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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

## **GENE WILDER NAMED HUMANISTIC JEWISH ROLE MODEL By the Society for Humanistic Judaism for 2017-2018**

October 17, 2017—The Society for Humanistic Judaism (SHJ) is proud to name Gene Wilder as its Humanistic Jewish Role Model for 2017-2018. SHJ is the organizing body for congregations and communities affiliated with the denomination of Judaism known as Secular Humanistic Judaism. Throughout the coming year, SHJ-affiliated communities will offer programs to celebrate Wilder's life, revisit the laughter he gave us through his films, and honor the causes through which he expressed his humanism.

The name Gene Wilder conjures feeling of both joy and sorrow. Joy for all the laughter he brought into the world through his comedic acting in classic films like *The Producers*, *Blazing Saddles*, and *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* -- and sorrow knowing he lost his wife Gilda Radner to cancer at such a young age.

Author Abigail Pogrebin's 2005 book, "Stars of David: Prominent Jews Talk About Being Jewish," captures Wilder's joy and sorrow beautifully. In the chapter recounting her meeting with Wilder, which [you can read here](#), she also quotes him describing his secular Jewish identity:

*I'm going to tell you what my religion is: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Period. Terminato. Finito.... I have no other religion. I feel very Jewish and I feel very grateful to be Jewish. But I don't believe in God or anything to do with the Jewish religion.*

Beyond bringing joy through his acting, writing, and directing, Wilder also worked to make the world a better place. He promoted cancer awareness and treatment, helped found the Gilda Radner Ovarian Cancer Detection Center—now the Gilda Radner Hereditary Cancer Program, a program of Cedars-Sinai Women's Cancer Program at the Samuel Oschin Comprehensive Cancer Institute in Los Angeles—and co-founded Gilda's Club, a community organization for people living with cancer. Wilder himself would later survive cancer in his 60's before passing away last year at age 83.

The Society for Humanistic Judaism launched the Humanistic Jewish Role Model program in 2005 to honor outstanding people who demonstrate the organization's Humanistic values and philosophy and its valuing of Jewish culture, history, traditions, and a strong Jewish identity. Past honorees can be found here: <http://www.shj.org/hj-role-models/>

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**Secular Humanistic Judaism**, one of the five denominations of Judaism, combines the Jewish values of loving-kindness (Gemilut Chassadim), charity (Tzedaka), and making the world a better place (Tikkun Olam), with the recognition that the responsibility for putting them into

practice lies in human hands. It is a nontheistic movement in which cultural Jews and their families can affirm, celebrate, and enrich their Jewish identity and values. The Society for Humanistic Judaism (SHJ) is the central body for the Humanistic Jewish movement in North America.

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