

9/25/89

PLYMOUTH STATE COLLEGE
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PLYMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE 03264

Dear Deane Shapiro,

I thoroughly enjoyed -- and learned much from -- your recent article on Judaism in JTP. After 20 years, ^(!) it's about time something like this got published in JTP, which seems to have a bit of a bias towards Buddhism and the East.

Could you possibly send me two reprints? I know two rabbis (one is my father) who would like to read your article, I'm sure. If you are low, send one and I will xerox it.

My only reservation about the article, actually more about Judaism as a path is that, having grown up in a traditional Jewish family, Yeshiva training and all, it has always seemed to me that the spiritual path element has been de-emphasized, and the moral, guilt-inducing, dogmatic element has been over-emphasized. Perhaps that is why so many Jews wind up taking up some Eastern path. I myself learned TM some years back. I practiced it for about a year, then sporadically ever since. The reason I did not even consider Judaism was twofold: on the negative side, I had associated Judaism with "thou shalt nots" and inhibition of development. On the positive side, I looked for some means of self-transcendence and was really not aware that Judaism had any of these. Prayer was essentially mumbling.

A workshop with Zalman Schachter and just growing older -- I am 43 -- have turned things around some. Like Gurdjieff said, you have to come to terms with the religion of your childhood at some point. I can now pray, although I find it much more effective when chanted or sung. So, your article really brought together a number of latent positive strands in my reinvolvement with my childhood religion.

Thanks in advance.

Eshono Tovah,
Joel Funk



August 21, 1991

Deane H. Shapiro, Jr., Ph.D.
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Dear Deane,

Concerning your article on "Jewish Spirituality", I like your style and your erudition. I am not sure if we are in 100 percent agreement, but maybe you wouldn't like it if we were.

The word "spirituality" is going to become more and more a topic of interest, a topic for articles, papers such as yours, essays, sermons and debate. I am trying to work up the courage to write an opinion column for Reform Judaism magazine to see if I can get it printed, but also to make a point that ritual is not, by itself, spiritual. Do we really believe that the more intricate our rituals, our dress, our dovening that it makes us more spiritual? Is a moment of silence a pagan intrusion?

I think you have to consider that Reform Judaism may have some kinship with the Quakers or Methodists who really were offended almost at the rituals of the Catholic or Episcopal churches, and in this country they would certainly be offended

the Greek Orthodox church. A moment of silence to them is a valued, spiritual element. Kissing the Torah while it is being walked around the room, or wearing a hat or kipah may not decrease the feeling of spirituality, but just by putting one on, one cannot say, "Look, God, I'm spiritual!"

There was a 30-years war fought in Europe between Christian elements over how much ritual to have in a church. I don't think Jewish groups are at that stage, but certainly in Israel, there is bitter, bitter feeling between the extreme Orthodox and the Reform movements.

I believe you acknowledged my point of view at the bottom of page three that "observation of rituals does not necessarily imply spirituality." At the bottom of page four, you ask the same question I do. On page six, you touch on the difference or the similarity between spirituality and social action.

Actually, I always felt that social action and ethics are entirely different. Certainly our Social Action Committee in Washington takes positions that from a Jewish point of view, are really on the opposite side of ethical behavior. Even the Reform attitude toward homosexuality is on the verge of being considered - and certainly is considered by the other Jewish groups, unethical.

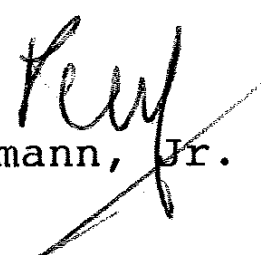
The approach to the AIDS problem where you hide it at every chance is certainly not a Jewish ethic. It is the opposite of the Jewish ethic where you were not supposed to do harm to anyone.

I note that the kipah you mentioned would be, "as a way of feeling the hand of God covering us." Applying that to the prayershawl, of course, would be that it would be the hand of God choking us, and therefore you would not wish to wear a prayershawl. I am being facetious in a way because to a person raised like myself, and your mother too as far as that goes, we were always taught that the outer garments had nothing to do with the inner soul. I would stick with that myself even today.

We also go with Isaiah who did not want to see anyone wearing sackcloth and ashes because he felt that was just a substitute for doing good to the poor. He spoke rather forcefully - I don't have it in front of me, but saying that this was not the type of fasting that he wanted, but he wanted you to be kind to the poor, and make sure that your wages were paid to your servant at the end of the day - which was in a day when servants were available and presumably were docile and spoke the language.

It was good seeing you here, although really Betty Ann will be missed by so many of us that there was a sadness to our meeting that even our conversation, and maybe even especially our conversation, could not quite cover.

Best regards,


Paul Uhlmann, Jr.

PUJr/bj