

I am honored to participate in the Yom Kippur Symposium "What Judaism means to me". I will recount the blending of my Jewish particularity with my American persona and how Judaism has become a vibrant part of my life.

My story begins with my Russian grandparents, who all passed through Ellis Island, as did my father, bound for Chicago. My Mother's family quickly became Americanized Reform Jews whereas my Father's parents remained very Orthodox. My traditional grandfather was an interpreter for the Cunard Steamship Company and later became an impresario for entertainers and opera singers. I remember him introducing me to the famous operatic cantors Richard Tucker and Jan Peerce who he frequently brought to Chicago and Miami. My parents elected conservative Judaism and my early childhood was spent near the University of Chicago.

On Memorial Day 1945 we moved to Miami Beach and lived at the Leslie Hotel on Ocean Drive where I watched the troops parade for two months before moving to Miami just before V-J. Day. I began Sunday School at the Beth David Synagogue, Miami's pioneer conservative congregation. Later I attended the YMHA summer camp and even studied at the Workman's Circle, a center for Yiddish culture, language and secular religion. My Scottish born father who changed his name from Israel to Irving to be more American, thought I should study Yiddish to enhance my ethnic identity. If you lived in Miami after World War II, it didn't matter if you spoke Yiddish, were reform, conservative or orthodox because geographically you were a cultural, ethnic, and gastronomic Jew. I knew that Bess Myerson, Miss America, and Hank Greenberg, The Hebrew Hammer, were celebrities whereas the Rosenbergs were convicted Soviet spies. I remember my parent's excitement when Israel declared statehood and also the painful unfolding of the Holocaust. Our Rabbi, Max Shapiro, was a renowned scholar who taught classics at the University of Miami. After three years of Hebrew School, Rabbi Shapiro conducted my Bar Mitzvah and encouraged me to continue my religious study. I had joined the Boy Scouts just prior to my Bar Mitzvah and instead chose little league, sailing and scouting over continuing my Jewish education because those activities made me feel like a Norman Rockwell American. The next year, I became an Eagle Scout and was the only Jewish recipient at the awards ceremony.

Although my grandparents recalled persecutions and pogroms in Czarist Russia and my father encountered anti-semitism in Chicago, I experienced very little prejudice growing up in Miami. I was aware of the Kenilworth Hotel's infamous sign "No Dogs or Jews allowed." Though this outrage was problematic for the ADL it did not impact my life. Even though both Miami High and the University of Miami had a significant Jewish presence, my life circumstances were such that by the time I left Miami for Duke Medical School in September 1959, I was thoroughly acculturated but not assimilated. I considered assimilation the loss of ethnic identity, a velvet holocaust. I was proud of my Jewish legacy and aware that some of the most outstanding students and professors at Duke were Jewish. In Durham, I clung to my

Jewish identity by seeking out Jewish roommates and attending Services at Beth El Synagogue which had been founded in the nineteenth century by itinerant peddlers and Russian tobacco rollers. Occasionally, a Jewish family would invite us for a Passover Seder or a Thanksgiving dinner. Dr. Walter Kempner's famous Rice Diet attracted many Jewish celebrities such as Jennie Grossinger and Buddy Hackett creating excitement and Jewish nostalgia. I consciously avoided the famous Duke Chapel until my graduation ceremony. My lifelong dilemma was I wanted to be part of America and yet apart.

On June 24th 1963, my twenty-fifth birthday, I began my internship in Atlanta, Georgia at Grady Memorial Hospital. I did not anticipate that Dr. J. Willis Hurst, Chairman of Medicine, would become President Johnson's personal cardiologist on November 22nd, the night of the Kennedy assassination or that my kosher observant roommate, Mort Coleman, would become the Shah of Iran's oncologist ten years later. The Atlanta Jewish community was outstanding and well respected. The community had survived the Leo Frank lynching in 1915, which prompted the formation of the ADL, and the white supremacist Temple bombing in 1958. The Frank tragedy was so traumatic that many Jews left the state of Georgia, whereas the Temple bombing actually strengthened the civil rights cause. My Judaism was reinvigorated when I met my future wife, Ellen Balser. Ellen, a student at the University of Pennsylvania, was a beautiful, refined, intelligent young woman, the youngest child of the most respected Jewish family in Atlanta. Because Ellen's father, Meyer Balser, was so exceptional, having received every possible award and accolade repeatedly from the Jewish community, I was exposed to a most extraordinary man who lived a life emphasizing community, charity and social action that was a revelation to me.

In 1965, I was drafted and spent two years in the military as a medical officer with a dogtag embossed blood type A positive, religion Jewish. I volunteered for the Marines and Vietnam but was assigned to the Air Force and spent my first year at Osan, Korea as the Chief Medical Officer of the 6045 Air Force Hospital. Although not a M.A.S.H. unit, we did offer circumcision on demand with complementary anesthesia. I attended High Holiday services freezing outside of Seoul within North Korean artillery range. I reflected on my Judaism and ate kosher rations, thanks to Rabbi Dimont, the nephew of the well known author Max Dimont. On trips to Japan, I sought out camaraderie at Ann Dinker's Ginza Deli and the Tokyo JCC kibbitzing with Jewish expatriates. The next year, I was stationed at Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas home of the Thunderbirds. I arrived in Las Vegas on Erev Yom Kipper, unpacked and went to Kol Nidre services. Connecting with Judaism in Las Vegas was a lot easier than Korea. Later that year, I was awarded the Air Force Commendation Medal, which I accepted proudly as an American Jew. After my discharge from the Air Force, I returned to Atlanta and Ellen and I were married at Congregation Beth Jacob by Rabbi Emmanuel Feldman who ten years later gave the Jewish blessing at Jimmy Carter's inauguration.

In 1971, Ellen and I moved to Houston so I could take one additional year of medical training. I chose Houston because my best friend and medical school roommate, Mark Entman, had joined the Baylor faculty. We stayed, raised our daughters Laura and Karen and made Houston our home. We joined Congregation Beth Israel October 1st 1971, exactly forty years

ago this week and later went on the first pilgrimage to Israel with Rabbi Karff. During that time, our daughters were confirmed, graduated from Kinkaid, The University of Texas and married exceptional young men. They have since moved to Dallas and Atlanta and have blessed us with five precious grandchildren.

Ellen and I have been very fortunate to have traveled extensively and have pursued our heritage by visiting Jewish sites, museums and synagogues wherever we go. Even at Machu Picchu and Tierra de Fuego, I kept my eyes open for a lost tribe, but to no avail. Last year, Ellen and I returned to Jerusalem and we had shabbat dinner at the King David Hotel, viewed the Dead Sea Scrolls and prayed at the Western Wall. At Yad Vashem, I was reminded of how much the Holocaust had shaped the State of Israel. As a Jew, I'm proud of Israel's accomplishments but my American patriotism is not conflicted by a dual loyalty. The prophet Jeremiah exhorted the exiled Babylonian Jews to pray for the welfare of the state where they lived. A hundred years ago, my grandparents found Zion in Chicago and Louis Brandeis addressed the loyalty issue. On a trip to Germany we went to the Leo Baeck Synagogue in Berlin and the Wannsee Villa where Nazi officials planned the final solution. Later I visited Dachau, the first major concentration camp in Germany. After those somber experiences, Ellen and I were emotionally moved to become founding members of the Holocaust Museum and later Ellen was asked to chair the Moral Courage Award Dinner honoring Edgar Bronfman.

Somehow over time, I had become a tepid calendar and life cycle Jew without attachment. Although comfortable at Beth Israel, I had become alienated, neither emotionally or intellectually engaged nor open to my religion. Two years ago at this Yom Kippur service. I was uplifted to redeem my Jewish heritage. I remembered that Talmud Torah is considered to be the most central mitzvah because study hopefully leads to good deeds. I began my renewal by attending Saturday Torah study and even took the "Introduction to Judaism" course. For the past two years, I have attended Torah study and find it compelling because of the biblical text, our exceptional Rabbis and the attendees who are dedicated students. Although Talmud Torah is an end in itself, it has stimulated my interest in Jewish theology, philosophy and history. Just as the Jewish political emancipation led to secular enlightenment and Reform Judaism, my redemption has been transformative putting rhythm back in my Jewish calendar.

Judaism is my inherited faith, it is my DNA. Although, religion has many definitions and responses, Judaism emphasizes finding God and what God wills you to do. More than just a religion, Judaism is a civilization with diverse cultures, common folkways and a unifying law that binds a Jew to every Jew that has ever lived. Reform Judaism has evolved without dogma to reflect the spirit of the times, accept biblical criticism and the individual's response to more than six hundred mitzvot. Judaism imparts a moral posture for treating people ethically and instructing humanity on how to live a sanctified life. If Judaism was only about commandment, it would be an intellectual or studied morality; however, ceremonial acts, such as kindling the Sabbath candles, reciting kiddush and celebrating holidays with friends who have become our family, provide warmth, and emotional satisfaction for Ellen and myself. Some say Judaism is

about belonging, behavior and belief. However, it is the combination of morality, nostalgia, and the unknown that defines Judaism for me.

I want to thank Rabbi Lyon and the congregation for allowing me to share my story and Beth Israel for helping me better understand Micah's prophecy.

"He has told you, O Man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you:

Only to do justice and to love goodness and to walk modestly with your God".