



## Passover Google

We're searching for people who love party planning, enjoy assembling seder plates, are charoset heros and matzah mamas. If you have any time to donate to help make this year's Passover even better than last's, we want you! Any amount of help you can contribute is welcome.

Please email Rachel Saks at [xxxxxx@yahoo.com](mailto:xxxxxx@yahoo.com) if you want to be a part of the Passover Planning. For more details on this year's plans, see article at right.

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## One Happening Hanukkah

More than two dozen revelers kept the candles lit all night at the UHC Hanukkah party, held December 10<sup>th</sup>. In addition to the Ritual Regulars, children, adults of all ages and even the "Chabad Boys" took over the pool at the Gilman Heights Condominium.

UHC Rachel Safman kept the latkes coming while her mom, Edie could only be present in spirit, re-

covering from pneumonia (we're happy to report she's doing great now!)

There was enough food for at least eight days and nights, including "the best potato pancakes ever" and bowl upon bowl of yummy salads.

Many thanks to all who came and a special thanks to those who helped make it happen.

## Passover - What's the Plan?

That's what everyone want to know when it comes to Passover. What's the plan? Members of the UHC Steering Committee have already been working for months to not pass over any details for this year's Passover celebration.



Rabbi Ragins will be returning to Singapore for an even-better week of Seders, study, and serving our community in whatever ways we need. We are still working out the dates but a couple of new things to look forward to this year include:

**An adult-only study "seder"** (in quotes because it won't be a full seder and it will probably take place before Passover). This will be an opportunity to really learn about the history of the holiday, discuss the evolution of the rituals and the spirituality of the season.

**A not-for-tots kids event** (where parents may not be invited!) so older children have an opportunity to speak freely in the presence of Rabbi Ragins, ask questions about religion and experience the wisdom and humor appropriate for their developing minds.

**Rabbi One-on-One** Need some time with the Rabbi for a life-cycle ritual? Yearning for spiritual counseling? Want to show him "your" Singapore? He will have blocks of time that you can schedule for some one-on-one time.

**April 2<sup>nd</sup> Seder** at the American Club.

Separate mailings and emails will reveal details of prices, timings and other events.

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# Letter from the President

*Dear Fellow UHC Members,*

*This year the holiday of Tu b'Shevat falls on the 3<sup>d</sup> of February. Tu b'Shevat, generally known as the "New Year of the Trees," is an interesting holiday, which has its biblical roots in an ancient system of tithing. Its rituals, in particular the Tu b'Shevat seder (modeled after the Pesach seder about which I'll speak more in a moment), were developed by Kabbalistic thinkers, who used the holiday as an occasion for exploring esoteric themes. But this tradition had a limited following and by the late Middle Ages Tu b'Shevat had essentially been forgotten in mainstream Jewish communities until the resettlement of Israel gave rise to a renewed interest in the Land and its natural features. Since that time Tu b'Shevat has taken on new relevance and interest in Progressive communities. It has provided an occasion for congregations to come together to speak and act on issues of common concern including environmentalism and support for the Jewish state.*



*It is not only on the occasion of a religious holiday but throughout the year that we as a congregation have opportunities to identify areas of interest and organize activities that reflect these shared interests and concerns. But for our priorities to be identified and for any action to transpire we need first for our membership to share with us their views as to where our attentions should be focused, and as importantly for individuals to subsequently step forward to play a role in helping carry these ideas forward.*

*In the coming weeks our community will be carrying out a survey of our membership to gather your views on the programming which we are currently conducting and gauge your interest in select areas in which our activities might expand. I would encourage you to take the time to participate in this survey. As you do so, please give careful thought to what the UHC could ideally be for you and your family, because the feedback you provide us will be carried by our delegates to the World Union of Progressive Judaism's international convention next month where it will help inform their investments in our community's growth.*

*Of course growth is not solely, or even primarily, something that originates from without, and we as an all-volunteer organization desperately need individuals to step forward to contribute their time and skills to bring our dreams and programs to fruition. We have, in the near term, both our monthly Shabbat dinners and services for which we are always recruiting leaders (for both adult and children's activities) and the upcoming Pesach seder, which will be celebrated on the evening of 2 April under the guidance of Rabbi Sandy Ragins. If you have ever organized a seder for your friends and family at home, you can appreciate how much work goes into coordinating a seder for 200 members and guests! So, please, if you enjoy our events, if you care to see Jewish life in Singapore thrive, step forward and offer your assistance on these activities or others. We are an equal-opportunity, gender-neutral, all inclusive body that can make use of the talents of volunteers of all ages and abilities. We just need to know that you are interested and willing to help.*

*Best wishes for the new month and new year!*

*~ Rachel Saks*

# Jewish Humor Page

*Editors cannot be held responsible for readers' sense of humor. Enjoy!*

The Harvard School of Medicine did a study of why Jewish women like Chinese food so much. The study revealed that this is due to the fact that 'Won Ton' spelled backward is 'Not Now'.

There is a big controversy on the Jewish view of when life begins.

*In Jewish tradition, the fetus is not considered viable until it graduates from medical school.*

Have you seen the newest Jewish-American-Princess horror movie?

*It's called "Debbie Does Dishes."*

Why do Jewish mothers make great parole officers?

*They never let anyone finish a sentence.*

What's a Jewish American Princess's favorite position?

*Facing Bloomingdales.*

A man called his mother in Florida, "Mom, how are you?" "Not too good," said the mother. "I've been very weak." The son said, "Why are you so weak?" She said, "Because I haven't eaten in 38 days." The son said, "That's terrible. Why haven't you eaten in 38 days?" The mother answered, "Because I didn't want my mouth to be filled with food if you should call."

A Jewish boy comes home from school and tells his mother he has a part in the play. She asks, "What part is it? The boy says, "I play the part of the Jewish husband." The mother scowls and says, "Go back and tell the teacher you want a speaking part."

Where does a Jewish husband hide money from his wife?

*Under the vacuum cleaner.*

Why don't Jewish mothers drink?

*Alcohol interferes with their suffering.*

How many Jewish mothers does it take to change a light bulb?

*(Sigh) "Don't bother. I'll sit in the dark. I don't want to be a nuisance to anybody."*

Short summary of every Jewish holiday: They tried to kill us, we won, let's eat.

Did you hear about the bum who walked up to a Jewish mother on the street and said "Lady, I haven't eaten in three days." "Force yourself," she replied.

What's the difference between a Rottweiler and a Jewish mother?

*Eventually, the Rottweiler lets go.*



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# UHC Happenings

## Book Club

The group will be reading the following books in the months ahead:

**The Mezuzah in the Madonna's Foot**  
Trudy Alexi

**Because They Hate**  
Brigitte Gabriel

**The Sunflower**  
Simon Wiesenthal

**The Story of a Life**  
Aharon Appelfeled

**The Truth about Muhammad**  
Robert Spencer

**For the Relief of Unbearable Urges**  
Nathan Englander

**The Red Cavalry Stories**  
Issac Babel

**The Conversion**  
Aharon Appelfeled

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## Is everything already illuminated?

Do have a go at our next Book Club read, the award-winning New York Times bestseller, *Everything Is Illuminated* by Jonathan Safran Foer. It is a unique and unforgettable reading experience. Our next meeting will step out of the ordinary and include a screening of the book's movie.

The first session of UHC's revived Book Club on January 9 was exceptionally well attended with lively and vibrant discussion of Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent*.

### Please join us for our next gathering:

Tuesday, February 13 at 8:00 pm  
55 Woodson Park #01-12

For further details contact Laura Jacobs: xxxxxxxx@gmail.com or Jared Goldman xxxxxxxx@yahoo.com

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## Adult Education Activities, Joshua Greene

For the past two years, the UHC's adult education program has included an ongoing adult education discussion n group focusing on topical issues and a book club that discusses major books of Jewish interest. A third activity, focusing on Hebrew literacy, will be starting soon, with details to come. This article covers the first of these activities.

This year's adult education discussions have included sessions both on Sunday mornings and on weekday evenings, to address the scheduling needs of different members. The first part of this year's discussions has focused on Israel, using Alan Dershowitz's *Case for Israel* as a background reference. The initial sessions reviewed the history of Israel's development as a modern Jewish homeland and the basis for Israel's existence under international law. Participants noted how several international commissions (Peel Commission of 1937 and a UN commission in 1947) recommended the partition of Israel into separate Jewish and Arab states, which Jewish leaders accepted (despite the small land masses originally awarded) and Arab groups opposed. The second session, focusing on the period since 1967, discussed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, noting how news coverage and a perception that Israel is no longer the "underdog" have weakened support for Israel. The third session, on Sunday, January 21, addressed the role of culture in the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict. The group saw how dramatic differences in cultural styles and even the notion of truth (accordance with objective reality vs. consistency with an ideological belief or worldview) complicate resolution of the conflict. A recurring concern in all three sessions has been Israel's difficulty in presenting its case to world opinion, which reflects not only events, but also the different cultures of Jewish Israelis, Arabs, and outside observers.

The next set of adult education discussions will address Jewish ethics, using Rabbi Joseph Telushkin's recently published *Code of Jewish Ethics* as a background reference. An initial session is tentatively scheduled for Sunday, February 4, although the date may change to meet the needs and interests of members. In the interim, some who have attended the sessions on Israel have expressed interest in discussing Jimmy Carter's controversial book, *Palestine: Peace, Not Apartheid*. Members wishing to attend such a session should contact me at xxxxxxxx@yahoo.com, indicating when in February they could attend, so we can determine if there is enough interest to convene a discussion.

**Jewish Ethics Discussions**  
scheduled to begin  
Sunday, February 4

**Contact**  
Jason Hill  
xxxxxxx@yahoo.com

# Months of the Jewish Year Word Search



Tishrei  
Heshvan  
Kislev

Tevet  
Shevat  
Adar

Nisan  
Iyar  
Sivan

Tammuz  
Av  
Elul

# Announcements

## *Birth*

**Vanessa Grace Ginger Green** was born 1<sup>st</sup> December, second child to Jason and Stefanie Green and sister to Annabelle.

## *Conversion*

Congratulations to Todd Shubert and Nongyao Wongchaiya on the conversion of their daughter **Sarida Helen** at a Conservative Mikveh in Los Angeles over the holiday break. Her Hebrew name is Liora.



## *Condolences*

To **Brian Denenberg** and his family on the death of his mother Margaret Cantalupo Denenberg on Sunday, January 7.

And to **Lee Stewart**, whose father Mr. Lauren Stewart passed away on 16<sup>th</sup> January.

## *Rabbi Ragins Returning to Singapore*

Rabbi Sandy Ragins will be returning to Singapore this March with his wife Masayo to lead our Pesach seder. Rabbi Ragins and Masayo are coming to us from Los Angeles where Sandy is teaching part-time at Occidental College. He has retired from an extended term as director of Leo Baeck Temple, one of the largest Reform congregations in LA.

### **UHC Shofar**

The UHC Shofar is the newsletter for the United Hebrew Congregation in Singapore. Contributions are always welcome. Send submissions or suggestions to the editors at:

Sharon Rublin  
[xxxxxxxx@gmail.com](mailto:xxxxxxxx@gmail.com)

Brett Gold  
[xxxxxx@hotmail.com](mailto:xxxxxx@hotmail.com)

## *Congregational Survey*

In preparation for the WUPJ Convention, we will be conducting a telephone survey of our members to get their input on various aspects of congregational life and opportunities for growth. We need volunteers to participate in a telephone tree to contact other members and would also appreciate if people set a few minutes aside to talk to the canvassers when they call. This will help us to grow our programming in accordance with members' needs.

## *Hebrew Classes*

We have arranged with the Chabad Boys to offer basic (prayer book) Hebrew. These reading classes are aimed at teens and adults with limited skills who would like to improve their comfort level with the alphabet. Marc Gould is coordinating the classes and can provide details. He can be reached at: [xxxxxxx@mow.com](mailto:xxxxxxx@mow.com). Further information about the classes will be circulated shortly.

## *UHC Delegation to WUPJ*

Rachel Safman will be leading a delegation from UHC-Singapore to participate in the bi-annual meeting of the World Union of Progressive Judaism in Jerusalem, 15 - 20 March. It promises to be a spectacular event with opportunities for Jewish learning, travel, skill-building as well as interacting with members of progressive congregations from throughout the world. Details of the conference are available online at the WUPJ site:

<http://wupj.org/News/Event.asp?EventID=2>

The convention organizers have offered Singapore delegates a special concessionary registration rate of \$365 which includes all conference events (including conference dinner and opening reception with Ehud Olmert). Anyone interested in attending should contact Rachel at: [xxxxxxx@yahoo.com](mailto:xxxxxxx@yahoo.com)

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# Antarctica: *A Life-Enhancing Experience*

By Amy DaSaro

*With Tu b'Shvat falling on 2 February 2007 (15 of Sh'vat, 5767), it is a good time to introduce Victoria Salem's inspirational, firsthand experience with one of the most unusual places on earth, the Antarctic, and the effects of global warming there.*

*Victoria Salem, a member of the UHC, is an innovative, intrepid and very independent lady who graciously consented to sharing her story.*



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*The past year has seen the first conclusive evidence by scientists that global warming is caused by people and industry.*

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**B**orn in Leicester, England, Victoria attended Cambridge University, earning a degree in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic studies. She worked overseas as a Business English teacher in Japan, France, Germany and now teaches part of the year in Singapore. At times, she has been a trailing spouse, as her husband, Richard, is in Unilever's IT department.

Victoria and Richard first went to Antarctica to see the ice and the penguins. After two tours, they decided to study for the Graduate Certificate in Antarctic Studies at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand (2001-02). Camping in Antarctica, they carried out projects like exploring the geology of Castle Rock, measuring ice density and movement on the Ross Ice Shelf, and taking a census of Weddell seals. For Victoria, this was "a really life-enhancing experience."

After earning her GCAS, Victoria began working on tour ships to Antarctica, lecturing on the history of polar exploration, the Antarctic Treaty System, and Antarctic literature. This is her fourth Antarctic season; she will spend the first half as the Assistant Expedition Leader on a Russian-crew ship and, for the second, as a History Lecturer on a ship with a Greenlandic/Danish crew. She notes that the historic hut, like the most famous ones, Scott and Shackleton in the Ross Sea region, are unique and atmospheric, "as though the explorers have just left them and might come back at any time."

Most trips to Antarctica originate from the southern tip of Chile or Argentina with about 10% leaving from Tasmania or New Zealand. From South America, it takes two days to sail through the Drake Passage to the Antarctic Peninsula, whereas it takes



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*In Victoria's experience, it is the icebergs with their varying shapes, textures and colors, which provide the most wonderful sight.*

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five days to sail from Australia/NZ to the Ross Sea region. Icebreakers are necessary for Ross Sea trips. However, ships going to the Peninsula, which has the mildest ice conditions in Antarctica, are not icebreakers, but rather are ice-strengthened to break through thin ice. They have to go around the heavy stuff.

Over 30,000 people will visit Antarctica this 2006-07 season. Minimum price for a nine-day trip to the Peninsula, the shortest and cheapest trip, is about US\$4000 triple sharing. There are no hotels in Antarctica, but the Argentinians, Chileans and Australians unofficially offer tourists the opportunity to stay on the continent, even though the Antarctic Treaty strongly discourages this. Small rubber vessels, called Zodiacs, ferry passengers from ship to shore for three to four hours at a stretch.

The only facilities for tourists to eat, sleep or use a toilet are on shipboard. The food is gourmet standard, with fresh herbs, salads, and fruit available throughout the trip. Commercial fishing south of 60° S is illegal except for those with a special license. Tourist and crew fishing is strictly prohibited, but, unfortunately there is no one to enforce this law.

There are only two flowering plants in Antarctica, a grass and a pearlwort. There are, however, many mosses, algae and lichens on the Antarctic Peninsula, which has been most affected by global warming. Thousands of penguins and seabirds, including the endangered albatross can be seen, besides seals and whales. Antarctica's animals live in or at sea, only coming to land to breed or give birth. The climate is too hostile for land mammals.

The sun neither rises nor sets most of the time Victoria is down there. While pictures of Antarctica may show blue skies and sunshine, such days are rare, as the sky is most often overcast. Shades of grey are more common. However, the mountains and glaciers of the continent are spectacular in any weather, especially when low bands of cloud obscure part of them, with ice-cream peaks sticking out above.

In Victoria's experience, it is the icebergs with their varying shapes, textures and colors, which provide the most wonderful sight. "They can be so unexpected and it's marvelous when they're lined with penguins in a row, silhouetted against the sky!"

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*It's become a spiritual need for me over the years, to spend months in Antarctica to recharge my batteries," said Victoria.*

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She also says that pods of whales around the ship are amazing. "Four years ago, we had a two-hour encounter with three humpback whales, who played around the ship, diving underneath and surfacing on the other side, spy-hopping (sticking their heads out of the water to look at us) and blowing for hours." Naturally, she finds that the "first penguin chicks of the season are always a delight."

"The best thing for me is standing alone on deck early in the morning or late at night and just feeling part of the scenery. It's become a spiritual need for me over the years, to spend months in Antarctica to recharge my batteries," said Victoria.

### **Earth's last frontier: environmental impact and politics**

Getting permission to tour Antarctica is a "grey area" because no one owns the continent. While about forty-five countries signed the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, which includes regulations on notifying relevant authorities on upcoming trips, it is impossible to enforce.

With 30,000 tourists a year visiting Antarctica, how is its fragile ecosystem being protected? Victoria's company, Quark Expeditions, is a founding member of the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO). IAATO's guidelines include clear regulations about not littering, not approaching nearer to wildlife than five meters, not taking food or drink onto the continent (except for emergency use), not disturbing scientific experiments, keeping out of certain restricted areas, and not taking whale bone or articles from historic huts as "souvenirs" etc.

A maximum of 100 passengers are allowed to land at one site at a time. While scientists can use snowmobiles and skis to get around, tourists and guides must walk. During landings, staffers are positioned at strategic points to protect plant life and wildlife from interference by tourists. Tour operators must submit written reports after each landing, containing numbers of passengers going ashore at each site, length of stay, and what was done in order to judge long-term environmental impact.

It's getting easier for tourists to come to Antarctica, with prices coming down due to competition. This has made it increasingly difficult to give tourists a unique experience. Nearly all of the cruise ships go to the Antarctic Peninsula, making it difficult to "park" a ship out of sight of the other thirty or so ships in peak

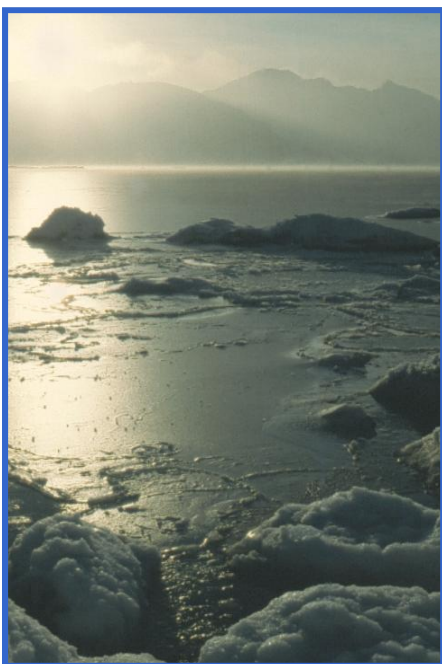
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season (Dec-Jan). It is hard also to find landing spots where tour groups won't bump into each other. Expedition leaders spend loads of time on the radio checking out who is landing where and when. There are nearly always other people's footprints in the snow upon arrival, which is sad, as Antarctica IS the last frontier on earth.



Most scientists are hostile to tourism because not only are tourists a distraction, but they trample on experiments, expect to shop on science bases, and generally act rich and spoilt. The exceptions to this hostility are some Argentinean and Chilean bases that have cashed in on the commercial opportunity. They are genuinely friendly, but they are also doing the least real science. In fact, they are there to maintain a political presence.

Argentina, Chile and the UK have overlapping land claims on the Antarctic Peninsula. Australia, New Zealand, France and Norway claim other parts of the continent. The world does not acknowledge any of these claims, though the claims are important to the countries concerned. The 1959 Antarctic Treaty froze all such claims in perpetuity. Interestingly, although both Russia and the USA have more bases in Antarctica than any other nation, they have never claimed any of it, though they "reserve the right to make a claim". Russia has built science bases in every claimant's area. The US has a base at the South Pole, which extends into every claimant's area. All countries which signed the Antarctic Treaty have the right to inspect all other bases without warning. No military or nuclear activity is permitted in Antarctica.



There is a Ukrainian base, off-the-beaten-track, Victoria likes to visit when possible, because they are doing good science AND they welcome tourists with lovely shots of vodka.

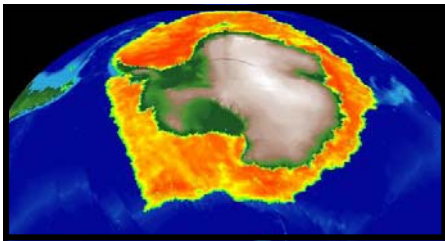
### **Global warming: a firsthand look**

Global warming is a hugely complex issue. The first effect of temperature increase in the polar regions is more snow, as very low temperatures rise to just above freezing. More snow seems to create more ice, which should have a cooling effect. But of course, as temperatures continue to rise, the snow will never have time to become compacted into ice. At the poles, temperature rises of just .5° C have a huge effect on snow melt, which is why Antarctica is such a useful place to study global warming. Sea ice melting does not actually raise sea

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*As active evidence of the thin ozone in Antarctica, everyone's skin burns incredibly easily however much sun lotion is used. Humanity should be very worried.*

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levels, but increased areas of water absorb more heat from the sun. This in turn accelerates the heating up of the planet. Ice, whether on land or sea, reflects 90% of the sun's rays back into space, so when that changes, the difference is felt fairly quickly and can spiral out of control. In summer, on the coast of the Antarctica Peninsula, temperatures rarely go below  $-4^{\circ}\text{C}$  these days, and it has been as high as  $+13^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

There is large-scale ice shelf collapse in the form of massive (and massive quantities of) icebergs, detected, measured and tracked by satellite. This affects plant and animal populations adversely. When huge icebergs block the bays, penguins cannot reach the sea to get food for their chicks, forcing the whole colony of chicks to starve to death. It is not clear yet if this is because of what humans are doing to the planet or if it would be happening anyway. It IS clearly connected to global warming. The past year has seen the first conclusive evidence by scientists that global warming is caused by people and industry.

Actually, ice shelves melting does not change sea level either (they displace the same amount of water whether solid or liquid), but if the ice shelves around the edges of Antarctica slip into the sea, then the huge ice masses of the Antarctic plateau will eventually slide into the sea too as it melts, and THAT causes the problem of sea levels rising.

There is also the issue of the ozone hole, which is largest over the poles because of climatic conditions. It is especially large in Antarctica. This year (northern autumn, Antarctic spring), scientists were alarmed because the ozone hole was the biggest ever. They had calculated that the decreasing use of CFCs should have made it smaller by now. It isn't... Eventually, all animals will be affected by increasing absorption of "bad" rays from the sun and will start mutating. Nice thought! Life on earth would never have developed if the ozone layer hadn't existed.

*As active evidence of the thin ozone in Antarctica, everyone's skin burns incredibly easily however much sun lotion is used. Humanity should be very worried.*