

## Reflections on being Jewish

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*Photo date and location unknown*

Being Jewish is a personal matter. Ask any ten Jews what it means to be Jewish and you'll get ten different answers. Having got that out of the way, I am now going to tell you what it means to be a Jew... to me.

Judaism (for me, in case you forgot) is a highly verbal religion. It is a religion of the WORD, both spoken and written. God's relationship to man is made on the basis of a legal contract, in which both parties have a say. God *might* have approached Abraham one day in the following manner, "How'd you like a blessing, Abe?" To which the patriarch would immediately have responded, "So what else is new?" But, then, with further thought he would have added, "So what do I have to do to get it?" And the Almighty, showing him the Law (including the fine print) would have replied, "Just sign on the dotted line, please."

From its very conception, Judaism has been a religion stressing the mutual relationship between God and man. The covenants He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all granted God's blessing to man in his earthly endeavors, if he upheld his part of the bargain.

But in the time of Mosheh Rabeinn (Moses our teacher) the emphasis on the WORD became even more pronounced. According to Jewish belief, when the Law was presented by God to the people at Mount Sinai, every Jew who lived and every one who ever would live was there in spirit if not in flesh to accept it.

So the Law is the center of Jewish life. Attend any Sabbath service in a synagogue the world over, and it's

as plain as the nose on your face that the scroll of the Law (the Torah) is the center of the worship service. "Torah" in its limited sense refers to the five books of Moses-Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. But in its broader meaning it connotes the written and oral Law that, theoretically at least, governs the life of every Jew-the law which binds man to God. And at the very heart of the Law is the concept of holiness. God is "the Holy One, blessed be He" before whom man stands in awe and wonder.

Thus, for the Jew, every act is sacred. There is a special prayer to be said before washing your hands; before meals; when killing an animal to be used for food; when rising in the morning; when retiring at night; and in general for almost every action. All of life is sacred to the Jewish people.

Though this might seem to put very great restrictions on one's relationship to God at first, upon closer examination it turns out that for those who can see beyond the letter of the Law to its spirit, a genuine wonder and de light results. There is nowhere that God cannot go with you. There is nothing you can do without His sharing it with you, providing you invite Him along. From readings I've done in the beliefs of other religions, I have found that this emphasis on the sacredness of life is quite rare. In Zen Buddhism, though, everyday actions are considered important, and almost sacred, depending on the person's attitude towards them.

To me, this similarity between the two seemingly divergent outlooks of Judaism and Zen is encouraging and hopeful. I believe that truth is universal. It is the point around which all men will one day unite. So I see these two different ways of life meeting at a central point.

Their approach, though, differs. Zen rejects verbal understanding. Masters give their students word puzzles (called a "koan") to meditate upon, in order to point out the futility of trying to understand God and life verbally. (An example would be "What is the sound of one hand clapping?") After meditating upon this with deep concentration, the moment of realization-the great intuition-occurs, and the student breaks through the barrier of reason to the reality beyond.

Judaism, on the other hand, emphasizes the rationality of God. (Although He is much more than that and, some believe, ultimately unknowable.) Abraham, for instance, argued with God in order to save the people of Sodom from destruction. Similarly, Moses successfully argued away God's wrath (Numbers 14: 13) when the Jews disobeyed Him in the wilderness. Both times, the Lord listened to reason.

Though some Jews believe that God has given His complete revelation of Himself through the Law, my own opinion is that today He has fulfilled the Law in the Unification Principle. The Principle teaches that God's original intention for creating man was to establish a perfect family on the earth, beginning with one perfect man and one perfect woman. From them, a society, nation, and world of perfection would develop.

To me, this is a very Jewish idea. I believe that the hope of the Jewish people-to see this promise of a perfect world realized in our time-lies in the Unification Principle movement. Then, all mankind will live in the restored Garden of Eden, as children of Our Heavenly Father.