

A STUBBORN BEGINNER ENCOUNTERS A 7 YEAR OLD "F.F.B."

Anonymous

So I refuse to graduate. So sue me! I've always been a slow learner. It took me seven years to complete my B.A.; and I went days. It took me another five to get my Master's. Considering my penchant for being a slow learner, I find nothing unusual about my holding onto the Beginners Service and its rabbi for almost three years. So I'm a slow learner. So sue me!

O.K. So I agreed to compromise. I don't go as regularly as I used to. I try to find other synagogues, other minyanim. But the truth is, that if I go too long without a periodic injection of Effie's charm and enthusiasm, I begin to wither. No, it's not visible, but I can feel it. I develop strange symptoms, like a craving for shrimp with lobster sauce, and spare ribs, and Saturday afternoons in Bloomingdale's. So I show up every few weeks. So sue me!

Anyway it was the first beautiful Saturday in '87 and I was up at six. By eight I was dressed and raring to go.

Well nowadays, with Effie being a cause celebre and Effie stubbornly refusing to take a larger room (Effie, despite popular opinion, discomfort is not a part of Orthodoxy!) you have to get there early. People are hanging from the rafters by ten. So I get there early. I do. So does Ayelet, Effie's 7 year old daughter.

During the davening, Ayelet took notice of the fact that I was reading the prayers in English -- Effie has sent me many tutors and indeed they teach me the alphabet, but I don't practice. It's easier to daven at home in English than Hebrew. In English I can do the whole service in 20 minutes; in Hebrew it would take me hours. So I learn and then I forget. Patience is not one of my virtues. I daven in English. So sue me!

Ayelet wouldn't have it. She took my

finger and ran it across the Hebrew line that I would have been reading. Page after page she did this until finally she asked, "How come you don't read Hebrew?"



"My father never taught me," said I, not wanting to take responsibility for myself.

"Neither did mine," said she, "I learned it in school."

Well, that definitely took Dad off the hook.

"Well, in my school they didn't teach Hebrew."

"What kind of a school did you go to?" asked the curious 7 year old.

"A regular school."

"How could your father wear a keepa and not send you to Hebrew school?" she asked sincerely.

"My father didn't wear a keepa," said I. See it was his fault.

"He didn't!" The notion that my father didn't wear a keepa was quite inconceivable to her. "Why not?"

I didn't know how to break the news gently, so I shot straight from the hip. "I don't come from that kind of a family, Ayelet. My brother is married to a Catholic girl."

Again she looked at me in amazement. "What's a Catholic girl?"

I started to laugh. "A Catholic girl," I said a little more loudly, as if it was her hearing that was defective, and not her vocabulary.

She was not about to be taken lightly, "What's a Catholic girl?" After a moment she added, "You're making that up, right?"

"A Christian, my sweet Ayelet. A Catholic girl is a Christian, and my brother's married to one."

"Why?"

I wanted to bite her cheeks and would have had the brownies not come. They were the only things sweeter than Rabbi Buchwald's daughter.

After lunch, Ayelet and I decided to walk over to Central Park. We chatted, skipped and held hands. Then I asked her if she wanted to climb onto the Alice statue near the lake.

"I don't know if I can," she said.

Now it was my turn to ask why.

"It's a statue," she said, "I'm not allowed to play with statues."

It was the third time this month that I heard talk about idolotry. Once, a very religious man I knew came in and told me I would eventually have to get rid of my statues if I stayed "frum."

"Why? I had collected statues from all over the world. They were art objects. How could anyone ask me to get rid of them?"

"They represent idols!"

"But I don't bow down to them!"

He didn't push it.

Two weeks later a friend, whom I've known for years, visited me with her latest beau. He reiterated the point of my previous visitor. It almost made me cry.

And now Ayelet. I wasn't going to touch it with a ten foot pole.

"Well, what do you think? Can you climb on it?"

"Well," she said, placing her hand on her hip. "It's Shabbos, and I remember one day I was with my father and there was this big tall pole, you know the kind of pole that looks a little like a person. Well, he let me play on it." She stopped for a moment and placed her other arm on her hip. "I don't know if it was O.K. to play on it because it was Shabbos or because it was that the pole was O.K. But today is Shabbos and this is like the pole in some way." She deliberated another moment, "I think it's all right!"

I knew she wasn't manipulating the situation, looking for a yes when the answer was no. It was real. She had figured it out on her own, and, feeling free about her decision, climbed on top of the mushroom like all the other kids.

I watched her, an Orthodox Jewish girl at play with two Oriental children, one black, three Hispanics, two Danish children who spoke no English, and our newest minority, American caucasians, and felt her pleasure.

Someone asked me if she was a city kid and I said yes, but I know it didn't jibe. There she was in a beautiful blue coat and pale blue flannel dress adorned with an eyelet collar. There I was wearing heels and stockings, my Sunday best if you will, on the hottest day of the year. We definitely looked like tourists.

"Yes," I said, "She's a city kid, but she's a Yeshiva city kid." Somehow saying that made me feel proud.

On the way back to the synagogue we ran into a young woman who looked like she had stepped out of an Elizabethan play. Indeed, her lavender dress was handmade, cut low.

"Did you ever dress like that," Ayelet

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Friday, June 3
 *Kindle Shabbat Candles.....8:04 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....6:40 and 8:15 p.m.
 Saturday, June 4 (Behaalotecha)
 Shabbat Morning Service.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible Classes.....7:05 p.m.
 Mincha.....8:05 p.m.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv.....8:15 p.m.

Friday, June 10
 *Kindle Shabbat Candles.....8:09 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....6:45 and 8:20 p.m.

Saturday, June 11 (Shelach)
 Shabbat Morning Service.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible Classes.....7:10 p.m.
 Mincha.....8:10 p.m.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv.....8:20 p.m.

Wednesday, June 15 and Thursday, June 16
 Rosh Chodesh Tammuz
 Morning Services.....7 and 7:40 a.m.

Friday, June 17
 *Kindle Shabbat Candles.....8:11 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....6:45 and 8:20 p.m.

Saturday, June 19 (Korach)
 Shabbat Morning Service.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible Classes.....7:10 p.m.
 Mincha.....8:10 p.m.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv.....8:20 p.m.

Friday, June 24
 *Kindle Shabbat Candles.....8:13 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....6:45 and 8:25 p.m.

Saturday, June 25 (Chukat)
 Shabbat Morning service.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible Classes.....7:15 a.m.
 Mincha.....8:15 p.m.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv.....8:20 p.m.

Friday, July 1
 *Kindle Shabbat Candles.....8:13 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....6:45 and 8:25 p.m.

Saturday, July 2 (Balak)
 Shabbat Morning Service.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible Classes.....7:15 p.m.
 Mincha.....8:15 p.m.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv.....8:20 p.m.

Sunday, July 3
 17th of Tammuz (Fast Day)
 Morning Services.....7 and 8:30 a.m.
 Mincha.....8:10 p.m.

Monday, July 4
 Independence Day
 Morning Services.....7:10 and 8:30 a.m.

Friday, July 8
 *Kindle Shabbat candles.....8:11 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....6:45 and 8:20 p.m.

Saturday, July 9 (Pinchas)
 Shabbat morning service.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible Classes.....7:10 p.m.
 Mincha.....8:10 p.m.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv.....8:20 p.m.

Friday, July 15th
 Rosh Chodesh Av
 Morning Services.....7 and 7:40 a.m.
 *Kindle Shabbat candles.....8:08 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....6:45 and 8:15 p.m.

Saturday, July 16 (Matot-Masai)
 Shabbat Morning Service.....8:45 p.m.
 Talmud and Bible Classes.....7:10 p.m.
 Mincha.....8:10 p.m.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv.....8:15 p.m.

Friday, July 22
 *Kindle Shabbat Candles.....8:02 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....6:40 and 8:10 p.m.

Saturday, July 23 (Devorim)
 Shabbat Chazone
 Shabbat Morning Services.....8:45 a.m.
 Mincha.....5:00 p.m.

Fast begins at sunset.....8:20 p.m.
 Saturday night July 23
 and Sunday, July 24 Tisha B'Av (Fast Day)

Daily Mincha Maariv.....8:05 p.m.

Friday, July 29
 *Kindle Shabbat Candles.....7:56 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....6:35 and 8:05 p.m.

Saturday, July 30 (Vaetchanan)
 Shabbat Nachamu
 Shabbat morning Service.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible Classes.....6:55 p.m.
 Mincha.....7:55 p.m.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv.....8:00 p.m.

Friday, August 5
 *Kindle Shabbat Candles.....7:48 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....6:30 and 7:55 p.m.

Saturday, August 6 (Ekev)
 Shabbat Morning Service.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible Classes.....6:50 p.m.
 Mincha.....7:50 p.m.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv.....7:50 p.m.

Friday, August 12
 Kindle Shabbat Candles.....7:39 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....7:50 p.m.
 (No early service, resume one service only on
 Friday evening)

Saturday, August 13 (Re'Eh)
 Rosh Chodesh Elul
 Shabbat Morning Service.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible Classes.....6:40 p.m.
 Mincha.....7:40 p.m.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv.....7:40 p.m.

Sunday, August 14
 Rosh Chodesh Elul
 Morning Services.....7 and 8:30 a.m.

Friday, August 19
 Kindle Shabbat candles.....7:30 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....7:40 p.m.

Saturday, August 20 (Shoftim)
 Shabbat Morning Service.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible Classes.....6:30 p.m.
 Mincha.....7:30 p.m.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv.....7:30 p.m.

Friday, August 26
 Kindle Shabbat Candles.....7:19 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....7:30 p.m.

Saturday, August 27 (Kee Taytzay)
 Shabbat Morning Service.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible Classes.....6:20 p.m.
 Mincha.....7:20 p.m.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv.....7:20 p.m.

asked me, as we headed back to shul.

"Not quite like that," I said. But I did dress in ways that one wouldn't consider modest."

"Why?"

"Because, I guess, I liked it."

She stopped to pick something up, stopped so she wouldn't be carrying, then she threw it away. "You know Ayelet, before many of us met your father we led rather wild lives. I did, anyway."

She got very excited. "Tell me what you did."



Uh oh. I should have known better!"

"Well, I ate traif."

"Come on," she said shaking my hand. She knew there was more.

"Well," I said coyly, "I ate milk and meat at the same meal."

"Come on," she said, "You know what I mean."

This seven year old had suddenly turned forty and she wasn't going to be deprived of a good tale. Not if she could help it!

"Well," I said, "I went swimming and my neck and elbows weren't covered."

The little old lady in her asked if there were any boys.

"Lots of boys, Ayelet."

"So how much showed?"

Slowly, very slowly, I outlined the distinction between my suit and my skin, allowing her to see how much of me had shown itself to the sun... and to the world.

"When you were a little girl, right?" she said resuming her skipping.

"Well, I wasn't exactly little, Ayelet. It was five years ago."

She stopped dead in her tracks. Her jaw fell open. Her eyes became as big as saucers.

"No!"

"Yes!"

"No!"

"Yes!"

Somehow she had to reconcile this with the woman she had known for almost three years, with the woman who seemed not so terribly different than all the other grown-ups she had known.

She shook her head, obviously in deep thought. Then she began skipping again. "That's O.K. You probably didn't know you were Jewish then."

With that single comment she took my breath away. There was compassion and understanding and love. Her parents had done some beautiful job in raising her.

"I always knew I was Jewish, Ayelet. My mother is Jewish!"

"But you didn't know what that meant, did you?"

This time it was my turn to shake my head. "No, I didn't."



CONGRATULATIONS AND MAZEL TOV

ENGAGEMENTS

Abigail Hirsch and Michael Kissen
Irene Matrajt and David Disenhouse

MARRIAGES

Debra Balaban and Barry Childress
Ilyce Kahan and Kenneth Siegel
Susan Simon and David Glassberg

BIRTHS

Miriam and Akiva Lane on the birth of a daughter
Lisa and Jerry Marcus on the birth of a daughter Miriam Rochel
Audrey and Jeffrey Sussman on the birth of a daughter Amanda Blair
Sandy and Marc Weiner on the birth of a daughter Rebecca Esther
Sue Rosen and Sol Zalczgandler on the birth of a daughter Kayla Brooke

CONDOLENCES

Julie Beck on the passing of her beloved mother Fanny
The Jacobs family on the passing of their beloved husband,
son and brother Moss
Vivian Relkin on the passing of her beloved mother Lily Lerner
Susan Rosen on the passing of her beloved father Irwin Price



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*   Beginners Luncheon Schedule   *
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*   June 11, cost $10             *
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*   Beginners Schmooze Schedule  *
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*   June 6 - 8:15 pm.            *
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(cont. from previous page)
"That's what I thought."

"You know Ayelet. I don't think we should tell your father about this conversation."

"Why not?"

"Because he might not let you come to the park with me again."

"Why not?"

"Because he might think that you'll be influenced in some way."

"What does 'influenced' mean?"

"That you'll want to do the things we've spoken about too."

She looked at me as if I had told her that G-d hadn't written the Torah. "Don't be silly. I wouldn't do that. I know what it means to be Jewish!"

So maybe I should have graduated a long time ago. So maybe I should have done a lot of things. All I know is that when I can learn the kind of lessons I learn from a 7 year old, and when I can still receive the kind of joy that I feel from attending a Beginners Service, they'll have to send me an eviction notice in order to keep me away on a permanent basis.

So maybe Effie should get a larger room!

The author, a writer, wrote this in the Spring of 1987, and still drops in on the Beginners Service. Ayelet is now 8 years old.