

WHAT KIND OF JEW ARE YOU?

(E) ✓
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EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT THERE ARE THREE KINDS OF JEWS, ORTHODOX, CONSERVATIVE AND REFORM, BUT THESE DIFFERENTIATIONS HAVE TO DO WITH PHILOSOPHIC ORIENTATION TOWARDS JUDAISM, AND WITH THE DEGREE OF RITUALISTIC OBSERVANCE. THERE ARE OTHER WAYS OF DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN JEWS ALSO. FOR EXAMPLE, THERE ARE INFORMED JEWS, AND UNINFORMED JEWS. AN INFORMED JEW KNOWS SOMETHING ABOUT JEWISH HISTORY AND IDEALS, AND ATTEMPTS TO LIVE OUT HIS JEWISHNESS IN AN INTELLIGENT MANNER. THE UNINFORMED JEW, KNOWS LITTLE ABOUT WHAT BEING A JEW MEANS, YET HE MAY CHOOSE TO LINK HIMSELF TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE. ^{STILL} THERE ARE OTHER KINDS OF DIFFERENTIATION WHICH WE MIGHT USE, AND ~~WE SHALL CONSIDER~~ SOME OF THEM NOW.

FOR EXAMPLE, THERE IS A CATEGORY WHICH WE MIGHT CALL "THE YICCHUS JEW."
A YICCHUS JEW, ^{ASSOCIATION ONLY.} IS A JEW WHO IS JEWISH BY OSMOSIS. HE, HIMSELF, IS UNAFFILIATED WITH A SYNAGOGUE, AND HE KNOWS LITTLE ABOUT HIS FAITH, YET, WHEN HE MEETS YOU, AND THE TOPIC OF JUDAISM COMES UP, HE WILL IMMEDIATELY SAY, "MY GRANDFATHER WAS A RABBI IN A LARGE VILLAGE IN LITHUANIA," OR, HE WILL SAY, "MY COUSIN WAS THE FAMOUS CANTOR IN ODESSA IN 1843," OR, "MY BROTHER IS THE SHAMMAS OF BETH AM IN SOUTH MIAMI." USUALLY, THE YICCHUS JEW WILL HASTEN TO ADD, "BUT, I AM NOT RELIGIOUS", OR, "I LIVE TOO FAR AWAY FROM YOUR ^{synagogue} SHULE TO JOIN."

A VERY COMMON TYPE OF JEW THESE DAYS, MIGHT BE CALLED THE "NIGHT CLUB JEW." THIS FELLOW IS ACTUALLY FRIGHTENED AT THE PROSPECT OF VISITING A BRIGHTLY-LIT MODERN SYNAGOGUE, BUT, IN THE SEMI-DARKNESS OF A NIGHT-CLUB, LISTENING TO THE MUSICAL STRAINS OF THE LATIN-AMERICAN VERSION OF THE HORA, HIS JEWISHNESS SEEPS TO THE FORE, AND HE WAITS EAGERLY FOR THE JEWISH COMEDIAN TO APPEAR. ^{JUST AS} LIKE THE OLD JEWS USED TO WAIT IN ANTICIPATION OF THE RABBI'S DISSERTATION ON TORAH, SO THE "NIGHT CLUB JEW" OF MODERN TIMES LEANS FORWARD TO HEAR THE HOCHMAS THAT SPILL FORTH FROM THE INSPIRED LIPS OF THE COMEDIAN. THE COMEDIAN, WHO MAY, OR MAY NOT BE, A FORMER RABBINICAL STUDENT,

The inspiration for this essay was a talk by Rabbi Phillip Bernstein of Rochester, N.Y.

SAYS A FEW WORDS OF YIDDISH, EVERYBODY LAUGHS. HE TELLS A JOKE. NOBODY LAUGHS. IT WASN'T FUNNY. HE SAYS ANOTHER FEW WORDS OF YIDDISH. EVERYBODY HOWLS. ^{Why} WHAT ARE THEY LAUGHING AT? ^{So happy?} THEY'RE NOT CERTAIN. MAYBE THEY FEEL GOOD, ^{That} BECAUSE BY EXPOSING THEMSELVES TO A FEW JEWISH WORDS, ^{They are purging} THEIR GUILT FEELINGS FOR NOT GOING TO SYNAGOGUE, ARE PURGED. WHEN THE COMEDIAN IS THROUGH TALKING ABOUT THE GOOD OLD DAYS ON THE EAST SIDE OF NEW YORK, THE "NIGHT CLUB JEW" IS SO FILLED WITH SPIRITUAL YEARNING THAT HE GETS UP AND DANCES THE LATIN-AMERICAN HORA WITH ABANDON.

PERHAPS THE LARGEST GROUP OF JEWS IN OUR TIME, ⁴ ARE THE GASTRONOMICAL JEWS. THEIR MINDS AND HEARTS ARE NOT JEWISH, BUT THEIR BELLIES ARE. THIS KIND OF JEW IS CONVINCED, NOT SO MUCH OF THE SUPREMACY OF JEWISH MORAL TEACHING, AS OF THE SUPREMACY OF JEWISH-STYLE COOKING. HIS IDEA OF A HERO IS NOT MOSES ATOP MT. SINAI, BUT THE OLD JEWISH MOTHER OVER THE KITCHEN STOVE. I HAD MY FIRST EXPERIENCE WITH THIS TYPE OF JEW WHEN I WAS IN THE ARMY. AT FIRST, VERY FEW OF THE SERVICEMEN ATTENDED SERVICES, BUT, WHEN WE STARTED SERVING SALAMI SANDWICHES AFTER SERVICES, OUR ATTENDANCE MYSTERIOUSLY QUADRUPLED. I STILL DON'T QUITE UNDERSTAND WHAT IT IS ABOUT A SALAMI THAT CAUSES A ^{Jew} MAN TO SAY "SH'MA YISROEL". AS I HAVE GROWN OLDER, I HAVE NOTICED THAT FEW JEWS ARE ACQUAINTED WITH THE IMPORTANT PROPHETS, LIKE JEREMIAH AND ISAIAH, BUT THE VAST MAJORITY ARE ACQUAINTED WITH THE VARIOUS WAYS OF SERVING SWEET AND SOUR MEATBALLS. A JEW WHO WILL NOT THINK TO BEND OVER A PRAYER-BOOK, ^{Prayer book} OR A BOOK OF LEARNING, WILL SPEND QUITE A BIT OF TIME BENDING OVER SOUP AND KREPLACH. I DON'T KNOW WHAT IS SPIRITUAL ABOUT HELZYL, BUT I HAVE SEEN JEWS GET THAT FAR-AWAY LOOK WHEN THEY EAT IT. WILLIAM JAMES, THE GREAT AMERICAN PHILOSOPHER, ONCE WROTE THAT WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS, IS A "MORAL EQUIVALENT FOR WAR", THAT IS, SOMETHING MORAL THAT WILL COMMAND ^{That kind of} MAN'S LOYALTY AND EFFORT AS MUCH AS ^{That} "WAR". ^{get out} IT SEEMS TO DEMAND OF PEOPLE. FOR JEWS, IT MIGHT BE SAID THAT WE NEED THE MORAL EQUIVALENT OF CHOPPED LIVER.

A SPECIAL VARIETY OF THE GASTRONOMICAL JEW, IS THE "DELICATESSEN JEW."

or Saturday morning

FOR SOME JEWS, FRIDAY NIGHT IS THE SACRED HOUR OF THE WEEK. FOR THE DELICATESSEN JEW, THE WEEKLY VISIT TO THE "DELLY", USUALLY ON SUNDAY MORNING, IS THE SACRED HOUR WHICH REMINDS HIM OF THE RELIGION OF HIS FATHERS. WHEN THE "DELLY JEW" ENTERS THE PORTALS OF HIS FAVORITE STORE, AND THE FIRST WAVES OF THE ODOR OF BELLY-LOX DRIFT BY, HE IMMEDIATELY GETS A VISION OF HIS HOLY GRANDMOTHER, AND HE SAYS IN HIS INWARD PARTS, "IT IS GOOD TO BE A JEW!" WHEN THE SALESMAN WAVES THE PASTRAMI UNDER HIS NOSE, THE DELICATESSEN JEW SHARES THE SENTIMENTS OF THE PSALMISTS, AND THINKS TO HIMSELF, "HOW GOODLY ARE THY TABERNACLES, O ISRAEL." IN A SENSE, ALL OF US ARE GASTRONOMICAL JEWS, BUT SOME OF US HAVE OTHER PLACES IN OUR JEWISH PANTHEON. FOR A FEW OF US, THE SOLE JUSTIFICATION FOR GOD IS HIS HANDING-DOWN OF THE TORAH FOR JEWISH COOKING.

I HAVE SPOKEN FROM THIS PULPIT BEFORE OF JEWS WHO MIGHT BE CALLED "FOUR-WHEEL JEWS". THEY ARE NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH BIG-WHEEL JEWS. A FOUR-WHEEL JEW, CAN BE IDENTIFIED BY THESE SIGNS: THEY DRIVE THEIR KIDS TO THE RELIGIOUS SCHOOL ON THE WEEKEND, BUT, INSTEAD OF GETTING OUT OF THEIR CARS TO ATTEND THE ADULT CLASSES BEING CONDUCTED ON SUNDAY, OR THE ^{Religious} SERVICES BEING CONDUCTED ON SATURDAY, THEY STAY IN THE CAR! THEY HAVE, WHAT MIGHT BE CALLED, A FOUR-WHEEL IDENTIFICATION WITH THE SYNAGOGUE. WHEN THEIR CHILDREN HAVE TO ATTEND SERVICES ON FRIDAY NIGHT, AS PART OF THE CONFIRMATION PROGRAM, THEY DRIVE THE CHILDREN TO THE SERVICE, LEAVE THEM OFF, AND THEN STAY IN THE CAR! THEY THINK NOT IN TERMS OF FAMILY TOGETHERNESS, OR OF THE LESSONS THEY MIGHT LEARN IN THE SYNAGOGUE. APPARENTLY, THERE IS SOMETHING SPIRITUALLY REASSURING TO THEM ABOUT THE INSIDE OF THE CAR! THEY MUST BE THINKING THAT THEY CAN ALWAYS TURN THE CAR RADIO OFF, BUT, IF THEY GO INTO THE SYNAGOGUE, THEY CAN'T TURN THE RABBI OFF. THE FOUR-WHEEL JEW, GOES TO THE SYNAGOGUE OFTEN. HE JUST DOESN'T GO IN THE SYNAGOGUE!

YOU ARE ALL FAMILIAR, I AM CERTAIN, WITH THE CLASSIFICATION OF "REVOLVING-DOOR JEWS." THESE JEWS COME INTO THE SYNAGOGUE, AND GO OUT SO FAST, YOU WONDER WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM. IN THIS CATEGORY, COMES THE SUB-CLASSIFICA-

TION OF "BAR MITZVAH JEWS." THEY JOIN TO GIVE THEIR SON A QUICK EXPOSURE TO THE MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR BAR MITZVAH, AND, THEY HAVE RESIGNED FROM THE TEMPLE WHILE THE ECHO OF THE BAR MITZVAH SPEECH IS STILL RESOUNDING IN ^{their} OUR EARS. WHILE THE BOY IS BLOWING OUT THE CANDLES ON THE BAR MITZVAH CAKE, THE FATHER IS WRITING THE LETTER OF RESIGNATION FROM THE TEMPLE. WE MUST ADMIT, HOWEVER, THAT THIS PROBLEM IS MUCH WORSE IN CONSERVATIVE AND ORTHODOX CONGREGATIONS THAN IN OUR OWN, WHERE THE EMPHASIS IS ON CONFIRMATION. WE HAVE A FEW "CONFIRMATION JEWS", AS WELL AS A FEW "LET'S GET OUT BEFORE THE PLEDGE COMES DUE" JEWS. ALSO IN THE GENERAL CATEGORY OF REVOLVING-DOOR JEWS, COULD BE PLACED THE "LIGHTENING-BOLT JEWS". THESE ARE THE JEWS WHO COME TO THE TEMPLE, SIT VERY QUIETLY, AND THEN COMPLAIN THAT THEY ARE QUITTING THE CONGREGATION BECAUSE "NOTHING HAPPENED"! CLEARLY, THEY EXPECTED THAT GOD WOULD CALL THEM BY NAME AS THEY SAT IN THEIR SEATS, ~~AND~~ THEY WERE DISAPPOINTED THAT NO DOVES APPEARED WITH TWIGS IN THEIR MOUTHS.

did not

THESE JEWS HAVE ~~NOT~~ YET LEARNED THAT RELIGION IS NOT A CHILL RUNNING UP AND DOWN THE SPINE, BUT A HUMAN BEING RUNNING UP AND DOWN TO SERVE HIS FELLOW MEN. A FINAL TYPE OF REVOLVING-DOOR JEW, IS THE KIND THAT QUILTS THE SHULE TO GO TO ANOTHER ONE WHERE THE CANTOR IS TALLER, OR THE RABBI HAS A DEEPER VOICE. WE MIGHT CALL THIS SUB-CATEGORY, "THE MATINEE IDOL JEW."

A MORE DIFFICULT KIND OF JEW, IS THE "CHIP ON THE SHOULDER JEW." HE IS CONVINCED THAT, BECAUSE HE IS A JEW, EVERYBODY HATES HIM. IF HE MOVES INTO A NEIGHBORHOOD WHICH HAS CHRISTIANS, HE WILL TALK TO NO ONE BECAUSE HE IS CERTAIN THAT NO ONE WANTS TO TALK TO HIM. SINCE HE IS SO WITHDRAWN, THE NEIGHBORS SOON LABEL HIM AS UNFRIENDLY, AND THEY FORGET ABOUT HIM. THIS KIND OF JEW SEES A NAZI UNDER EVERY ROCK, AND INTERPRETS EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS TO HIM IN TERMS OF ANTI-SEMITISM. WE CAN ALL UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEMS OF THIS TYPE, BUT WE HAVE TO ADMIT THAT WE HARDLY SERVE THE CAUSE OF UNDERSTANDING WHEN WE CONSTANTLY CARRY A CHIP ON OUR SHOULDERS.

A VARIETY OF THIS CATEGORY, IS WHAT WE MIGHT CALL THE "DEFENSIVE JEW."

HE IS WILLING TO GIVE GREAT SUMS OF MONEY TO ORGANIZATIONS FIGHTING ANTI-SEMITISM, BUT HE IS UN-WILLING TO JOIN ORGANIZATIONS WORKING TO TEACH JUDAISM OR TO SPREAD JEWISH CULTURE. THIS ^{person} MAN WORKS FOR SOME LIBERAL CAUSES, NOT SO MUCH OUT OF LOVE FOR HIS NEIGHBOR, AS OUT OF FEAR FOR HIMSELF. WHILE THE INFORMED JEW HAD BEST TAKE STEPS TO PROTECT HIMSELF IN MODERN SOCIETY, THE FUTURE OF JEWS AND JUDAISM DOES NOT DEPEND ON OUR SQUELCHING OF ANTI-SEMITISM, BUT ON OUR ^{practice} TEACHING OF JEWISH VALUES.

AS WE REVIEW THE MANY DIFFERENT TYPES OF JEWS THAT ARE AMONGST US, WE MUST CANDIDLY ADMIT THAT THESE TYPES ARE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE. A PERSON CAN BE A LITTLE OF EACH OF THESE THINGS, AS MOST OF US ARE, FOR UNDERSTANDABLE REASONS. WE ARE ALSO ABLE TO ADMIT, I HOPE, THAT THE VITALITY OF JUDAISM WILL NOT SURVIVE IF WE ARE MERELY NIGHT CLUB JEWS, MERELY GASTRONOMICAL JEWS, MERELY FOUR-WHEEL JEWS, OR MERELY REVOLVING-DOOR JEWS. IT IS NOT MY INTENTION TO MAKE YOU FEEL GUILTY WHEN YOU LAUGH AT A JEWISH JOKE, OR WHEN YOU EAT PASTRAMI. I AM VERY FOND OF THESE THINGS MYSELF, BUT WE MUST HAVE VERY CLEARLY IN OUR MINDS, THE NOTION THAT NIGHT CLUB JOKES AND SOUR PICKLES WILL NOT PRESERVE JUDAISM ANY MORE THAN THE OBSERVANCE OF BAR MITZVAH OR CONFIRMATION, AS A MERE FORM. SO LONG AS THE ADULTS AMONG US ARE MERELY JEWISH CHAUFFEURS, JUDAISM IS IN DIRE DANGER. OUR CHILDREN ARE BOUND TO BELITTLE THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR RELIGION WHEN THEY SEE THAT ^{that} THE PARENTS ARE ~~INDIFFERENT TO ITS TRUELY IMPORTANT ASPECTS.~~ ^{use them as the "caporal", as a substitute for their own religious commitment.}

FOR JUDAISM TO SURVIVE IN A CULTURE OF WHICH IT IS BUT A SMALL COMPONENT, EACH OF ITS MEMBERS MUST RECOGNIZE HIS RESPONSIBILITY TO SUPPORT THE SYNAGOGUE ON A CONTINUING BASIS. EACH OF US MUST RECOGNIZE THE NECESSITY OF LEARNING THE DEEPER CONTENT OF JUDAISM, AND ^{it} MAKING IT AN ACTIVE PART OF OUR LIVES.

WHEN WE BECOME JEWS, NOT ONLY GASTRONOMICALLY, BUT ALSO INTELLECTUALLY AND SPIRITUALLY, WE WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AGE SUCH AS OUR FATHERS MADE TO THEIRS.