



The Life of Joe Ben-David as a Unitarian Humanist and Social Activist

1937 - Participant and speaker at a rally of the International League Against Nazism, headed by the German humanist leader, Helene Von Harant. The rally was held in Prague, Czechoslovakia, in the auditorium of the Czech Unitarian Association

1938 - Conducted six months' research on the causes of anti-Semitism in the Carpatho-Ukraine as a basis for his activities to promote interreligious tolerance and ethnic cooperation

1938 - Active member of the anti-Nazi youth group of the Prague Unitarian Congregation and member of the International Religious Fellowship in Holland, a forerunner of the International Association for Religious Freedom.

1939 - Personally inducted by Dr. Norbert F. Capek as a member of the Czechoslovak Unitarian Association

1940 - Conducted cultural activities to raise the spirit of 2,000 refugees on the Turkish vessel Sakariah, while fleeing Nazi occupied Czechoslovakia on an illegal transport to Palestine.

1942 - Attempted to prevent the death from lung cancer of thousands of printers exposed to toxic fumes in rotogravure printing plants. This effort was vigorously opposed by the chemical and printing industries.

1943 - Founder of the Society for Creative Culture in Palestine, based on the values of Capek's Unitarianism and Felix Adler's Ethical Culture, to counteract religious, racial, ethnic and cultural enmity and feelings of supremacy

1945 - Organized humanistic dialogical groups of Christians, Jews, Muslims, Druzes and others in Jerusalem, within a hostile and divided environment, giving an opportunity for free personal expression fostering mutual understanding and friendship.

1948 - As the hygiene officer of the elite troops of the Israeli army, but war resister, provided medicine to wounded Palestinians hidden in Christian monasteries and aided elderly and sick Arab survivors forgotten in their abandoned and destroyed villages

1949 - Worked on ships sailing between Marseilles, Naples and Haifa, bringing survivors of concentration camps and assisting their integration in Israeli refugee camps.

1949 - Confronted Ben-Gurion, at the latter's home, with the question of what the State of Israel ought to be doing to fulfill the universal ethical and social demands of the prophets of Israel. This enraged the Prime Minister immensely, who burst out: "Nothing, nothing! We will take care of ourselves!"

1953 - Campaigned against a bribed Israeli senior medical officer who, during the period of austerity, ordered the distribution of two tons of butter containing live tuberculosis bacillus to the children in Jerusalem.

1953 - Selected by Martin Buber and a group of prominent social activists and professors of the Hebrew University, at a meeting in Buber's home in Jerusalem, to assist them in the United States by promoting IHUD (UNION), the historically significant organization for Palestine/Israel reconciliation.

1954 - Addressed students at Sarah Lawrence College and at Earl Hall, Columbia University, on the subject of peace in the Middle East, and called for their active involvement in this cause.

1957 - Bearing in mind the equal importance of the two: 1./ Personal and collective security of the Jews and 2./ The inalienable rights of the Palestinians - developed a four-year campaign based on the assumption that real peace in the Middle East will depend on the achievement of justice for the Palestinian people. Participants in this campaign included: Erich Fromm, Roger Baldwin, Norman Thomas, Hannah Arendt, Bishop James A. Pike, Reinhold Niebuhr and others

1958 - Engaged in the struggle against smoking by founding the REPORTER ON SMOKING AND HEALTH newsletter in cooperation with Roy Norr, who had triggered the anti-tobacco movement in the United States. Attended the first planning meeting of the International Congress Against Smoking. The REPORTER was instrumental in introducing into the consciousness of the American public the fact that 400,000 Americans annually die prematurely on account of their smoking addiction.

1963 - Became the President and Humanist Counselor of the American Humanist Association's New York Chapter. Over eight years, he motivated large numbers of people in the New York area to become active on behalf of humanistic values, such as freedom of thought, religious liberation and enlightenment, psychological education and consciousness raising.

1963 - Approached all United Nations missions with an IHUD Association appeal to prevent from the start the production of nuclear weapons in the Middle East and asking the world powers to impose an embargo on all arms shipments to the Middle East.

1964 - Was one of the keynote speakers who, from a sound truck at the first rally on Union Square, helped to initiate the first major demonstration against the war in Vietnam. Also spoke at other locations to rouse students and the larger public to take action for peace.

1965 - Cooperated with Dr. Vo Tanh Minh, a prominent Vietnamese professor of ethics, in his efforts to influence the U.S. government to stop the massive bombing of his country. Organized a peace pilgrimage of anti-war organizations to the First Unitarian Church in Brooklyn, where Dr. Minh was conducting a fast to death. The participants pledged to engage in maximal action, convincing him that his leadership will be crucial, thus stopping his fast and saving his life. A similar action was Ben-David's successful appeal to Lee Stern, of the Fellowship of Reconciliation in Nyack, NY, to stop his fast to death.

1966 - Appointed by Bertrand Russell as Chairperson of the New York chapter of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation

1967 - In cooperation with the Reverend Dana E. Klotzle, Director of the UUA UN Office and the Unitarian Service Committee, visited the US Embassy twice, briefing U.S. Ambassadors on the Middle East crisis. Became member of Klotzle's Interfaith Committee on Peace in the Middle East.

1969 - Organized and led a humanist youth group of about 300 people between the ages 17 and 25 with the purpose of starting a young peoples' civil and human rights liberation activity dealing with issues such as: sexual education and sexual rights, legal and political discrimination, parental tyranny and mental coercion of children, and protection of the rights of infants.

1969 - Created the first New York Humanist Leadership Training Seminar with the purpose of developing sufficiently sophisticated leaders and community organizers to initiate and promote activities that stimulate social awareness and action in diverse fields of human concern.

1970 - Campaigned to help the American Humanist Association: 1./ to transcend its dualistic, atheist/materialist and simplistically anti-religious ideology, and 2./ to find a creative solution to the failure of the AHA to assert itself as a national humanist organization that would attract, recruit and retain hundreds of thousands members..

1972 - Founded, in the Unitarian spirit of Dr. Norbert Capek and his associate Dr. Karel Haspl, the independent Church of Humanism, based on a fusion of humanistic philosophy, psychology and liberal religion. Duly ordained as a minister. Took a vow of poverty.

1979 - Instrumental in electing the playwright and civil rights freedom activist Vaclav Havel and six other imprisoned signers of the Charter 77, as recipients of the Church of Humanism's Humanist of the Year award, at the time of the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia.

1982 - Participated in a public meeting with Danilo Dolci, "The Gandhi of Italy," in support of his work on behalf of the poverty-stricken villagers of western Italy and for non-violent action against the Mafia.

1983 - Conducted with the Rev. Frederick Douglas Kirkpatrick, radical black human rights leader and folk singer, a humanist cultural program counteracting racism and all forms of ethnic prejudice.

1983- Regularly attended organizational meetings of ACT UP, the radical action group for gay rights and the struggle against the devastation of the AIDS epidemic. Also attended the first meetings of the Interfaith Clergy Against AIDS and seven professional training programs.

1983 - In Lynchburg, Va., staged a demonstration outside of Jerry Falwell's church. His street sermon on "Humanism: the Religion of the Future" drew the attention of those exiting from the political evangelist's Sunday morning service. This was the first time that they heard the message of positive, religious, theocentric humanism.

1984 - Visited Lemuel Smith, then on death row in the Green Haven Correctional Facility. Mr. Smith is an African-American convict, who according to very strong evidence, was set up for the murder of a women guard. Later when a change of the NYS law prevented Smith's execution, Ben-David and Rev. Kirkpatrick started a defense committee to help him to attain justice and secure his release from prison. He is still in solitary confinement.

1986 - Made an exploratory visit, sponsored by the Church of Humanism, to the politically suppressed Czechoslovak Unitarian Association.

1988 - Served as panelist on a program "AIDS in America," sponsored by Middlesex College.

1989 - Again sponsored by the Church of Humanism, visited Prague to explore ways to help the Czech Unitarians. Participated in a major demonstration against the Soviet oppressors, witnessing police brutality.

1990 - As a delegate of the Church of Humanism, an NGO accredited by the United Nations Division on Palestinian Rights, came out in defense of Mordecai Vanunu, Israeli anti-nuclear activist who provided proof that Israel is manufacturing nuclear weapons. Vanunu was kidnapped by agents in Italy, smuggled back to Israel and has been languishing in a dank, cramped cell in solitary confinement for 18. years and is now released under very severe circumstances.

1990 - Made a three-month visit to the Czech Republic after the liberation to work with the Czech Unitarian Association. Addressed a class of students at the Charles University and the department of psychology of the Academy of Sciences, and conducted a lecture/workshop for psychotherapists at the Central Psychiatric Institution. Organized meetings attended by more than 100 students in the Unitaria building. Arranged for and led a delegation of the Church of Humanism and Czech Unitarians meeting with Count Schwarzenberg, President Vaclav Havel's Chief of Staff, at the Prague Castle. In cooperation with the Czech Unitarian Association, the Church of Humanism sponsored a freedom celebration of its 1979 Humanists of the Year, filling the Unitaria's large sanctuary to capacity.

1991 - As International Coordinator for the Development of the Czech Unitarian Association, organized the American Friends of the CUA with the purpose of helping the Czech Unitarians who lost their church to a corrupt cleric who had himself elected as superintendent for 10 years and locked out 400 Czech Unitarians.

1992 - Over three years, cooked vegetable soups that were distributed by volunteers of the Church of Humanism to some 4,000 homeless people in N.Y.C.

1993 - Issued an appeal for the release of Leonard Peltier, a Lakota Indian leader now in his 21st year of unjust imprisonment.

1995 - Elected to the Executive Committee of the UUA Partner Church Council.

1997 - Elected to the governing board of RAINBO, The Research Action and Information Network for the Bodily Integrity of Women, an organization supporting global action against female genital mutilation.

1998 - Elected to the Board of Directors of the North American Committee for Humanism (NACH)

1999 - Under the auspices of the International Association's New York Branch, organized a panel on "The Challenge of Religious Freedom Today." The event took place at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock, Manhasset, N.Y.

1999 - Instrumental with the Reverend Cynthia Powell in having the Rt. Reverend John Shelby Spong, the Anglican Bishop of Newark, elected as Humanist of the Year of the Church of Humanism. Bishop Spong is the most prominent and courageous humanistic reformer of Protestant Christianity in the United States. As a theologian of action, he is engaged in some of the most controversial struggles for justice and human rights.

2000 - Engaged in a most difficult action to prevent NACH (The North American Committee for Humanism) from eliminating its membership structure and turning this enormously important organization into a self-appointed and therefore dictatorial elite, reneging on its original purpose of acting as an umbrella organization unifying and empowering all humanistic organizations. Furthermore, Rev. Ben-David is introducing a concept of a three-dimensional Humanism, whereby, atheist, agnostic and rational and naturalist theist Humanisms would be validated as equal forms of Humanist expression and therefore promoted with the same vigor. Millions of people, who are ready for humanism but are antagonized and prevented from joining the humanist movement, because of its current reductionist definition "humanism equals non-theism" would then join its ranks.

2000 - Rev. Ben-David appeared three times on national television networks (CBS and NBC) performing, in the name of love, humanist weddings. One of them was the first dignified humanist gay partnership wedding ceremony officiated before a national audience.

2001 - Participated in a peace rally on Union Square in New York City, counseled people affected by the September 11th tragedy and conducted a memorial service for one of the victims. As a Czech Unitarian Minister and American UU, acted as translator and facilitator in a retreat of Czech and American Unitarians and Universalist ministers and members in Sumava, the Czech Republic. Rev. Ben-David gave also the initiative and prepared the preliminary structure and curriculum for the establishment of the first Czech Unitarian Theological Seminary..

2002 - Participated as an NGO delegate of the Church of Humanism in the United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People. The Conference included representatives of many governments, Palestinian, Israeli and International peace activists and religious organizations involved in the Middle East. Ben-David's position is that murder and violence will not lead to peace. He believes that only an approach based on the spirit and values of the humanistic Prophets of Israel, Jesus and Mohammed may bring about a solution of the conflict

2003 - Attended the UUA General Assembly in Boston. Honored the Reverend David Van Streen with the Humanist of the Year award of the Church of Humanism. Attended the UN Division for Palestinian Rights Conference for a Civil Society. Preached at the Westborough Unitarian Church, MA.

2004 - Elected as member of the Honorary Board of the newly established Martin Buber Fund in the Czech Republic. Participated on a panel on Politics, Civics and International Relations at the 22nd World Congress of The Czechoslovak Society of Artists and Scientists, at the Palacky University, Olomouc, Czech Republic. Addressed survivals of the holocaust at the former concentration camp Terezin. Preached at the Prague Unitarian Church. Lectured about his experience with Martin Buber, for the Martin Buber Fund and conducted an interactive, dialogical workshop for its staff. Completed the thesis: "The Next Step in Theological Realism - The Humanist Unitarian Meaning of God." This unique concept traverses the dichotomies of atheist/theist, and religious/secular dichotomies. It also establishes a link between humanism and other world faiths. It is not for public distribution. Appeared on Television, Manhattan Cable Network, interviewed on Conversations with Harold Channer on: "The Humanist Experience."

2005 - Delivered an original lecture on personal transformation: "Steps to Self-Actualization," Suggested a vital promotional campaign in a statement: "The New Spirit of Unitarian Humanism." Mentored a class at the Humanist Institute on: "The History and Future of Humanism." At the invitation of the Martin Buber Fund, visited the Czech Republic. Delivered a series of lectures also in the Prague Unitarian Society: "My Life Experience with Martin Buber," "Humanistic Psychology Today," "The Unitarian Life and Struggle of Martin Buber," "How to Resist the Decline of Civilization," and "A Concept of God for Our Time." Presented an outline for personal humanistic growth: "16 Steps to Self-Actualization." Presented a film: "Jesus on Broadway, where Jesus as a humanistic personality challenges ancient and contemporary myths about his life and aspirations. It is a highly dramatic one-person play, featuring Ben-David in five different roles. It was performed for four months in a theater in New York.

2006 - Preached at the 4th Universalist Society on: "Worship Arts as Spiritual Uplift." Television interview with Harold Channer on Manhattan Cable Network on "Martin Buber's Life." To

prevent misunderstandings regarding his humanistic position on peace in the Middle East, delivered a talk on: "My stand on the Palestine-Israel Issue Today." Again at the invitation of the Martin Buber Fund visited the Czech Republic. Delivered a paper for the Czechoslovak Society for Art and Science at the University of Budweis on "Heresy and the Future of Liberal Religion in the Czech Republic." Attended meeting of the Board of Directors of The North American Committee for Humanism/ Humanist Institute, but after serving on this Board for six years, decided not to run for another term. Participated in filming of a documentary about Martha and Rev. Waitskill Sharp two American Unitarians, who under extremely dangerous circumstances saved many people during the Nazi holocaust and who have been recognized as the "Righteous Among Nations."

2007 - Appeared on TV, Manhattan Cable Network, Conversations with Harold Channer on: Humanism, Theology and Politics." Attended a three-weeks workshop on: "Acting with Your Inner Partner." This workshop with Professor Ivan Vyskocil, of the Drama Academy of the Czech Republic is designed to introduce actors and people working with the public, to a new way of relating with a strong sense of spontaneity and personal authenticity. Attended a Conference on New Humanism, at Harvard University where New and Old Humanisms were discussed. Gave a lecture for the Czechoslovak Society Of Arts And Sciences at the Moravian College, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, on: "The Struggle for Contemporary Czech Humanism." Conducted a workshop on Prof. Vyskocil's method: "Living Dialogue - Celebrating Your Inner Partner." Invited to visit Prague by the Martin Buber Fund. Conducted in the mountains of South Bohemia an Interactive Dialogical Workshop on: "The Joy of Relating." Again appeared on TV Manhattan Cable Network, Conversations with Harold Channer. These programs can be viewed at any time, anywhere in the world on: www.youtube.com. In search put the words Ben-David Humanist.

Other causes Ben-David identified with and took action at different times: separation of church and state, anti-racism, women's reproductive freedom, protection of Brazilian rain forests, defense of animal rights, Earth First, Greenpeace and others.

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