

Z-mail Parshas Lech Lecha

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JEWISH PRIDE?

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, in a brilliant essay titled *Is Judaism Worth Saving?* (Encounters pp. 103-108, Moznaim Publishing) discusses “Jewish pride”. He writes about a rabbi who was a bit skeptical when Jews would tell him that they were proud to be Jewish. So the rabbi used a sort of “lie detector” test to determine whether people were in fact sincere when they mentioned their Jewish pride. If, during the course of the conversation with the rabbi, a person would declare, “I’m Jewish, and I’m proud of it!” the rabbi had a standard reply. He would say, “I’m glad that you’re proud to be Jewish, because you sure look Jewish!” The person would usually just look at the rabbi at first, to see if he were just kidding. When he realized that the rabbi was quite serious, his face would turn red from embarrassment, and he would emit a hollow laugh. He might have been proud to *be* Jewish, or at least he said he was, but he certainly wasn’t proud to *look* Jewish. This scenario took place time and time again.

Of course, a person who doesn’t feel proud about the way he looks is likely not really proud of who he *is*. So I bet that there are a gazillion Jews out there who claim to be proud Jews but can’t really be that proud of being Jewish since they spend untold amounts of money just to look as “non-Jewish” as they possibly can. Kind of sad, isn’t?

This phenomenon of Jews outwardly declaring Jewish pride while being ambivalent towards their Judaism on the inside is not new in Jewish history. In fact, the brother of the very first Jew to walk the planet was just such a person.

As we are told by *Rashi* in his commentary to Genesis 11:28, Abraham’s father, Terach, who was a manufacturer and seller of idols, complained to the evil king Nimrod that Abraham had smashed his idols, so Nimrod had Abraham thrown into a fiery furnace. Abraham’s brother, Haran, was challenged to choose between Nimrod and his idolatrous beliefs and Abraham and his belief in monotheism and One G-d. Haran said to himself, “If Abraham emerges unscathed, I am with him, but if Nimrod is victorious, then I am with him”. When Abraham was miraculously saved from the fire, Haran said, “I am with Abraham and his G-d”, whereupon he was thrown into the furnace and was burned to death.

Haran loudly declared his pride in being Jewish – why, he was even willing to walk into a burning hot furnace because of that pride – yet, unlike his brother Abraham, Haran had never *internalized* those feelings of what it means to identify Jewishly and to live with those ideals. Had he *really* meant what he said, he would have told Nimrod that he sided with Abraham and his G-d *no matter what happened* to his brother inside that furnace.

Part of the reason why many Jews today who publicly profess Jewish pride are not that proud

of their Judaism is because of the simple fact that one cannot be truly proud of something concerning which one knows very little. And many Jews today, often through no fault of their own, have not been sufficiently educated in Jewish knowledge, beliefs, rituals, and history for them to be proud of their Judaism. Jews today may know all about Halloween but precious little about Purim. They may be somewhat familiar with Jesus, but be quite ignorant when it comes to Moses.

Many years ago I stumbled across a great little quiz on the NJOP website www.njop.org which illustrates this point exactly, and which I would like to present to you. [The National Jewish Outreach Program (NJOP) is an independent, non-profit organization which is dedicated to providing, through educational courses and experiential programs, a basic Jewish education for every Jew in America.] The quiz pits general knowledge questions (“g”) against Jewish knowledge questions (“j”). An answer key and rating sheet can be found below ...*Have fun!*: (my apologies for the lousy e-mail format of the quiz)

1g) The Author of “Das Kapital” is:

- a. *Vladimir Lenin*
- b. *Karl Marx*
- c. *New World Atlas*

1j) The Author of “Guide to the Perplexed” is:

- a. *Maimonides*
- b. *Nachmanides*
- c. *Sigmund Freud*

2g) What happened to Columbus in 1492?

- a. *He got lost in the Atlantic*
- b. *He discovered America*
- c. *He died*

2j) What happened to Jews in 1492?

- a. *They were expelled from England*
- b. *They were expelled from Spain*
- c. *The Spanish Inquisition began*

3g) Name 3 of the 4 Gospels:

- a. *Matthew, Paul, Luke*
- b. *Mark, Luke, John*

c. *Paul, Mark, Luke*

3j) Name 3 of the 5 Books of Moses:

a. *Genesis, Exodus, Job*

b. *Numbers, Leviticus, Ruth*

c. *Numbers, Exodus, Deuteronomy*

4g) Who was the mother of Jesus?

a. *Martha*

b. *Mary*

c. *Anne*

4j) Who was the mother of Moses?

a. *Miriam*

b. *Rebecca*

c. *Yocheved*

5g) What is the date of

independence of USA?

a. *July 4, 1776*

b. *August 10, 1947*

c. *December 7, 1941*

5j) What is the date of

independence of Israel?

a. *November 14, 1947*

b. *May 14, 1948*

c. *August 10, 1947*

6g) On what day is Jesus'

birthday celebrated?

a. *July 4th*

b. *December 25th*

c. *January 1st*

6j) On what day is Moses'

Birthday celebrated?

a. *15 Tishrei*

b. *7 Adar*

c. *9 Av*

7g) Who is the present Pope?

- a. *Leo X*
- b. *John Paul II*
- c. *Benedict XVI*

7j) Who are the present Chief Rabbis of Israel?

- a. *R. Amar, R. Metzger*
- b. *R. Steinsaltz, R. Soloveitchik*
- c. *R. Schneerson, R. Buchwald*

8g) "Our Father Who Art In Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name" is the first line of:

- a. *The 23rd Psalm*
- b. *The Lord's Prayer*
- c. *The New Testament*

8j) "Hear O Israel, the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is One" is the first line of:

- a. *The Israeli National Anthem*
- b. *The Shemoneh Esrei*
- c. *The Shema*

9g) Eggs are dyed for:

- a. *Easter*
- b. *Christmas*
- c. *Egg Salad*

9j) We spin the dreidel on:

- a. *Passover*
- b. *Chanukah*
- c. *Rosh Hashanah*

10g) The Trinity is:

- a. *The first three books of the Christian Bible*
- b. *The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*
- c. *The three cardinal sins of Christianity*

10j) A Mitzvah is:

- a. *A Prayer*
- b. *A Commandment*
- c. *A sin*

Answer Key: 1g) b. 1j) a. 2g) b. 2j) b. 3g) b. 3j) c. 4g) b. 4j) c. 5g) a. 5j) b. 6g) b. 6j) b. 7g) c. 7j) a. 8g) b. 8j) c. 9g) a. 9j) b. 10g) b. 10j) b.

Rating Sheet

“g”: General Knowledge Questions

- 10 Correct – Genius
- 7-9 Correct – Sharpie
- 5-6 Correct – O.K.
- 3-4 Correct – Go back to school
- 0-2 Correct – Give Up!

“j”: Jewish Knowledge Questions

- 10 Correct – You’re wasting your time, you should become a Rabbi
- 7-9 Correct – Are you a Hebrew School teacher?
- 5-6 Correct – Pretty Good
- 3-4 Correct – “Oy, Vey!”
- 0-2 Correct – Are you sure you’re Jewish?

If you scored better on the general knowledge questions than on the Jewish knowledge questions, don't you think you owe it to yourself to learn a little more about your heritage? If you consider yourself a “proud Jew” and you've had difficulty scoring over 5 on this simple quiz, then maybe it's time to consider, or reconsider, exactly what it is you think you're proud of. (Ouch).

To that end, I would like to recommend an incredibly easy and painless way to build up your Jewish knowledge real quickly. Subscribe to NJOP's www.jewishtreats.org and you will

receive a free daily e-mail called “Jewish Treats” which is short, easy to read, and very interesting. You can also follow Jewish Treats on Facebook and Twitter. These “Juicy Bits of Judaism” are guaranteed to increase your Jewish knowledge and your Jewish pride. *Enjoy!*

GOOD SHABBOS!