

Director's Note

"If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one quarter of one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous puff of star dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly, the Jew ought hardly to be heard of, but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk.

His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine and abstruse learning are also very out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in this world in all ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself and be excused for it. The Egyptians, the Babylonians and the Persians rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greeks and Romans followed and made a vast noise, and they were gone; other people have sprung up and held their torch high for a time but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, and have vanished.

The Jew saw them all, survived them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert but aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jews; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality? "

– Mark Twain, September 1897

What does it mean to be Jewish? Ask 12 Jews, you'll get 45 answers. Every page in the Talmud has one or 2 verses from the Torah, surrounded by rabbinical debates about their meaning. I must believe that constant search for answers has enabled our survival over the centuries. We are a people who love to argue, debate, and question everything – from the meaning of Torah to what to have for dinner.

We are a people of strong traditions. Despite persecution and oppression and countless empires that have tried to destroy us, we have survived. We practiced in caves despite the Greeks forbidding it. We became "conversos" during the Spanish Inquisition. Outwardly converting, but secretly practicing. Recently a secret synagogue was discovered in the Terezin concentration camp. I often wonder if the lack of interest in our traditions will do what Pharaoh, Amalek, Haman, the Greeks, Hitler, and too many others to count failed to do.

Anti-Semitism is on the rise once again (up 57% in 2017). Jewish children are being attacked in France. Poland is denying its role in the Holocaust. Swastikas are appearing in Jewish cemeteries. Steve Bannon and Richard Spencer - proud anti-Semites - are receiving international attention. Louis Farrakhan and Linda Sarsour are being embraced by the left – they love to speak of intersectionality – just not with the Jews. People with Jewish stars on pride flags were kicked out of the Chicago Dyke march. Once again, we are the other. And now we are seeing a rise in Jewish involvement – religiously and socially.

I spent most of my twenties travelling and always sought out the Jewish community. Even if I was somewhere for only one night, and that night was Passover, I knew I had a place to go for Seder – no questions asked. My instinct to seek out my people goes back to my strong Jewish upbringing. We kept kosher and went to Shabbat services every week. My mom made Shabbat dinner, right down to baking challah, and my dad did the traditional blessings over us kids. Despite moving around a lot, we found the Jewish community wherever we were. I'm pretty sure that this sense of community stems from our nomadic heritage. We had no choice but to stick together. Here we are thousands of years later, still going strong.

As Daphna says in the play, culture matters. Where we come from matters. When I meet Jewish people who don't practice the way I do, they often guiltily tell me "I'm a bad Jew." I don't believe that. In my humble opinion, if you identify as a Jew, you're a Jew. How you choose to worship or practice is personal. There is a broad spectrum of Jewish people out there. Who am I (or anyone) to tell someone that how they do it is wrong? Yes there are 613 commandments. To me one of the most important ones is to love your neighbor as yourself. I keep kosher. My Jewish husband does not. That doesn't mean he is a bad Jew. There is a Jewish value called Tikkun Olam. It means repairing the world – making the world a better place. If more people practiced Tikkun Olam, imagine what we all could achieve.

This play asks the question, “What does it mean to be a Jew?” but it also asks, “What does it mean to be family?” We love our families but we don’t always like them. We are capable of hurting family in a way that strangers can’t. But families can give love and support in a deeper capacity.

Love your neighbor, love your family, love each other – even if you don’t like each other.

L’shalom. Toward peace.

Stacey