



A Modern Orthodox Congregation

My Vacation, Part 2

While recently walking down the holy streets of Jerusalem, I keep my eyes focused on the potential terrorists dressed in Muslim garb. I begin to question my fears and even my integrity but realize that my concerns are real, and lurking behind the traditional veil may be a real threat. I try to tell myself that the odds are overwhelmingly in my favor but I quickly reaffirm that in most other matters I'm not a gambler.

In a strange sort of way, I want to use my time away, my vacation time, to learn about myself. My employment demands that I focus on others and my status as husband and father demands that I focus on my wife, children and grandchildren. By the time I finish with all who need my attention, I have little energy or interest in self-analysis. It's easier not to have to think than to address the cumulative barriers associated with thinking.

Thus, in order to help me better understand myself, I created a list of who I am or more so who I would like to be.

1. Much to the chagrin of some, I have decided to be a Jew first and see the world through my blood colored lenses. I need not apologize for my sarcasm as it is the hypocrisy of the world that prompted my existence to evolve.
2. Unashamedly, I am biased towards segments of society that openly convey hostility towards me and my people. I believe the negativity of others leads me towards generalizations and stereotypes, although I am cognizant that my system is flawed.
3. I give the benefit of the doubt in a rather skewed manner; I am much less critical of myself, my family and my people than I am of others.
4. I am genuinely open to forgive and forget the atrocities of the past, but only for those who genuinely show remorse. I continuously walk the boulevards of Europe hoping to see a mass repentance but sadly it's nowhere to be found.

5. And I too am not guiltless. In as much as I am able to excuse my failures they still remain an indelible stain. Perhaps my assessments of humanity are tainted. Perhaps the world is open to my embrace and it is I who fails them.
6. There is always the theological path of existence. Perhaps my life is all part of a divine plan and I am only a pawn in God's creative process. I wonder about the possibility that we are not the ones in control but on the contrary, we are the ones being controlled.

I'm still afraid to question what if. I am frightened by the complexity of the question; there are too many scenarios that I dread. I know that no matter how much I delve into our collective past, only the surface will be touched. As the generations pass, their deepest and darkest secrets are lost for eternity. The unmarked graves tell a tale of woe, yet digging any deeper won't unfold the myriad of untold stories. As I glance at the scenes of torment, my eyes see only a sanitized version. For some, the nightmares are a constant, while my mind is incapable of reliving that which it has never experienced. I don't complain that my grandparents arrived in the early 1900s, yet I'm aware that a mere sleight of hand could have changed the outcome.

I might be slightly masochistic for I know the outcome of my visit to Europe, but nevertheless I return for another dose of mental anguish and turmoil. I would love to imagine that my motivation is altruistic. That I seek to gain a healthier perspective on the travails facing humanity today. But, I know deep down, that even that task is illusory.

Life is full of uncertainties and questions will continue to challenge me. Yet, I believe life is less about being certain and more about striving to find the essence of our existence. Thus, I continue my quest to seek answers to questions that, in the process of asking, may bring more pain than relief. Hopefully, over time the fears will subside and the answers to lifelong questions will be answered.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Jack