWH promised in Genesis 3:15 a Redeemer who would destroy Satan’s work.

In Genesis 11 we learn about a man called Terah, brought up in Ur of the Chaldees, who left his country with his son Abraham, his daughter-in-law Sarah and his grandson Lot, and headed towards Canaan. Terah had two other sons; one was called Nahor and other one Haran. Haran was the father of Lot and he died when Terah was still living in Ur. In their journey to Canaan they came to a place called Haran and there they stayed. When he was still in Haran YHWH appeared to him and told him to go to a land He was going to show him. We find this command to go to a different country in Genesis 12:1: “The Lord had said to Abraham, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you’.” After Terah died, Abraham and his wife and nephew Lot carried on with their journey towards Canaan.

Ur was a very idolatrous place and YHWH prompted Terah and his family to leave behind all they had and knew in order to start a great nation. He did this so that Abraham could have an important part in God’s plan of salvation. It is amazing that YHWH spoke to Abraham and revealed Himself to him. YHWH said in Genesis 12:2-3:

I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse, and all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you.

It is clear in the verses above that YHWH made a covenant with Abram in turning him into a great nation. This was an amazing promise; however, Abram had no children. This whole promise of a people coming from Abram was crucial as part of God's plans of redeeming mankind.

Here we begin to see the plan of God for the salvation of the world in these four promises to Abram, whom God renamed Abraham (which means the 'father of many'): a people who would come from him, a place that they would be given, a purpose that would bless all the peoples and that his promises would be forever, or in perpetuity (Richards, 2002: 52, 54).

In the first chapter of Genesis we saw God creating and blessing humanity. Now YHWH tells a specific man, Abram, to be a blessing. This man needed to take up his responsibility of being a blessing and not just expect things to fall into place.

Some years later Isaac was born. The name Isaac in Hebrew means laughter. It was a laughing matter that a woman who was very old was having a baby. There is a lot of similarity between Isaac and Jesus. Each was an only child, each born of a miracle – Isaac's mother was old and Jesus' mother was a virgin. One day YHWH asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son on a mountain He was going to show to him. The account of Isaac's sacrifice is found in Genesis 22. Here we can see yet more similarities between Isaac and Jesus. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place for sacrificing Isaac. Jesus after three days rose from the dead. Isaac carried the wood on his back, Jesus carried the wooden cross. When Abraham was going to slay the boy an angel stopped him and he looked and he saw a lamb among the bushes and he sacrificed it. YHWH said to Abraham, 'Now I know that you fear God' (Genesis 22:12). When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said, 'Behold the Lamb of YHWH which takes away the sins of the world'. YHWH provided a lamb to take Isaac's place which symbolises the Lord Jesus. Jesus was the Passover Lamb who died for our sins. The meaning of the sacrifice and resurrection did take place in Abraham's heart. He knew that God would raise Isaac from the dead as Hebrews 11:19 expresses it. God spared Isaac but did not spare his own begotten Son, for in John 1:29 we read, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.' John 3:16 reads, 'For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.' The mountain where Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice

is Mount Moriah, the very place where Solomon built the temple (Wiersbe, 1995:54).

From YHWH's promise to Adam and Eve until the promise to Abraham, from Mount Moriah until Calvary Mount where Jesus the Messiah died for our sins, many things took place in order to try to stop or destroy YHWH's plan of redemption for mankind. Israel's disobedience caused many problems. Contrary to Humanistic Judaism's claim that disobedience was a kind of positive blessing, the opposite is the case. Throughout the Scriptures every time Israel stopped following YHWH, life became very hard for them. To follow YHWH does not mean to simply acknowledge that He exists, but to show true belief by living our life as it pleases Him. YHWH first led the nation of Israel through the faith and obedience of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Robinson, 1957:20-26).

Now as we move from the patriarchs to Moses I shall show that once again, far from bringing blessings, Israel's disobedience brought disaster and death. After the era of the patriarchs the nation of Israel entered the Mosaic period. Because of different circumstances the Israelites found themselves working as slaves in Egypt and YHWH in his mighty power rescued them from Egypt and decided to take them back to the land of Canaan. That proved to be a very trying and difficult journey (Robinson, 1957:27-38). YHWH raised up a prophet called Moses and through him created a religious system that in the future would be called Judaism. This is the system of thought that the most orthodox religious Jews try to follow. According to the orthodox Jews Moses received special revelation from YHWH with rules and regulations of how the Israelites should live their lives. Humanistic Jews see these as a set of rules and regulations that the Jewish people are expected to live by (Cousens, 1993:30). However, Humanistic Jews do not see these rules as the Orthodox Jews see them and Humanistic Jews do not abide by these rules. We read in Exodus 20 the story of Moses going to Mount Sinai to receive the commandments from YHWH. The people thought they had been deserted by Moses and they went back to idol worship. In Exodus 32 we read about the people of Israel rebelling against the Lord in the desert of Sinai where they made a golden calf and started

worshipping it. Exodus 32:28 records the consequences of this rebellion: three thousand people died.

The more traditional forms of Judaism and also Humanistic Judaism fail to see the presence of the Messiah – Christ Jesus in the *Pentateuch* and throughout the Old Testament. Traditional Judaism and Evangelical Christians alike believe in the authority of God's word. However, traditional Judaism does not believe in the New Testament and they do not see Christ as the fulfilment of the law or as the promised redeemer. Evangelical Christians owe a great deal to traditional Judaism for preserving the scriptures. However traditional Jewish Theists then and now do not see the Old Testament pointing to Christ as their Messiah, nor do they accept him as their coming redeemer. Here, Theistic Jews and Evangelical Christians come to a bifurcation on the road and follow a different set of beliefs. The Judaism Moses brought foreshadowed Christ even in the very idea of deliverance. But when the deliverer foreshadowed in Moses actually came, the forms of Judaism concocted by the Jewish leaders led them to reject their own Messiah and redeemer. Jesus made this very clear when he declared to them their failure to understand that their own scriptures testified to him (John 8:32-59). Whatever forms Jewish Theism has adopted since still treat the Old Testament in such a way as to render them blind to their own Messiah.

Humanistic Jews say that religious pluralism was present in the life of the Israelites in the ancient times. Yaakov Malkin, who is active in Humanistic Judaism circles, believes that the picture the Bible portrays of YHWH is one that most people do not want to see or admit. The God of Moses, according to Malkin, is a hot-tempered one who is always manifesting his anger towards his followers at any sign of rebellion. The idea of monotheism that many believers and theologians defend as biblical is not right, because the Bible itself reveals the reality of a pluralistic religion in Israel and not one of monopoly.

The Bible presents a multifaceted picture of reality, which contradicts any exclusive theological view of God and his relationship with humankind. The many styles and ideologies represented in the biblical literature help the reader to see ancient Judaism as pluralistic, having many cultural and religious streams and many forms of artistic and literary expression (Malkin, 1995:14-15).

Malkin is right in saying that religious pluralism existed in ancient Israel. However, just because Israel gives in to pluralism, it does not mean that it is

approved by YHWH. The first of the Ten Commandments says, “You shall have no other gods before me’ (Exodus 20:3). YHWH demanded exclusive worship from his people. It is clear from the context of the book of Exodus that Israel’s disobedience shown in pluralism did not bring them blessings.

By reading the books of Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy we can see the history of the Israelites in their journey to the Promised Land. According to Numbers 13, Moses sent twelve spies to inspect the land. They were very impressed with the land but ten of them gave a bad report about the land and the danger that awaited them because of its inhabitants. Caleb and Joshua tried to silence the other ten spies, saying that Israel could surely overcome their enemies if they were willing to trust in the Lord. Because they decided to rebel against the Lord, YHWH threatened to destroy them and start a whole new nation through Moses (Numbers 14:13-23). Moses interceded for them and YHWH spared them but as the consequence of their rebellion, none of them were going to enter the Promised Land. Once again no positive things came out of their rebellion despite the claims of Humanistic Judaism.

YHWH used different methods to refine His people and teach them to obey Him (Robinson, 1957:30-38). In Numbers 21 we read the stories of the Israelites once again rebelling against Moses and grumbling against YHWH. Snakes were sent among the people to bite them, causing many of them to die. In Numbers 25 we read about the men from Israel indulging themselves in immorality with the Moabite women and starting to sacrifice to their gods. As a consequence of their actions 24,000 people died of a plague. Once again this was the consequence of religious pluralism. This refutes Malkin’s defence of religious pluralism. Despite the consequences, we see Malkin defending the existence of religious pluralism in Canaan and its influence upon the Israelites.

From the days of Israelite settlement in the land of Canaan, Canaanite religious beliefs and practices – particularly the cults of Ashtoreth and Asherah, Baal and Moloch – spread within Judaism. These polytheistic religions coexisted with, and sometimes even supplemented, monotheistic religion in both kingdoms, as in the period in which the cult of Baal and Ashtoreth became the official state religion in the kingdom of the tribes (Malkin, 2003:73).

But Malkin is hardly making an argument here. He is simply stating that pluralism existed. Things are not right simply by virtue of existing. According to

the Scriptures, pluralism is an evil with vast consequences such as Israel experienced.

According to the actual biblical account, it is abundantly evident that the Jews would have been much better off if they had lived their lives according to the principles of YHWH's word. But this is the case with any disobedience, not just pluralism. We see the same terrible consequences of disobedience in Nehemiah 8, in a period of time when Ezra the priest was in charge. He tried very hard to implement the teachings of the *Torah*, and was strongly against the Jews marrying people from a different nation (Ezra 9-10). The Humanistic Jews see it as an act of racialism (Wine, 1995:46), but Christians see interfaith marriage as something not approved by YHWH's word, and this teaching is supported in different parts of the Scriptures (Deuteronomy 7, 1 Corinthians 7). Christians defend the principle of obedience to YHWH's word (1Samuel 15:22). However, because they reject the biblical record, Humanistic Judaism is able to pick and choose the passages in the Bible and adapt them according to their own beliefs. But for these very reasons the justifications they use are both arbitrary and subjective. For this reason they can hardly be accepted as representative expressions of any form of Judaism presented in Scripture. They exclude YHWH from the biblical equation and for that they become true 'theological contortionists'.

Throughout this section we have given prime examples of how very strongly the actual record of Scripture time and again shows that the consequence of disobedience was never positive, never a good thing. If space and time permitted, this could be shown throughout the Old and New Testament scriptures, but the examples from Scripture that have been given are more than sufficient to refute the notion that disobedience ever brought blessings or positive things into the life of either Israel or humankind in general. Indeed the very fact that the remedy for disobedience was that God gave his only Son shows how very evil disobedience was, and had not God made a way for humanity, disobedience would have left all humanity without hope, with no means of redemption. The final outcome of disobedience can never be good, but only the greatest Hell imaginable: continual separation of humanity from God.

6.2 Theological Contortion and the Feasts and Festivals of YHWH

Humanistic Jews attempt some theological manoeuvres to try to get their point across. This is clearly seen in their interpretation of the Jewish feasts. They often seem to use the Bible without any regard for context or origins. Humanistic Judaism attempts to connect with the cultural side of the Bible because they think it links them with Judaism. But from a rational standpoint, how can an arbitrary and selective use of the Bible enable them to be taken seriously? Humanistic Judaism appreciates the cultural side of the feasts but does not accept the focus of YHWH in them. Humanistic Judaism sees the feasts as a celebration of human achievements. Humanistic Judaism views those who celebrate the Jewish festivals in a theocentric way as making a peace offering to a self-centred vengeful deity who will punish them if the offering is not brought. Evangelicals, in light of the biblical teachings, see these feasts as Israel's celebration of God's faithfulness.

6.3 Science, the Feasts and God

Humanistic Judaism has shown a desire to retain the Jewish Feasts, while omitting the God on whom these festivals were all focused. Humanistic Jews defend the idea that any allegiance to a supernatural being is unscientific. It would appear then that they seek to make science their basis for omitting the supernatural from the feasts. But a question that arises from this assumption is the following: 'If God is omitted, is there any basis for celebrating the festivals at all'?

Richard Dawkins, a famous British atheist, sees no harm in Jewish atheists wanting to hold on to their traditions out of loyalty as long as Jewish atheists do not believe the traditions ever involved the supernatural (Dawkins, 2007:35). However, it is very questionable whether anyone should hold on to something just because it is a tradition. Traditions need to be questioned and not just perpetuated. The British mathematician John Lennox, Christian apologist and Emeritus Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford, speaks about Dawkins and his followers who are normally referred to as the New Atheists. He highlights the fact that they do not want just to disprove the existence of God, but that they want to replace Him with science. Lennox notes that an

article appearing in the *New Scientist* with the title 'In Place of God' reveals the objective of the New Atheists.

This title reveals that the objective of the New Atheists is not simply to complete the process of secularization by banishing God from the universe; but it is to put something in place of God. And it is not simply that society should replace God with something else; it is that science should do so. Apparently no area of human thought or activity other than science is qualified to contribute anything useful. Science is king. Of course, science is a set of disciplines practised by human beings; so the ultimate objective would appear to be to make these scientists the ultimate arbiter of what is not only to be believed by all other human beings, but what is to be worshiped by them – remember it is God they wish to replace. Do we detect more shades of totalitarianism? (Lennox, 2011:20, 21).

Would it not be a more intelligent choice if atheistic Jews dropped anything to do with Judaism instead of trying to reinvent it because of their nostalgia for traditions? Humanistic Jews, by such actions, can easily be viewed as diluting Judaism and by no means re-affirming it. This poses yet another problem for Humanistic Jews who try to reinterpret the Jewish festivals. In section 4.1.3 of this thesis there is a piece written about the feast of *Shavuot*. In traditional Judaism and also in evangelical circles this festival is used as a means of thanksgiving to God for the first fruits (Cousens, 1993:71, 72). Humanistic Judaism reinterpreted this festival to suit their doctrinal agenda. However, their attempt to reinterpret *Shavuot* is not acceptable. For them, *Shavuot* is a time to study the *Torah* and other Jewish literature. The *Torah* is seen just as any other Jewish literature: it can be admired but it is not a manual on how mankind should live their lives (Wine, 1983a:11-13). However, why study the *Torah* and at the same time try to exclude the main character in the book, YHWH? It is inappropriate to have such an approach to *Shavuot*. *Shavuot* is also called the Festival of the First Fruits and it is celebrated fifty days after Passover. *Shavuot* in traditional Judaism is a time for the giving of the law. For Christians, it is the gift of the Spirit. The Christian church gives a new meaning to it. Jesus died during the Passover festival and then fifty days after that the Holy Spirit came upon the believers and it was the birth of the church. Christians see the feast of Pentecost as the true fulfilment of *Shavuot*. This new meaning is congruent and consistent with the Bible. It is understood to be the first fruits of a world spiritual harvest (Metzger and Coogan, 1993:227).

The *Hanukkah* festival was mentioned in this thesis in section 4.1.2, which explains the religious importance of this festival for religious Jews and the new meaning Humanistic Judaism seeks to give to it. True to their beliefs, wherever there is the mention of God Humanistic Judaism tries to both discredit and omit him. A theory is invented by them in order to justify the existence of such a festival in their culture. In traditional Judaism *Hanukkah* celebrates the miracle of the *menorah* that gave light without oil when the temple in Jerusalem was rededicated under the Maccabean leadership. The Humanistic Jewish theory is that *Hanukkah* is the celebration of human courage and not a tribute to divine power. Even today *Hanukkah* exists to celebrate human courage (Jerris, 1993:30, 31). But how can such a disconnected theory be justified? It is like someone trying to take Romeo out of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Humanistic Jews, who are trying to disassociate the person of YHWH from the Jewish festivals, are trying to impose their story on the ancient accounts responsible for the feasts and festivals in the first place. This approach of exchanging one truth by 'my truth' is a mistake that is dangerous and needs to be avoided (Koukl, 2017:32).

The festival of *Pesakh* is discussed in section 4.1.2. This is another feast full of religious connotations for Jews and Christians alike. Humanistic Jews reinterpret it to make it relevant for their own movement. For Humanistic Jews, *Pesakh* is not about the divine presence who led the Israelites out of Egypt. Throughout their history Jewish people have experienced many different 'exoduses' and these should be celebrated as such instead of a mythical ideal of YHWH (Wine, 1995:178). Once again it is clear that Humanistic Jews are trying to abolish the main character YHWH from this festival, to implement their own story. If we used this criterion, all the great works of art would have to be re-interpreted or dismissed. What would then happen to Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel or Leonardo Da Vinci's *Last Supper*? How would Humanistic Judaism go about re-interpreting these masterpieces of Judeo-Christian heritage?

Humanistic Jews appear to embrace 'Realism'. Realism is the commonsense belief that there is a reality external to our minds that includes material and immaterial things (Turek, 2014:36). Humanistic Jews apply the law of Realism when dealing with emotions and the arts; they even call it a spiritual experience.

They believe in spiritual experiences that are related to the grandeur of nature or the beauty of human creativity. They even maintain that humanism enables people to feel these experiences more deeply because they are responsible for their own feelings. There is no need for mysticism to enjoy the beauty of the world or to enjoy the serenity of a sunset or to be touched when an orchestra is playing. All of these are human feelings that need to be encouraged and developed and humans have the control of these feelings as they are the result of a reaction of the brain (Seid, 1990:66-67). Why then embrace Realism, yet apply it so arbitrarily and selectively? Humanistic Judaism's selective application of Realism, by logical implication, forbids it to the Judeo-Christian heritage. Yet this very heritage and history and reason for feasts and celebrations can never make sense or retain its beauty or art apart from the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the Saviour sent into the world. How strange to have a spirituality that omits God who is Spirit. But, of course, if, as they claim, their spirituality is based on a reaction of the brain, how can one call this spirituality if spirituality is something immaterial? What Humanistic Judaism leaves us with is a strange hybrid called 'material spirituality' derived from the physiological brain.

6.4 The Serious Consequences to Israel When Central Pillars of Judaism were Removed

As any building needs a good foundation and structure to be able to stand, the same applies to nations, societies, organisations and any other gathering of people. The Evangelical movement and the more traditional expressions of Judaism have a lot in common when it comes to being inspired and guided by the Word of God. However, the ways of interpreting it and the content greatly differ. Both traditional forms of Judaism and Evangelical Christians believe the word of God is inspired by God and is authoritative. Traditional forms of Judaism live within the framework of Salvation by the Law. Consequently, they inhibit God's grace and redeeming power. Christians see the Law as a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ and this was Paul's argument in Galatians 3, and elsewhere. Evangelical Christians and traditional forms of Judaism differ concerning the scriptures in terms of content, because the former accepts the New Testament as the revealed and inspired word of God but the latter does not. The history of the nation of Israel proves that every time Israel abandoned

the teachings of YHWH and embraced a different god or followed teachings alien to the *Torah* the political, social and financial consequences were very serious ones. The whole nation suffered a lot because of its rebellion against YHWH. The same applies to the church of Christ today. There is a fundamental need for the church to learn from the history of Israel and its own history the importance of remaining true to the God of the Bible. Humanistic Jews do not accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God; they believe it is a great piece of literature but full of errors and it should not be used to guide people's lives. However, from an Evangelical perspective there is a great respect for the Bible as literature but also it is the authoritative Word of God and it contains the best teachings of how men and women should live their lives. To take away the *Torah* from Judaism opens the floodgates for humanism and takes God from its central place. This is the objective of Humanistic Judaism, to take the central place that belongs to YHWH and this cannot be achieved as long there are those who believe in the divine inspiration of the *Torah*.

As we earlier learned, Humanistic Jews do not believe in the divine formation of the nation of Israel – there is nothing special about it. With such an approach Humanistic Judaism takes away an important reason for the survival of the Jewish race: YHWH has a specific plan for them. Evangelical believers understand that the Israelites are not favourites but are chosen to fulfil YHWH's purposes; as it is written in Romans 2:11, "God does not show favouritism".

The Jewish feasts in the Bible were ways of encouraging people to come together to have a time of celebration and thanksgiving. As we saw, the feasts are meant to be times of celebration and togetherness. The Humanistic Jews like the cultural side of the feasts and they will use them as ways of attracting nostalgic Jews to their movement. It is like people who celebrate a birthday party and enjoy it but do not want anything to do with the birthday boy. It is just not possible to disassociate the biblical religious feasts from the person of YHWH. For the feasts to have a real meaning and reason to be celebrated, the centrality of the presence of YHWH must be preserved.

The Temple in Jerusalem has had a central part to play in the survival of Judaism. Even the Humanistic Jews know the importance of the Temple. It is

impossible to disassociate any sort of Judaism from the Temple. Actually, even the Humanistic Jews have their own temple – the Birmingham Temple in Detroit, USA. However, they do not like the idea of the Temple in Jerusalem. The reason for that is very clear: it exists for the worship of YHWH. As the Humanistic Jews do not believe in Him, they abhor the idea of a temple being devoted to Him and the central part it has to play in the history of Israel. As we showed, the Temple played a very important part in the Jewish identity and also in the Jewish survival. In fact, every time in the history of Israel, when a foreign nation invaded with the objective of destroying her, the Temple was always ransacked or destroyed. The Temple is a very important pillar within Judaism and Humanistic Jews are aware of that; that is why they have their own temple.

Humanistic Jews will make use of different Jewish symbols and festivities in order to attract others to their movement. They will reinterpret them in order to be seen to be Jewish. However, it seems they cannot see the serious damage which is done to Judaism if the religious pillars are removed from Judaism, whether the feasts, the *Torah* or the Temple.

6.5 Was Secularisation the blessing that preserved real Judaism as Humanistic Judaism Claims?

When the Babylonians were conquered by the Persians the Jews were under Persian rule and were shown some favour and kindness (Robinson, 1957:144-145). Politically, the community was wholly dependent on the Persian government and was ruled by a Persian officer (Robinson, 1957:157). The Humanistic Jews explain that the religious leaders seized the opportunity to take political control, hiding under the garment of religion (Wine, 1995?:47-48). However, because the Jews were under the political power of Persia, they could not have elected a king, for it would have been seen as an act of treason against the Persian king. In their difficult position the best option was to make use of their religion as a means to guide the Jews, to keep them together and preserve their Jewish identity (Robinson, 1957:156-157). The Persians were not going to remain in power forever; their kingdom lasted two hundred years. The last Persian king was Darius III who faced Alexander the Great and fought the final battle of Gaugamela in 331 BCE when the great city of Babylon received Alexander as its liberator (Menoudakos, n.d.:71-73). History teaches

that the Persian rule had a very important role to play in the history and survival of Judaism. During the Persian Empire the Jews were able to exercise their religion during their time in exile. This was a powerful step for the re-establishment of the Temple and its religious practices. Around this centre it was possible for Judaism to develop without political interference (Robinson, 1957:164,165).

The next period was the Hellenistic one: 333-63 BCE (Robinson, 1957:166). Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire but he died young in the year 323 BCE. After his death some of his generals started striving amongst themselves for power. Three kingdoms evolved from this power struggle: Macedonia, Egypt and the kingdom of Seleucia. The kingdom of Egypt, even though smaller than the other two, had great significance for Judaism. Alexandria became the capital and Ptolemy the king. He invaded Jerusalem and tried to subdue the Jews to a Hellenistic type of culture. Humanistic Jews such as Wine see this as a wonderful process for the secularisation of the Jews. The Hellenistic ways of life appealed to the most enlightened Jews and led them to embrace a more secular way of life (Wine, 1995?:53-57).

For example, Humanistic Judaism points to the integrating power of the Greek translation of the *Torah* composed by order of Ptolemy II. However, Christian believers see it from a different perspective: it was a preparation for the coming of the Messiah. The scriptures became available in Greek, the language the New Testament was written in. This made it possible for Jews of the Diaspora and non-Jews to have access to the scriptures in a language they could understand. First the *Torah* was translated into Greek, and also the rest of the Old Testament. The translation is known as the Septuagint (Robinson, 1957:169-170).

However, the aim of this translation was not at all secularisation! If Ptolemy II asked for the *Torah* to be translated, it was so that he could better understand the Jewish religion. As for the Alexandrian Jews, it was a way to conserve their Scriptures, even though the Jews were living far from their land in a Greek-speaking country. This enabled Jewish philosophers in Alexandria to combine

elementary wisdom sayings with passages borrowed from the Pentateuch (Rowley, 1967:229-235).

Because of this Hellenistic cultural invasion, some Jews felt their Jewish ways of life were being challenged negatively. As a result, traditional Judaism experienced some sort of revival under the leadership of the Maccabees, who are termed Hasmonians in rabbinic literature (P. Alexander, 2001:256,258). The Maccabees were a family of three brothers, but one of the brothers called Judas took prominence above the other two (Robinson, 1957:182). Humanistic Jews teach that they used religion to gain political power and influence in Judea (Wine, s.a.]:59). However, the other result of the Maccabees' conquest was the survival of the Jewish culture. They rekindled the flame of a purer Judaism and they knew it would appeal to their compatriots. Under their leadership the Jews enjoyed 70 years of independence (Robinson, 1957:182). The Temple had a central part to play in the role of Judaism and Jewish identity. During the Hellenistic period the Jewish culture and religion was affronted when the King of Assyria, Antiochus Epiphanes, plundered the city in 167 BCE. The temple was desecrated when an altar of the Greek god Zeus was placed in the Temple, books of the law were burned and Jews were martyred (Bratton,1961:107). Once the centre of the Jewish religion – the Temple – was desecrated, those who desecrated it created a very difficult situation for themselves. The perpetration of Hellenism in Judaism was accepted and welcomed by the secular Jews of those days; however, to desecrate the Temple was not an act of courage but of sheer wickedness. Religion was a very important factor in these events and Judas Maccabee was empowered by this desecration to rise up with great zeal for YHWH and His law.

Humanistic Jews attribute the success of the Maccabees not to religion, but to the political turmoil of those days. But it would appear that throughout this time of Hellenisation and political turmoil, by far the main ingredient for the preservation of the Jews in exile was their God and their temple and the Septuagint scriptures.

Judea belonged for 125 years to the Greek king of Egypt who lived in Alexandria. His rival the Greek king of Syria invaded his territory and defeated

him in battle. Judea passed from Egyptian hands into Syrian control. Humanistic Jews see this point in the history of Judaism as counterproductive for the secularisation of Judaism (Wine, 1995?:60-61). However, here, the God of Israel was creating His pathway in the history of mankind to fulfil His promise of redemption of mankind. Humanistic Jews want to secularise everything and do not accept that God was and is largely working out His purposes for mankind through the Jews. While all this political strife was going on, Rome was changing its tactics in the political world. The Roman republic was breaking up and a new imperialistic ideology was gaining strength. Rome was changing from being a republic to becoming an empire. The Roman general Pompey conquered Jerusalem and Aristobulus surrendered to him, but his Sadducean followers stood a siege for three months in the Temple. In 63 BCE the Temple mount was captured, and Pompey made his famous visit to the Holy of Holies (Robinson, 1957:191).

The Jews needed to learn to adapt to live under their new conquerors. It was not plain sailing for Rome in Palestine. The Roman Emperors had their own internal problems to solve and military conquests to launch too. Conscious of the strength of religion among their Jewish subjects, instead of opposing it, Rome showed some lenience towards Judaism in order to establish political power over them. Herod paid for the refurbishing of Solomon's Temple (Robinson, 1957:192-202). The Jews took great pride in the Temple; it was a symbol of national pride and Jewish strength.

Until AD 70 the Romans carried on reigning over Palestine and the Jews rebelled against their rule. In AD 67 Vespasian subjugated Galilee and then there was a civil war in Jerusalem and another campaign by Vespasian in AD 68-69. In AD 70 the future emperor Titus conquered Jerusalem and set the Temple on fire. The Jews were expelled from their homeland until the middle of the twentieth century (Chalom, 2002:25). Titus knew of the importance of the Temple for the Jewish people. By destroying the Temple he would be truly dismantling an extremely important building that had contributed highly to the survival of the Jewish people, culture and religion.

The claim of Humanistic Jews that secularisation preserved Judaism is not a true one. Actually, every time Israel was attacked or when they were in captivity, other nations tried to subject the Israelites to their ways. But a sufficient number of Jews remained strong in their faith in order to survive and kept it alive till this very day. A very clear example is found in the book of the prophet Daniel, who declined the luxury of a pagan life in order to serve YHWH and keep His commandments (Daniel 1:9-15). The book reports in detail Daniel's resistance to idolatrous kings and people.

6.6 Humanism and its Disservice to Society seen from a Christian Analysis and Perspective

Humanistic Jews defend the idea that humans alone are responsible for their own destiny. There is no one else who can change human destiny and the social environment (Bauer, 1991:12-14). This sort of notion implies that theistic believers are passive people just waiting for divine deliverance without the courage or disposition to something positive. But Evangelical Christians do believe in human responsibility because of what the Scriptures say. We will benefit from our choices and also suffer the consequences of them: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7). This is a natural law that applies in the social worlds in which we live and engage.

Humanistic Jews advocate taking the Word of God away from mankind and requiring them to find their own direction and moral principles by which they should live their lives. It is a cruel way of treating people who are lost and at the mercy of a variety of philosophical experiments. Humanistic Jews do not believe in orthodox truths. They believe the truth is mutable as the world we are living in is mutable too. It is true to say that our world is going through a process of change; however, this does not mean that it is a cosmic change and that there are no orthodox truths to guide mankind. One powerful proof of this is the survival of the Jewish people and their *Torah*. The reason why people change their ways of thinking is because of the progress caused by new knowledge. Nevertheless we all need moral truths to guide us during our lifetime. The reason why humanity does not want absolute truths to guide them is because of their rebellion. Some people are unwilling to believe or submit to truth they are

confronted with. Karl Barth saw faith as essentially obedience to the truth: “knowledge of the truth solely in virtue of the fact that the truth is spoken to us to which we respond with pure obedience” (Boa and Bowman, 2001:395).

Evangelical Christians believe the Bible is the Word of God and that it has the greatest teaching for mankind to live upon earth because it involves a relationship with the Creator. It also involves an understanding that reason is meant to lead to a knowledge of God. As Stephen Neill put it,

Reason is not the affirmation of the arrogant autonomy of man, fashioning a universe to his own ideas. It is the faculty in man which makes it possible for him to receive the revelation of YHWH, to receive revelation in the form of the Word of God. But to receive it, he must be humble, and ready to listen to YHWH, whenever and however He speaks (Boa & Bowman, 2001:110).

In Romans 1 Paul argues that once human beings begin to reason that God does not exist, they no longer make any sense at all. This is a diametrically opposed understanding of reason from that of Humanistic Judaism, which supposes that true reason should lead away from belief in God. The implication is that the senseless reasoning of Humanistic Judaism will, if embraced, plunge humanity into irrationality as well as moral and intellectual difficulties. Once God is embraced as the true outcome of sound reasoning, one has no difficulty in recognising that such a God will communicate with us. Hence an Evangelical Christian is guided by the Bible, the book that claims to have God as its author through the entirety of its development (2 Timothy 3:16). But the very existence of this book from God makes it obvious that human reason is not enough, because God takes our understanding beyond the limits of human reason. Without the superior reasoning that comes from the creator, human reasoning of any kind goes wrong, because it is limited and cut off from the form of reason and understanding that is greater than human reason. To take away the Bible and to attempt to redefine its truth is a cruel way of treating human beings who are lost either because their reasoning has become senseless, or because all they have to go on is human reason. To take the Word of God from people will not help them to break free and be happier and more fulfilled. It will distract them from the only book that teaches reconciliation with God (Boa & Bowman, 2001:110).

Any person who joins any sort of society will find out that there are rules and regulations to live by. God has given us rules and regulations to live by and they are for our ultimate good. But Romans 1-3 makes clear that these rules are not arbitrary, they are ever grounded in the law written on human hearts, and that even without the written law, this sense of right and wrong is in us all because we are God's creatures. They cannot simply be exchanged for arbitrary human preferences such as homosexuality, transsexual identity, or values clarification programs that enable adherents to formulate their own ideas of social and individual interaction.

Humanistic Judaism is quick enough to criticise the existence of God and sees it as a superstition for those who are weak and feeble in their minds. In this way, Humanistic Judaism does away with God and thus the idea of sin and guilt before a creator. But this leaves Humanistic Judaism with no explanation as to why people experience guilt. Humanistic Judaism can claim that all guilt is false guilt, but this does not invalidate the universal presence of guilt that all people experience, except those who have seared their conscience as with a hot iron. Therefore Humanistic Judaism cannot deal with the problem of sin and the guilt people feel. In their liberal ways of looking at life and allowing a great number of permissive practices, Humanistic Jews do not provide for those who fail to meet the acceptable standards of society. What should people do when a social mistake has serious consequences such as prison or social ostracism? There are many situations in life where an apology will not do; it needs to go much deeper than this in order to help those who are not suffering from false guilt. It would be great if people were able to live inside the parameters of the rights and wrongs of life. However, there are times when people will break from these parameters and they need to be instructed in how to obtain forgiveness and reconciliation. If someone murders another person, what does Humanistic Judaism have in place in order to help the perpetrator of the crime? There is absolutely nothing in place and all they can hope for is that this sort of people will not be part of their social religious atheistic system. There is no provision whatsoever in Humanistic Judaism for those who have trespassed. One of the strengths of Christian doctrine is the comfort found by those who confess their sins and find forgiveness from God and from fellow human beings. Evangelicals believe in reconciliation between humans and God and also in the reconciliation

between fellow humans. For reconciliation to take place two ingredients are necessary: repentance and forgiveness. The word 'repentance' in Greek is *metanoia* and it means a change of mind (Young, 1939:808); it means a U-turn in one's life. There is a clear message throughout the Bible of God calling men and women back to Himself. God desires to be reconciled with those who have broken His known law. This is not an offering of false comfort, but it deals with the root of the problem, which is human rebellion against God. Both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament illustrate, as we earlier showed, that rebellion against God is the root of the problem that causes people to act in ways which are inhumane and dehumanising (Boa & Bowman, 2001:395). Christians in the light of Scripture believe that through the Person of Christ, God provided a way for us to be forgiven and also to be regenerated. Humanism can teach people how to get on with each other and how to apologise to one another and this is great and necessary. However, when things go wrong how can offenders understand that they have been truly forgiven? How could the offender go through the process of regeneration? It is not just a matter of change in social behaviour, but a crucial change will take place in the mind so that offenders will realise that they have been forgiven from real transgression and guilt. There is no such provision in Humanistic Judaism for someone to feel forgiven from true transgression and guilt through regeneration at the cross of Christ. In Christianity we find the truth of what we call regeneration and it is the result of someone's conversion to Christ. Regeneration starts and finishes with God. It is a creative way of God's Spirit working in the human spirit and turning a person into a new creation. It is a divine process and a human experience (John 3:3; Titus 3:5).

Christian people have very good reasons to see people being born again. As John Stott said, "It is not because of what they may become in the speculative future development of the race, but because of what they already are by Divine creation" (Stott, 1990:14).

In Humanistic Judaism there is only hope in humanity, but a very different kind of hope is found in the Christian faith, a hope and happiness which emanate from a relationship with God. This hope and happiness is exclusive to those who believe in God and who are in a relationship with Him. The hope and happiness

given by God is very much for His own glory and humans benefit tremendously from it (Piper, 2006:31-33). This sort of hope and happiness is not obtained as the result of outward influences; it is the result of an understanding of who God is and accepting that the whole of the universe was created for His glory. This hope and happiness is part of the Christian life and those who reject it are missing out tremendously. Christians do not hope in humanity like the humanists do, they hope in God.

It is important to notice that the Christian hope is not confined to this earthly existence alone. Hope is a very positive point in Christian doctrine and this is an alien concept for Humanistic Jews. Jürgen Moltmann is a German theologian and Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at the University of Tübingen. One of his books is entitled *Theology of Hope*. In one of the sections of this book he deals with the doctrine of eternal hope. Christians do not ignore the reality of pain and severity of death. However, by applying faith Christians find a great reassurance and comfort in the Christian doctrines (Moltmann, 1993:19-22).

This hope makes the Christian Church a constant disturbance in human society, seeking as the latter does to stabilize itself into a 'continuing city'. It makes the Church the source of continual new impulses towards the realization of righteousness, freedom and humanity there in the light of the promised future that is to come. This Church is committed to 'answer for the hope' that is in it (1 Peter 3:15). It is called in question 'on account of the hope and resurrection of the dead' (Acts 23:6). Whenever that happens, Christianity embraces its true nature and becomes a witness of the future of Christ (Moltmann, 1993:22).

In contrast to Christian philosophy, humanist philosophy does not offer a way out of death. Humanists hold out no hope of possibility of a better place to rest forever; but even though there is no hope of eternal life, neither is there any need to despair. The living need to face death with courage and deal with it honestly and effectively (Friedman, 1989:3-4). Christians, on the other hand, have a very hopeful and optimistic view of their final destiny. They do not believe death is the end or that death will have victory over their lives. The Apostle Paul expresses this view very well in 1 Corinthians 15:55 – "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" There is a great sense of hope in the spirit of Christians; there is a great sense of certainty of victory. Jesus' teaching is hopeful and optimistic. Jesus taught the victory of the Kingdom of God over the power of evil. Christians have a great hope because of the victory of Jesus

over sin and death and this very victory over death is the spiritual inheritance of all born-again believers. The certainty of a victorious future motivates and gives Christians a great hope and it takes away the fear of facing death and the fear of an uncertain future (Senior & Stuhlmueller, 2003:156). There are so many people with depression in our world that is just a dreadful thing to see. Depression affects people from all walks of life. John Piper, speaking about faith and hope, teaches that they are synonyms: 'Faith is being sure of things we hope for' (Hebrews 11:1). When people do not have hope for the future, they get discouraged and depressed, and their joy drains away (Piper, 2006:149). It is important for people to have hope in this life and also to believe and have hope for what is going to happen to them after death. It would be very cruel to take away this hope from men and women.

In Humanistic Judaism moral absolutes do not exist (Cousens,1993:20-21):

The existence of moral absolutes – objective moral values which are real and true for all men regardless of whether any person or culture believes them to be true – enters into discussions of the existence of God at several levels. They figure into a refutation of physicalism as a worldview (since they are not themselves physical entities), they are used in arguments for God as the ground of morality, and they are part of the discussion about the meaning of life. Many people reject the existence of moral absolutes, opting for some form of moral relativism. In turn, moral relativism elicits arguments by absolutists defending the existence of objective morality (Moreland, 1989:240).

Once morality is diluted, people start to press for more freedom, and what was supposed to bring protection and happiness will become a reason to cause much heartache and social disturbances. As Moreland says, "... cultural relativism is not a moral thesis at all. It is not a statement of morality, but a statement about morality" (Moreland, 1989:241). In their search for absolute freedom people will break away from principles they view as a hindrance to their preferences. However, Christians hold that these principles do not deprive people of freedom but are like a fence of protection around them. Once a person breaks through this 'fence' he or she will find themselves in bondage. In its quest for freedom, humanity will find themselves slaves of their own sin. They fall headlong into what can be termed a 'freedom trap'. Evangelicals uphold the doctrines that Christ alone can set us free from our sin. True freedom starts with forgiveness. Mankind can find true freedom in the person of Christ. Christ does not only set us free from sin, but helps us to establish a new way of life based

on God's great love. The love of God is not only manifested in the coming of His Messiah to redeem mankind but also in establishing absolute moral principles for mankind to live by so as to experience what true freedom is (Stott, 1992:46-56).

Humanistic Judaism presents a challenge to Christians, who are facing a great dilemma, or as John Stott put it, we have a 'mission' in front of us. Christian missions of any sort must be prepared to engage with a very hostile, godless secular world (Stott, 1992:264). Stott goes on to explain that it will become an impossible mission if we withdraw from the world or if we conform to it. For the Christian message to be successful in our very secular world, it is important that the messengers engage with the society around them without adopting their godless ways of life (Stott, 1992:264).

The goal of the Christian mission is not to spread a new religious philosophy but to see people understanding and responding in a positive way to the message of the gospel. People will have a real experience with Jesus because of His life, death and resurrection. It is not just a subjective experience, but an objective one that will be demonstrated by the transformation of life under the impact of the gospel (Senior & Stuhlmüller, 2003:337-338). The church has a great responsibility to do mission in ways that are relevant to our modern society. The message of the gospel will always be an up-to-date message because of its veracity and power in transforming the lives of individuals and bringing very positive changes for the world we are living in. The best way to help our contemporary world with all its problems and difficulties is to share the message of the gospel and to encourage people to submit their lives to the sovereignty of God (Senior & Stuhlmüller, 2003:339).

In this section, we have seen how Humanistic Judaism does such disservice to society as to present a teaching that, if it ever prevails, would bring an end to all that is truly human: true guilt, true right and wrong, true forgiveness and true hope. Further, by implication, Humanistic Judaism also prevents humanity from ever experiencing true transformation, true redemption, and a true eternal relationship with the creator of us all.

6.7 Theistic Ethics versus Humanistic Ethics and Atheistic Ethics in General

Humanistic Jews base their ethics solely upon human reason, human experience and human needs (Cousens, 1993:20-21). However, they are basing their ethics on something very vulnerable, that is, the 'human being' and also 'experience and needs'. Both history and our everyday experience teach us how vulnerable the human being is. People can use their reason to rationalise the truth and thereby create experiences and needs that are not genuine but which they use to justify their behaviour. A clear example of this is the Holocaust. The Nazis tried to create a contrast between the good of the Nordic race and the evil of the Jewish race (Bauer, 1991:14). Christians, in light of Scripture, are aware that human reason is not perfect and pure enough to be relied upon in order to establish ethics for mankind. In Jeremiah 17:9 we learn how wicked and untrustworthy the human heart is. There are many humanists who are genuine and who desire the best for mankind. However, when God is taken out the equation, people are free to do what history shows, perpetrate horrors such as the Holocausts and other numberless crimes that have been so frequently done against humanity. Men and women without a true understanding of right and wrong will use their power and persuasion to implement their own agenda and the suffering can be excruciating (Stott, 1990:149-151). It is wrong to think that God is against human rights. God defends justice, but God's justice is not volatile nor does it show any favouritism. It treats all people as equals, and this is the basic principle of human rights established by the United Nations (Stott, 1990:152-154). Yet, the Christian ethic does not focus solely on dignity and equality. There is a great need for human responsibility. The ethics of the Christian faith is not based on the fulfilment of one's own happiness; it is based on the principle of renunciation. It is selfish and destructive to make decisions in a self-centred way and try to promote one's own happiness. God's idea of an ideal society is the one that promotes what is best for someone else (Stott, 1990:160-161).

People talk quite freely about human rights without addressing of the question of human responsibility. Christians believe in divine rights as well, deciding to live our lives in accordance with the teachings of the Bible; in this there is protection for mankind. The Bible calls us to our responsibilities; it teaches us that we are

accountable: 'So, then, each person will give an account of himself to God' (Romans 14:12). Evangelicals believe that the law of God is perfect and that living our lives by His law will enable mankind to live fulfilled lives. We will not struggle to find happiness; it will come as a consequence of our respect and obedience to God's word. God wants all people to be equal. It seems to be a paradox, but the only way mankind will know true freedom is by taking up their responsibilities.

In the moral sphere, humanism deals mainly with the consequences of the problems without dealing with what is truly causing the problems. Because of our very secular and materialistic society, we are teaching people how to do wrong and trying to get rid of the unpleasant consequences. Christians call it educating people into a life of sin by trying to avoid its consequences. For instance, instead of teaching a couple that it is wrong to have sex before marriage, the worldly mind defends the idea that it is right to have sex before marriage. The best way to prevent an unwanted pregnancy is to take due precautions. Therefore if an accident takes place and the girl gets pregnant, there are ways to exterminate the baby. However, Christians believe that the best way to protect someone's mind, body and emotions is to live our lives according to the principles that are taught in the Bible (McDowell & Hostetler, 1994:281-284). Human beings should not be treated as experiments in the hands of those who think they know better. It is not right to take away absolute truths from people and impose new ideologies hoping that they will work and people somehow will feel freer and happier (McDowell & Hostetler, 1994:15-17). Christians believe in absolute truths that will serve as guides for mankind. People will be set free not because they have the power to do whatever they want to, but by living by the truth of God's word: "Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). The truth Christians believe in is not a relative truth, it is an absolute truth. Absolute truth is "that which is true for all people, for all times, for all places. Absolute truth is truth that is objective, universal, and constant" (McDowell & Hostetler, 1994:20). The teachings from God's word to believers are not suggestions of how to live our lives. The truths of God's word are paramount: the very way we live our lives.

You acknowledge that the distinction between right and wrong is objective (it is defined outside ourselves – it is not subjectively determined), universal (it is for all people in all places – it does not change from person to person or place to

place), constant (it is for all times – it does not change from day to day). When you accept an objective standard for truth, you adopt a moral and ethical viewpoint that guides your choices of what is right and what is wrong. Your 'truth view' acts as a lens through which you see all of life and its many choices (McDowell & Hostetler, 1994:22).

Humanistic Judaism does not provide absolute truth for its followers; it must always rely on finite human reason (Cousens, 1993:60-62). However, as we have seen, we can use our reason to justify our behaviour, but the reasoning and justification for a specific behaviour does not make it right. We have discussed same-sex marriage above in Chapter 4 (Jerris, 1999:72). The leader of Humanistic Judaism, Rabbi Sherwin Wine, was in an open homosexual relationship and at the same time he was the leader of the movement (Cook, 2003:36,37). Evangelicals have no prejudices towards people but advocate that it is against biblical principles to practise homosexuality. However, this does not mean we are hateful towards them. If we were hateful towards them or fearful towards them, only then could we be fairly classed as homophobic. As John Stott puts it, "However strongly we may disapprove of homosexual practices, we have no liberty to dehumanize those who engage in them" (Stott, 1990:336). Evangelical Christians always go back to the Word of God for orientation and do not allow human reason to speak louder than the teaching of God's word. They build their moral, social and spiritual principles on the teaching of God's word. For instance, here is one passage in the Bible that condemns the practice of homosexuality: Romans 1:24-32. That is the Christian position. However, people in the media today declare that this means evangelical Christians are homophobic, and this conclusion is unfair. Scripture forbids that we are ever homophobic. Homophobic behaviour is disobedience to God. It is not part of the evangelical doctrine to be homophobic. Evangelical Christians make a clear distinction between what is legal and what is right. There are new laws in Britain that legalise homosexuality but they do not make it right. The same can be said about adultery; it is not a crime but it is not right in God's eyes. Some people would challenge evangelical believers as they do not agree with the marriage of two people of the same sex, but would allow a paedophile to get married in the church. The argument to be brought forward is that Christians would not perform or defend the idea of the marriage between an adult and a child. However, officiating the marriage of an adult who is guilty of paedophilia to another adult person does not mean the approval of what the paedophile has done but that he

is free to be married to another adult. The evangelical Christian holds that we are all sinners. The Bible teaches 'for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 4:23). However, we also believe that the social consequence of sin differs within the society we are living in. For instance, if someone steals £500,000 and is caught, he will suffer for his mistake, but if someone murders someone else, the social consequences of this sin will be much greater. Evangelical Christians try to live in peace with everyone, but that does not mean that they approve of all practices. Evangelical Christians suffer discrimination because of their beliefs. They suffer from being ostracised, ridiculed and even persecuted. Many of the people who say that evangelicals discriminate against them are the ones who discriminate against evangelicals.

In summary, evangelical Christians believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and they also believe in the authority of the scriptures for people to live their lives. They derive from the Scriptures the principles by which humankind should live their lives (Braaten and Jenson, 1990:78-84). They acquire their ethics from the Word of God and do not oscillate between different ideas and philosophies. Instead of following different ideologies they remain firm in the teachings of God's word and believe that it contains the best teaching for humankind to live their lives. Obedience to God's word revives the soul (Psalm 19:7). When we come to the crossroads of what we think and what the Word of God approves, evangelical believers intelligently choose to obey the biblical teachings.

We are living in very challenging days. There is so much darkness and so much evil considered as good. In times such as this, divinely forged moral ethics are necessary to give us the guidance that will keep us safe. As we read in the book edited by McDowell and Hostetler, "there are no easy answers, but there is hope. It is not too late to reinforce the crumbling foundations" (McDowell & Hostetler, 1994:25). The best way to live in society is to adopt biblical principles. The teachings of the Bible are very much in favour of mankind. God is not trying to deprive us of any good pleasure; God is trying to protect us from becoming slaves.

So the Bible is the Word of God. And the Word of God is no trifle. It is the source of life and faith and power and hope and freedom and wisdom and comfort and assurance and victory over our greatest enemy (Piper, 2006:152).

The Christian ethics that evangelical believers put forward is not based on traditions or narrow-mindedness. Evangelical believers do not bow to the currents of society or to its practices. Instead, their minds are renewed by the power of God's word and in it they find satisfaction for their souls, security for their moral and social ethics, and true joy. They do not find themselves deprived of any God-designed pleasure but are comfortable and secure in living their lives in accordance with the ethics proposed by God to mankind. Evangelical believers defend the idea that choosing to live their lives by God's standards of right and wrong, no matter how difficult it might be, is not only the right decision but also the most beneficial (McDowell & Hostetler, 1994:138). Instead of wavering between humanistic ethics such as those embraced by Humanistic Judaism, the evangelical believer will always choose the solid foundations of God's word.

Theistic Judaism has some important tools in its hands and its beliefs form part of their religious expression and ways of finding YHWH. However, theistic Judaism cannot provide for its followers' redemption by obeying the Mosaic Law. Theistic Judaism has a strong argument against the ethics and moralities of Humanistic Judaism. In Humanistic Judaism things are relative but in Theistic Judaism there are strong absolutes to be followed. They hold that humankind should live in obedience to the Law. With all of its obedience to the Law, neither Theistic Judaism nor Humanistic Judaism can provide redemption for its followers; this is only possible in Christ: Jesus is the Redeemer of humankind. Neither Theistic Judaism nor Humanistic Judaism understands the saving grace of YHWH manifested through the person of Jesus Christ. He is not only the redeemer but also the High Priest who enters into God's presence and intercedes for those who follow Him. It is important for both man and woman to change their social behaviour and try to live better lives, but redemption and forgiveness go beyond mere social change. It means being forgiven, transformed by God and reconciled with Him and that is only possible through Christ Jesus (Romans 6:1-23).

We have now completed our comparison between the so-called ethics of Humanistic Judaism and the Judeo-Christian ethics. The extent of evil brought

upon our world by the moral relativism embraced by Humanistic Judaism and atheism in general is immense. Every evil set forth in Scripture is historically available, but rather than call it relativism, let us allow Scripture itself to define the heart and soul of relativism whether practised by Humanistic Jews or atheists and immoralists in general. What then is that definition? It is one repeated by the authors of Scripture time and time again: "Each did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 17:6).

Chapter 7

CONCLUSIONS

From the outset, the aim of this thesis has been to contribute to the intellectual world a work that would make a deep study of the movement called Humanistic Judaism. The study has been undertaken without any prejudice or preconceived ideas. The thesis is the result of many years of labour and it provides answers to the questions I was determined to answer.

My curiosity respecting Jewish atheism first appeared when I was studying for my first theological degree in Brazil. In studying the history of Israel and seeing the great acts of God in the history of the Jewish people, I was truly puzzled that a good number of Jews did not believe in YHWH. This curiosity led me to research more on the subject of Jewish atheism and I was fascinated when I came across Humanistic Judaism. Humanistic Judaism is not just a form of Jewish atheism, it is an atheistic movement that considers itself a religion and has its own religious structure. This thesis aims to give a good understanding of Humanistic Judaism. It covers its history, doctrines and ethics. It contains information on how Humanistic Judaism wants to preserve Jewish culture and tries to disassociate it from traditional religion.

At the core of Humanistic Judaism is the decision to replace YHWH. By promoting their own literature they are always trying to extinguish the idea of his existence from the minds of people. They consider YHWH a poisonous idea that holds back humankind and the Jewish people, in particular, because of their belief in YHWH. One theological point that needs to be addressed by Humanistic Jews is the presence of Christ in the Old Testament. Humanistic Jews need to have a defence to present to Jewish people who have embraced Christianity as their religion and also their true expression of Judaism. This would, of course, require them to have an understanding of the New Testament and how it relates to Old Testament and how the person of the Promised Messiah in the Old Testament is found in the person of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. In other words, there is a need for Humanistic Jews to address the messiahship of Christ.

Is it possible to dissociate cultural Judaism from religion? Humanistic Jews are trying very hard to do so. It has proved to be a very difficult if not an impossible task, as this thesis has shown. Judaism started with Moses and it is deeply rooted in religion. Judaism is a theocentric culture and YHWH is in the centre. The whole structure of Judaism centres on YHWH and His relationship with His people. Judaism is not the result of a culture trying to incorporate the person of YHWH. It is a culture that has been created in order to relate to Him. Therefore, it is impossible, as we have seen again and again, to dissociate cultural Judaism from religion as Judaism starts with the person of YHWH.

Humanistic Judaism sees many gaps in theistic theology and the movement tries to bridge these gaps. To what extent has Humanistic Judaism tried to bridge the gap left by theistic philosophers? Does the provision serve the purpose? By analysing Humanistic Judaism this thesis has been able to explain the practical steps Humanistic Judaism has taken in its attempt to build bridges over these gaps.

Humanistic Jews did not just embrace atheism; they created a movement which tries to fill in the void created by denying the existence of YHWH and at the same time provide a system that would enable secular and atheistic Jews to relate to their rich cultural heritage without being committed to a deity. As we became aware, Humanistic Jews see this disassociation of culture and religion as a very positive step forward to freeing people to be 100 percent Jewish without having a theistic worldview. It must be said that their idea is a unique one. However, the idea of creating a movement that tries to rescue the cultural side of Judaism from YHWH is truly a very courageous adventure to embark upon. Humanistic Jews under the leadership of Rabbi Wine were not afraid of this journey. They looked into the history of Israel to draw strength for their new movement. In order to achieve some of their goals it was necessary for them to rethink Judaism and adjust some of the pillars of Judaism. The move they made was a very clever one; they did not remove the pillars themselves, but re-interpreted their value and relevance. For instance, did not deny the existence of the *Torah*. They say that it is an amazing piece of literature, but it contains mistakes, historically and also scientifically. It shows a lot of creativity, but its teaching and morals are not relevant for the world today. It is an expression of

Jewish ingenuity but it is not the Word of God and people should not live their lives based on its teachings. The position the Humanistic Jews took in excluding the legitimacy of the *Torah* created a problem for them. Much of the Jewish culture and many of the Jewish customs are found in the *Torah*. To overcome this problem, Humanistic Jews simply adopted revised versions of the customs while rejecting both the authority of *Torah* and its central figure YHWH. This approach to the *Torah* enabled them to reinterpret whatever is of cultural relevance for the Jews and to put mankind in the centre of it all instead of YHWH. Consequently, Humanistic Jews do not celebrate the Jewish feasts in ways that resemble traditional forms of Judaism but they give a complete new connotation to them. They do not rewrite Jewish history but bring forth a new understanding of it where men and women are praised for their achievements while rejecting YHWH altogether. The movement does not limit itself to the traditional Jewish celebrations, it goes beyond, by creating new forms of feasts and holidays that satisfy the need within the movement.

Other forms of atheism, arguably, do not normally appear to have a religious structure, but Humanistic Judaism does. To what extent does Humanistic Judaism really fill the social gap and spiritual void created by other forms of atheism? The present thesis addresses this question by demonstrating that Humanistic Judaism did not take away without putting something in its place. Humanistic Judaism challenged Theistic Judaism but did not leave its followers to fend for themselves. It came into existence with the express purpose of putting in place a movement that would supply the intellectual, emotional, spiritual and social needs of those who embrace a new form of atheism – religious atheism. This thesis demonstrates that in the aspect of emotional and social needs Humanistic Judaism has been successful. Its adherents are not left in limbo. Humanistic Judaism provides a structure to accommodate its followers and makes sure they will not be lacking support in different areas of life. However, Humanistic Judaism has not been able to meet the intellectual needs of its followers. In the intellectual sphere Humanistic Judaism needs to provide much more material for its followers. The written material in Humanistic Judaism is very limited. There is no material to explain religious revivals in different parts of the planet. There is no material to explain the dissatisfaction with the material world. The Humanistic Jews have written nothing in

anthropology to explain the fact that people who were not civilised and never had contact with civilisation had respect and reverence for different deities. As we saw in former chapters, in the spiritual sphere Humanistic Judaism does not make any provision at all. The basic reason for that is that they do not believe in the spiritual world. When someone sins and is feeling bad about it there is no provision whatsoever to help those who have sinned against God. Humanistic Judaism sees sins as just negative feelings that need to be dealt with because it affects people's emotions. People are not taught to be prepared to face eternity because in their concept there is no life after death.

The steps Humanistic Judaism has taken to fill the emotional and social voids can be seen in their atheistic religious expression. Traditional Judaism itself has a very rich culture and is full of symbols. Humanistic Jews do know that Jews can be very nostalgic about their beliefs and during the times of the Jewish feasts the attendance increases significantly in the synagogues (as it does at Easter and Christmas for the Christian churches). Humanistic Jews, aware of this nostalgia, created a whole system of beliefs and practices to satisfy this cultural and religious remembrance. Their gathering resembles a synagogue gathering: they sing songs, have a liturgy, and light the Shabbat candle and add many other celebrations. Humanistic Jews know the importance the Temple has in Jerusalem for the Jewish people. So, to break away from this sort of fidelity to the Temple, Humanistic Jews erected their own temple in Detroit – the Birmingham Temple. This same sort of strategy has been used before in the Bible. In 1 Kings 12 we read that after the nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms, Jeroboam, the king of the Southern Kingdom, built a temple and introduced different ways of worship. He did this so the people under his ruling would not revert to the Northern Kingdom because of their nostalgia and desire for Judaism. Humanistic Jews to some extent have done exactly the same. They want to attract Jewish people to the cultural side of Judaism while excluding YHWH from it.

Yet the question remains: is Humanistic Judaism a legitimate expression of Judaism? Humanistic Jews think so. There is a book called *Judaism Beyond God* that is considered the 'bible' of the movement. In this book, Rabbi Sherwin Wine argues that the legitimacy and identity of the Jewish people are not tied to

the existence of God. He envisions Judaism as a culture that goes beyond theistic beliefs. He claims that rabbis have hijacked Judaism and monopolised it for their own gain and to manipulate people's lives. Rabbi Wine defends the idea that Humanistic Judaism is rescuing Judaism and restoring the true meaning of Judaism and the true Jewish identity (Wine, 1995:83-99).

There are four main branches of Judaism and Humanistic Judaism considers itself the fifth branch. The four main branches are: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist. Humanistic Jews defend the idea that what they have to offer is not found in any of the other four branches. This is true, but does it validate the movement as a legitimate one? In chapter 6, we found that Humanistic Judaism is not a legitimate expression of Judaism even though it proclaims to be. This cherry-picking approach they have chosen is not a wise one. It is truly a clever way of trying to reach out to secular and atheistic Jews and encourage them to embrace their attempt at a new expression of Judaism. However, what they are offering does not fill the void of those who want a true expression of Judaism. Authentic Judaism, as we noted time and again, does not have an all-inclusive mentality. There are absolutes in Judaism which need to be observed and appreciated, and which do not harmonise with the mentality of inclusive Humanistic Judaism. With Humanistic Judaism, a person does not even need to be born Jewish or be converted to Judaism to embrace it. If anyone wants to be part of it, they simply go through the process of adopting the movement without any need for conversion. In Humanistic Judaism, the followers learn to be more and more humane towards others even if it contradicts the teachings of some forms of authentic Judaism. The absolute in Humanistic Judaism is the satisfaction of someone's emotional or physical need. While seeing to someone's needs and satisfaction, moral principles can be ignored. For instance, Humanistic Jews defend the idea of euthanasia as a way of alleviating someone's suffering. The human being in the equation is more important than the teachings of *Torah* or *Talmud*. Same-sex marriage is permitted within the movement under the umbrella of celebrating 'love'. Instead of teaching people the need to change their moral behaviour, Humanistic Judaism embraces them and excuses their behaviour. It was discussed in Chapter 6 why this sort of all inclusive mentality is against Judaism. Humanistic

Jews with their inclusive approach to Judaism are diluting it and not reaffirming it.

Humanistic Judaism is not a legitimate expression of Judaism, because in Chapter 6 we learned that true Judaism is all about trusting YHWH's answer to mankind's problems. Humanistic Judaism relies on humanity finding answers to its own problems. Theistic Judaism looks vertically and horizontally while Humanistic Judaism looks only horizontally. We saw that Theistic Judaism is a combination of laws, ethics and ceremonies, and deals with how people should live their lives. It begins with God and it ends up with God. He is in the centre of it all, and people always gain by living their lives in accordance with the teaching of the *Torah*. Humanistic Judaism sees it from a different perspective. It sees that people loses a lot if they attempt to live their lives by the teachings of God's word; men and women will become less humane if they base their conduct on the Bible. Theistic Judaism sees that human relationships are enhanced if people live their lives within YHYH's parameters. Humanistic Judaism thinks the opposite: human relationships will be enhanced if humanity only looks to itself to solve its own problems and face their challenges with courage and determination.

Even though Humanistic Judaism is not a legitimate expression of authentic Judaism, it does fit some definitions of religion. Most of the definitions of religion imply belief in God, gods and spiritual beings. However, Humanistic Jews understand the term 'religion' as a set of specific fundamental beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a number of persons or sects (Wine, 1995:219-221). Humanistic Judaism says that the movement is a religious one because it provides for its followers everything that a theistic religious movement provides. It provides a set of services for different occasions, ethics, doctrinal classes, comfort and encouragement, rituals, celebration of holy days, engagement with the local community, and fellowship among the followers. Besides these, many other aspects of theistic religions can be found in Humanistic Judaism.

Humanistic Judaism has some very positive points that cannot be ignored. Humanistic Judaism provides for its followers a community spirit where like

minded people can gather together and find solace. It does deny the existence of God, but it does not abandon people and simply let them fend for themselves, yet it allows them a large measure of independence. It provides a whole structure to support and encourage atheists and secular people alike. It breaks the taboo of the Jewish people being better than others (Galatians 3:28). They accept their Jewishness, which identifies them with the wellbeing of Israel and promotes the wellbeing of Jewish people all over the world. It accentuates that all of humankind is on the same level with respect to basic rights and needs. In light of these concepts the planet belongs to all.

Humanistic Jews believe in a world composed of different societies and groups of people

where Jew, Gentiles, Muslims and people from different races and creeds should learn to live together and not be judged by their beliefs, race or skin colour (Romans 13:9-14). People should be accepted for their humanity. Humanistic Jews give a new insight into Jewish identity. They believe that religion is not what decides Jewishness and that theistic Judaism has no monopoly on Judaism. Theistic Judaism in the times of Jesus caused a lot of division and problems to the ordinary believers. John the Baptist did not have a lot of sympathy for them (Matthew 3:7). Jesus himself was the supreme opponent of the theistic Judaism of his day (Luke 11:37-54). Humanistic Jews believe that to be Jewish is not just a matter of birth, others can embrace Judaism through the process of adoption; for Humanistic Jews, Judaism is not a religion but a culture and way of life. Paul provides an innovative definition of Jewishness, 'If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise' (Galatians 3:29).

With respect to anti-racism, the very existence of Humanistic Judaism is a very positive one because it causes people to rethink 'Judaism'. For the Evangelical believers Humanistic Judaism provides a great gateway for evangelism. People are not saved because they are born Jewish or Christians, people are saved because of the understanding and acceptance of what Christ has done for them. Humanistic Jews are atheists, but if they can come to understand that Jesus stood against the exclusivity of the Theistic Judaism of his days, it could

well be an open door to start a very interesting discussion and lead Humanistic Jews into the marvellous light of Christ (Matthew 11:25-28).

What is Humanistic Judaism doing to secure its future? Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine, the founder of Humanistic Judaism, retired in June of 2003 (American Humanist Association, 2017:1). His retirement, however, did not mean the end of the movement. During his development of the movement, Wine ensured that he gave life to something that would grow without him. His projects went beyond the local congregation, expanding geographically both nationally and internationally. The movement grew in maturity and in intellectual challenge, developing from Sunday School projects into the International Institute of Secular Humanistic Judaism. The structure created by Wine, with the help of others, does show promise to secure a future for the Humanistic Judaism movement. After his retirement, Wine was available for consultation until his death in 2007. The void he left behind needs to be filled by new leaders. The next few years will be an important time in the existence of Humanistic Judaism as it attempts to move on and expand without Wine.

Of course, the movement needs continually to reassess the way forward. It needs to ensure its own future existence. What then are some of its essential future needs?

- To make the movement well known

There is an evident lack of outreach in the structure of Humanistic Judaism. Their ideas are not very popular, but they will never be well known unless a strategy of spreading the message is put in place. Such a strategy needs to be one of the priorities of the movement in order for it to prosper numerically. If such a step is not taken the movement will always be small and confined to certain areas.

- To invest in the formation of its rabbis and leadership

The people in the Institute for Humanistic Judaism are both welcoming and pleasant and very knowledgeable about Humanistic Judaism. The curriculum is designed with Humanistic Judaism in the centre. The student will acquire a

knowledge of what Humanistic Jews consider to be the best philosophy for pure secular and Humanistic Jews – Humanistic Judaism.

- To increase the literature available

The material about Humanistic Judaism is very limited.

- To attract cultural secular Jews and pure secular Jews to the movement

To some extent the movement is composed of cultural secular Jews. They are the ones who identify with the cultural side of Judaism and are nostalgic about its celebrations. It seems that they fit in better than the purely secular Jews, who are not nostalgic about their Jewish identity and are quite happy to assimilate into the culture in which they live.

Cantor warns that if Humanistic Judaism does not become more militant and adventurous within the social sphere where it aims to make its impact, it incurs the danger of becoming just a fringe group within Reform Judaism (Cantor, 1998:32). Humanistic Judaism has yet to make its impact felt and its voice fully heard.

Wine had a great vision for the movement. He saw the necessity to secure its future by the development of leaders. Without a strong and well qualified leadership, the movement is in danger of inertia. This inactivity would hinder the growth and development of Humanistic Judaism. In Wine's opinion it was fundamental to cause leadership to happen instead of waiting for it to happen. Humanistic Judaism saw the need to explore the tremendous potential of *Madrikhim* –leaders or teachers in Israeli youth groups. Wine decided to go ahead and prepare leaders for Humanistic Judaism and the training was established in 1988 in North America and Israel. It became the major project of the new International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism. Wine says,

We have now begun to provide for our own future. We cannot depend on the "refugee" leaders of other Jewish movements. We cannot rely on the well-intentioned efforts of untrained volunteers. We need trained leaders who know that their work is a profession and who receive recognition of their professional achievements from people they serve. In time many *Madrikhim* will evolve into full-time leaders. In time, both rabbis and *Madrikhim* will form a corps of visible 'missionaries' to sustain existing communities and to create new ones. In time, the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds will come to accept in the same way that they learned to accept Reform and Reconstructionist rabbis (Wine, 1992:4,5).

Norman Cantor reflects upon the fact that Humanistic Judaism has the potential to become the most important movement in American Judaism. He believes that what is proposed by them is too grand to be ignored by American Jewry and concludes that there is a great future for the movement. However, for it to be successful it needs to meet the challenges posed by modernist and postmodernist cultural revolutions. The other forms of Judaism have fallen short of meeting this challenge, but if Humanistic Judaism meets this challenge it can become the most important movement in American Judaism. It will create a positive and genuine form of Judaism for now and beyond (Cantor, 1998:31).

Symbols are an important part of Judaism, and Humanistic Jews make use of several of them with a different understanding of their significance. On entering the Birmingham Temple in Farmington Hills, one finds written on the front wall the Hebrew word 'Adam,' which means 'humankind'. It is a very clear message that humanity is in the centre of everything and has the capacity to be happy and look after itself without the help of a deity. The *menorah* (candlestick) is a very important symbol of Humanistic Judaism, as the cross is for Christians and the crescent for Muslims, but Humanistic Jews have designed their own version of the *menorah*. They even changed its name to 'humanorah'. It pictures a human being in the centre holding six candlesticks, and the message is that humans are at the heart, offering enlightenment to humanity, which is the basic philosophy of Humanistic Judaism. This is self-explanatory and sums up the movement.



This is the 'Humanorah', with a human in the centre as the one who provides light and strength.³

³ The author of this work has done extensive research on Humanistic Judaism, however he is fully aware it is not exhaustive. Many other people are interested in studying Humanistic Judaism and more research and publishing on this subject is necessary because literature in Humanistic Judaism is not extensive. There are those who have been brought up as Humanistic Jews and others who embraced it as their humanistic religion. There are also others, like this author, who are truly interested in understanding Humanistic Judaism. There is room for some people to disagree with some of the conclusions the author reaches, and this is a very important step to refine the knowledge and understanding of Humanistic Judaism. These different points of view are welcomed by the author as an effective way of gaining a clear picture of Humanistic Judaism. In time it will become clear whether actual Humanistic Jews see this description of them as true to their own perceptions of themselves and their beliefs.

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