

being called upon to decide where our loyalties lie—to this “land of freedom” the Union Prayerbook says we live in, or to the demands of a conscience formed by Jewish tradition.

When Judaism is taken seriously

Until comparatively recently, it was second nature to us to consider legality and morality synonymous. The most lasting expressions of the religious understanding of Judaism have been primarily legal. We have assumed, for three thousand years on and off, that the use of law to regulate personal and group relations was a religious duty. We are commanded to have judges and courts, and to submit ourselves to their judgements. Only once before in our history have we been forced to consider the possibility that the “law of the land” might not be law *for us*; only under the Romans did we have to consider the implications in Jewish law of a secular regime whose laws could have immoral consequences. From the revolt against the Romans came a good deal of theologizing, on pacifism and violence, resistance and rebellion, war and collaboration, which has become significant to many Jews today. When is it lawful to disobey the law of the land? When is it obligatory? When is it lawful to disobey a commandment in order to obey the law of the land? When is it lawful to resist injustice by violence? When is silence in the face of evil complicity?

Once the Romans had made their peaceful desert in Palestine, the problem rarely troubled us—we were willing to do anything to live in peace with our neighbors, short of (and sometimes including) apostasy. But the Holocaust of European Jewry ought to have made clear, even to us—especially to us—that legality and morality were not necessarily equivalent.

A far less apocalyptic confrontation with war abroad and poverty and repression at home has raised in the minds of many Jews today some of the same questions the Romans forced us to live with two thousand years ago. We are being brought face to face with the realization that any religion, taken seriously, can and sometimes must become a counter-culture, because any seriously religious person, (other than a worshipper of the official state gods) knows himself to be commanded (either by conscience or by revelation) by an authority no state can nullify. Any state that tries to place itself above that authority is calling us to the worship of idols. Being Jewish today means, at the very least, re-examining the demands the state, any state—Russia, Israel, the United States—

makes upon its citizens. For some of us, it also means the decision that some such demands—such as the draft, the war in Southeast Asia, the commitment of national and local government to the principle that the needs of business come before the needs of people—are in fact idolatrous and must be resisted. For others, it means desperate attempts to resolve the problems raised by such demands from the peculiarly useful vantage-point that middle-class, well-educated, dedicated Jewish professional and business people have. For others, it may mean mobilizing pride and the instinct for self-preservation against the proud and defensive groups pressing for change; or it may mean rejecting virtually everything that calls itself Jewish on the grounds that Judaism in America and Israel has become more American than Jewish, and is tainted too deeply with the idolatries of American life to be worth saving.

Perhaps it seems that most of the things I have said about being Jewish could as easily be said of being a religious human being in this age. Judaism is by no means the only religion to serve as a source of or focus for radical awareness of the idolatries around us. The only obvious difference is that we have had a good deal more practice in alienation, whether destructive or creative. We have been brought to this, for better or for worse, by our prophetic heritage; if we now live in a time when the “words of the prophets are written on the subway wall,” maybe the best and most Jewish thing we can do about it is to grab a Magic Marker and go underground.

Anti-anti-establishmentarianism

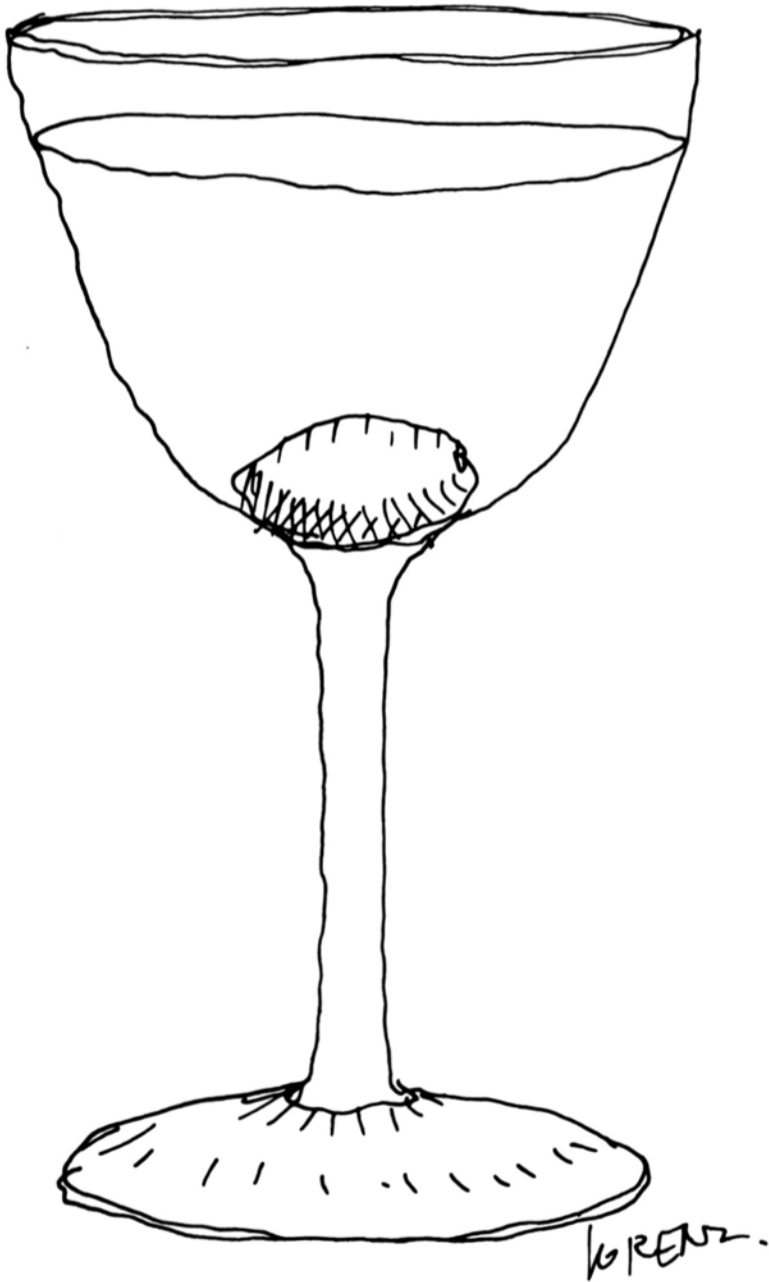
David L. Kline

I am a Reform rabbi, eight years out of H.U.C.—J.I.R., have served four part time “student” pulpits during graduate studies, been an assistant for a year, and am presently in my fourth year in a suburban New York congregation. My involvement in being Jewish today breaks down into two broad areas: *status quo* and *status halevai*. In the one I make a living, in the other I am pretty much on my own.

The *status quo* consists of: the temple services, education, activities, fund raising; institutions and organizations, including Zionist, interfaith, interracial, communal; personal contacts, counselling congregants and non-members. I did not create any of these but am required to lead, participate, develop and

expand them. There was a time when I was mostly anti-establishment. Today I see myself as "the establishment," for local purposes, at least, and hence I am, to a degree, responsible for the status quo. I find it somewhat depressing.

It is all too easy to list the problems and defects of our synagogues—apathy, boredom, crassness, disorientation, emptiness, false values—and so on and on. Where is there a rabbi who could say that his congregation is what it ought to be: a group of Jews gathered together for worship, study, and communal activity. Perhaps there are some temple members who are satisfied, but what could be more damning than the fact that the vast majority of Jews aren't



The Gap 2: "Rotten kids. They keep running away from reality."

moved to enter, let alone affiliate with a synagogue, and that most of those who do join apply only when their sons are of age to begin the minimum prerequisite course for Bar Mitzvah?

The atmosphere in the synagogue is not conducive to a positive program, but a temple is a temple, and avoiding any test for success, we must do the best we can regarding sermons, worship services, religious school, youth activities, bulletin, weddings and funerals. The only function that always succeeds is visiting with the sick and the mourners. I doubt if Jews join a temple for this benefit, but I venture to say that many remain members because of receiving it.

Are we deceiving ourselves?

We can only hope that the primary concern with Bar Mitzvah, with all the ambivalent feelings it brings up, does not leave people antagonistic to what we of the establishment feel is really important. (Maybe we are wrong? Maybe what is important is the "personal touch.") There are those, mostly laymen, who speak of the "golden opportunity" of the children's enforced but brief experience in religious school and of the parents' even briefer encounter with the temple: "something is bound to rub off." I am inclined to doubt it, and fear that the end result is likely to be negative. I have met very few adults who speak with fond memories of having been "Bar Mitzvahed." I remain optimistic and idealistic about my work in the congregation, but I am aware of a measure of self deception. When I lose this optimism, I hope to have the courage to look for other work, as many of my colleagues have done.

There are also the organizations: Israel Bonds, U.J.A., brotherhood causes, anti-drug efforts, various philanthropies. These go beyond the scope of the synagogue into the broader Jewish and non-Jewish world. They are another way to reach, educate and inspire our people, though here too, the major effort seems to be on organizing and fund raising, and we run into most of the same problems that we find in the synagogue.

One thing about the *status quo* institutions is that they offer opportunities to rabbis and laymen alike to become very important persons. Aside from organizational fame and honor, there is ego gratification in doing something for a cause, of garnering *mitsvah* credits. Promoting the *status quo* is a relatively cheap, easy and unencumbering way to meet some universal personal needs. There is nothing

wrong with doing it as Jews. We are, after all, taught not to question motives, ulterior or otherwise. What counts is the act.

Both the required and the valued

I learned from my father, who is also a rabbi, that a basic function of our profession is to work for the preservation of Judaism. It has been my experience that Judaism as an institution works well to preserve itself, given the combined efforts of all those who are concerned. It seems clear to me that the people of Israel will continue to live on. I am therefore determined to divide what creative energies I have between the *status quo* and the search and experimentation that could be called the *status halevai*. I would like to think that the two are really bound together in my career, but the persistent distinction is that the former is expected and demanded of me in order to justify my salary, while I demand the latter of myself, in order to justify my work.

The *status halevai* is guided not by requirements, minimums, schedules—not “*shver es tsu zein a Yid*”; but by the thought of enrichment and enhancement of life. It is concerned with moral, spiritual, aesthetic, sentimental, philosophical and ego values. I consider these values the fulfillment of Jewishness and feel that as a rabbi, I am a missionary to the Jews.

The source for decision

The question of moral judgment is a constant challenge. Situation ethics is an effective principle though it leaves things far more complicated than the traditional absolutes. Religion is first and foremost a matter of value judgments, particularly concerning relationships between individuals. Our sources, Biblical and rabbinic, are rich but uneven and conflicting, so that selectivity is a matter of course. I choose a humanistic standard: “Love thy neighbor as thyself,” “What is hateful unto thee . . .”, and a fitting image of God from Genesis: Man = (image of) God, creative, thoughtful, powerful, judging, passionate, compassionate. With such a standard and image it is relatively simple to quote proof texts.

Actually, the proof texts prove only a certain attachment to our past, a degree of continuity. (They can also prove to be a trap of righteous pomposity by which the educated tries to outwit the less educated. There is no real value in debating tactics.) Nevertheless it is good to be able to find precedent when searching for what Judaism must say about Viet Nam, marijuana, drug addiction, ecology, over-

population, sex, marriage, children, individual freedom, making a living, living. I hold that our value system points towards pacifism in connection with Viet Nam and Israel alike; towards holding sacred the environment, towards love and respect in any human encounter, be it between strangers, lovers or members of a family; towards personal freedom and responsibility in regard to drugs and sex. I am interested not in “personal opinions,” but well based and cogent judgments, recognizably Jewish. (Who does he think he is? Eliahu Hanavi?) Take, for example, marijuana, which some people prefer to alcohol. We thank God for the drink which alters our consciousness, and we drink at every happy ritual. Why shouldn't Jewish users smoke a *L'chaim* at appropriate times? Maybe the quality, whatever it is, that has preserved Jews from alcoholism might carry over to prevent drug addiction. I am compelled by regard for life, to make a moral distinction between marijuana and dependence upon hard drugs.

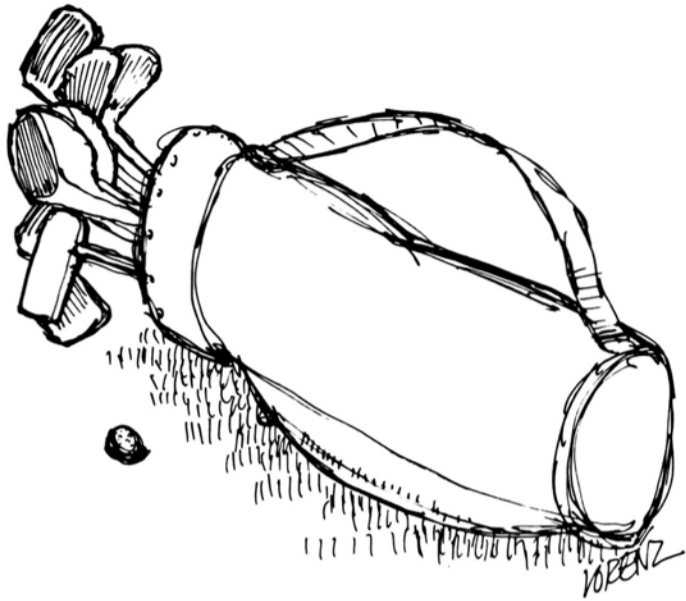
Can prayer happen here?

Prayer worship is in profound disuse as an expression of Jewishness among the congregations I have served. One of the most devout declarations you can hear is, “You don't have to go pray in a temple in order to be a good Jew.” I would insist that praying together with a group of Jews is essential to Jewish existence, except that then I would have to admit that it is time to close up shop. It happens that people go on being Jews without much prayer or any sort.

People do attend synagogue from time to time. High Holy Days, Bar Mitzvahs, Yahrzeits. Some rabbis draw crowds for their oratory. We hold “special Sabbaths”: Sisterhood, Men's Club, Youth Group, family night, speakers, rock services, etc. Sometimes the pageantry of a holiday, Simchat Torah or Purim, for example, attracts a full house. There are also temple “regulars” who don't miss a Friday night except for a cause. What do people do when they are at services? They look, listen, pay attention, read, converse, doze, gripe. My guess is that if any praying does occur, it is in spite of, rather than as a result of the efforts of the rabbi, cantor, choir and pulpit committee.

Learning the activity of prayer

Halevai, the synagogue should become a house of prayer. To begin, the rabbi will have to shed his robed and exalted role of “leading” the services. The



The Gap 3: "Our club is known for its high standards and exclusive membership."

better he performs, the worse the barrier, the more apt the congregation is to listen rather than pray. When I was new at my role in the pulpit, I enjoyed a sense of prayer as I read. Today, all too frequently, I find myself concerned with diction, pitch, interpretation, projection. I take pride in my skill and appreciate the compliments. The only trouble is that I am thereby defeating the function of worship.

Thoughtful and brilliant innovative services are not the answer so long as they are staged by performers. What is needed is something else altogether. *Davening*, reading, chanting, singing by a group, whether in Hebrew or in English, is a rudimentary but real form of worship, in which comprehension is secondary. There is a powerful, mystic effect that comes of participation in such prayer, and it could reward all those who attend services, were it only to be achieved. In addition, services should contain plenty of provocative and inspiring reading matter, to be spoken aloud or studied silently. I once saw in a yeshiva the time honored practice of studying Torah during the services by those who preferred to, while others continued to follow the prayerbook. I think people will come to temple when there is a possibility for them to do something, rather than sit back and have others do it for them.

The ultimate form of prayer is meditation. All other forms should lead up to, set the tone for, encourage,

this most difficult of religious acts. I don't mean, "Let us pray silently on page 24." I mean spiritual and mental discipline, a kind of concentration, a stimulation, freeing, and expansion of the consciousness. We need to learn about meditation, for it is, I think, a new form for the synagogue.

Can Jewishness be taught?

Education is the key. I can almost agree with the ancient intellectual who declared, "*Talmud Torah k'neged kulam*." Almost, but not quite, for another of the pieties a rabbi hears is, "I am not religious (observant) but I want my child to know he is a Jew and to learn some Jewish history." What keeps this from being comical is that it reflects a serious argument that you don't have to do anything in particular to be a Jew, but you should know something about it and "feel" Jewish.

Halevai, that education be the exciting process by which we learn how better to live; that Jewish education be helping Jews, young and old, learn to participate in a broad, Jewish experience. I have not yet discovered a way to educate significant numbers of adults. We have plenty of children in classes, but the failure of our religious schools is as great as the failure of our public schools. There are so many years of confusion behind us that we almost accept failure and frustration as a tradition. I am not yet ready to give up on religious school, but I don't deny that there could possibly be a benefit to Jewish education in closing our doors.

I am determined that it doesn't have to be this way. I have turned to a new unit curriculum, hired good teachers, searched for effective techniques, all in an effort to give our children and adults a stimulating opportunity for intellectual growth. We must end our dependence upon lectures and textbooks and utilize some sort of "problem solving" method. The more I read about learning patterns and curriculum reform, the more I sense my own inadequacy and frustration.

I recall a dictum from my education teacher (Dr. Schwartzman) at the seminary: "Don't try in a Sunday School to go beyond the public schools in learning skills." I have seen some beautiful plans fail primarily because the students (and/or their parents) weren't prepared for such "far out" techniques. It may still be possible for religious schools to get out of the rut, but home and school environments seem to hold students back. The best successes I have seen have been at certain summer

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camps, weekend conclaves and retreats, and trips to Israel. There is also a hopeful sign, I think, in the enthusiasm that can be generated in the primary grades, where students and teachers are more flexible. Maybe they could grow into a generation of adults who still find education worthy of their time.

Denying plastic judaism

There are other, less complicated, aspects of being Jewish. They have to do with fun and pleasure and embellishment, *hiddur mitsvot*, as I understand it. I apply the most liberal definition to Jewish food, humor, music, art, dance, epigrams literature. Apart from calories and vitamins, there is soul value in "gastronomic Judaism," which includes, for example, *shmura matses* and the wonderful "*tavlin shel Shabbat*." Our comedians are philosopher-clowns and they, together with our artists and writers, help us understand ourselves and be ourselves. I'd like to do away with stamped out, plastic, ceremonial items like certificates, *menorahs*, *mezzuzahs*, *talesim*. Let us design and make them ourselves; the greater the effort, the more significant the result. We don't know how?—for shame! We don't have time?—something must be wrong with our priorities. We must do things with care and *tam* as an expression of what we are. Beauty is important to you if you want to be a *shainer yid*. And, along with the *tsuris* in a *yiddishe kop* and a *yiddishe neshome*, there is no end of delight.

Altogether, I find it good to be a Jew. Naturally,

however, I cannot leave well enough alone. Apart from theological and methodological search, another, more basic question will not leave me alone: what is the direction and goal of the development, moral, spiritual, intellectual, aesthetic? I really don't know, apart from my faith that it is all leading somewhere. Perhaps the only answer must be: a better life, the glorification of God.

There are a number of new paths with vital possibilities for the future: e.g., *aliyah*, *havurot*, missionary work, intermarriage, militancy, radicalism. Who knows what they may bring? Some I like more than others, but in the perspective of destiny and the "glorification of God," how can we reject development? On the contrary, we must "get into" it. A lot has happened with the Jews and with the world in the one hundred thirty-three odd generations since Avraham Avinu. I wonder what it will be with the next one hundred thirty-three. I'm with them!

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