

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *HUMANISTIC JUDAISM, WINTER 2020*

This issue focuses on the politics of religion, especially as it is practiced by the so-called religious right in the United States.

1. If you live in an area with a heavy Christian fundamentalist population, do you have trouble with them?
2. Are they intrusive in the life of your community?
3. How do you respond to them?
4. Are there alliances you can form inside and outside the Humanist and Jewish community to insist on the rule of law and to neutralize their general negative influence?

“Interview with Jamie Raskin” by Paul Golin

Rep Raskin helped found the Congressional Freethought Caucus in 2018 to counter the religious right's influence in the Senate and House of Representatives.

1. Is the representative for your district a member? What about your Senator?
2. Can you and/or your group support their membership?
3. Do you write or otherwise urge them to follow secular principles, as an individual or member of a group or groups?
4. When they stand for re-election can you make separation of church and state an issue that matters?

“Revolt Against Democratic Modernity: The Unholy Marriage of Trump and His Base” by Professor Ron Aronson

Ron Aronson analyzes the background of the "unholy alliance" of Donald Trump and the mid-west/southern religious right.

1. Do you think economic circumstance is the main explanation for the distress that led to their support of an otherwise incompatible candidate for president? How can this be countered?
2. Has there been a failure of leadership in their communities and in politics?
3. Professor Aronson suggests racism is a factor as whites see their one time dominance fade into minority status. If there was full employment for the mid-western and southern whites do you think there would be the same issue?

These are not easy questions to answer. "Liberal" critics of Trump have yet to provide a platform that takes into account the global success of the policies they criticize in the United States. Matt Ridley, the patron of Humanists UK in Britain, says the last decade was the best for humanity ever because of the "globalism" and "neoliberalism" Trumpians and others despise.

1. Do you agree with this comment?
2. How can this be explained?
3. What can be done about it?

“The Founding Myth by Andrew Seidel” a review by William Thompson

Thompson' review shows how Christian fundamentalists have perverted the Constitution and its founding principles in pursuit of their aims.

1. Is there a positive answer to their attempt to encroach on the liberties enshrined in the founding American document?
2. Can you or your group engage with the larger community to make these positive points?

"Get Out the Vote" by Victoria Ratnaswamy

Ratnaswamy's experience in encouraging people to register to vote is a terrific example of the effect of positive action in politics. It seems there are ongoing deliberate moves to make registration and exercise of the vote difficult, as well as accidental difficulties that arise from differing requirements in different states.

1. Do you think that getting involved in registration drives or in polling stations is something you might like to do?
2. Can you or your group get involved in registration drives?
3. Are there openings for observers at polling stations to ensure people are able to exercise their vote?

"Ira's 'Humanukkah' A Father-Song Hanukkah Story" by Bills Parsons

This is a powerful story that brings home the relationship of a loving father and his son through a shared project.

1. Does this story inspire you to embark on a project with a child or grandchild?
2. What do you think would be fun for you to do together?

"Community News"

Community news shows the variety of community work and outreach of HJ groups across the United States.

1. Do you get ideas from the work of other groups?
2. Do you communicate otherwise than through the magazine to encourage what you think are useful activities?
3. If not and you would like to, what vehicle are there for you to do so?

Note from SHJ: If you would like some suggestions for increasing communication with other Humanistic Jews, please contact Rabbi Miriam Jerris at rabbi@shj.org.

Created by Steve Evans, SHJ Member, New Zealand