

Memoirs

# Book I

## Teshuva *Rejoining the Tribe*

By Richard Roland Grayson, M.D.

*“The LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.’ Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, ‘As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.’ ” (Genesis 16)*

Teshuva is a Hebrew word meaning repentance or return. A Ba'al Teshuva is a person who repents or returns. Webster's Hebrew dictionary states that a Ba'al Teshuva is a non-religious person re-embracing religion or a "repentant sinner". It is widely accepted among Jewish people that if you are born of a Jewish mother, you are Jewish and that you can never stop being a Jew any more than you could stop being a member of any other ethnic group. For example, if you are Irish or Chinese, could you ever declare yourself not to be Irish or Chinese? True, you may say, but those groups are not religious and isn't Judaism a religion? Yes, it is a religion, practiced by some Jews and not by others. But Judaism is also an ethnic group, or what I like to call, a tribe. You can even join the group by conversion, if you like, so it is not quite right to say that all Jews are genetic cousins, although I like to think that some of Abraham's genes are within me. Some say that they are secular Jews. Perhaps half the Jews in Israel are secular and do not practice the religion.

I was bought up in an assimilated family with an English surname, but I always referred to myself as "half Jewish". That always required explaining, which became tiresome. I figure that if all the assimilated Jews in the world would suddenly confess their heritage there would be a

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hundred million of us, more or less, instead of the measly twelve million that I keep reading about. We are the salt of the earth because we have been sprinkled into the human race everywhere, just like all other ethnic groups. I find people with a great grandmother Weiss or a great uncle Moses who have no idea whether their forebears were Jewish. Maybe if everyone thought he or she was part Jewish there would be no anti-Semitism. My Jewish great grandparents were in this country way back in 1860, so I claim standing as an old-timer American.

On the other hand, lest I be accused of saying the glass is half full or half empty and that I am ignoring my late father, I hasten to add that in addition to my being half Jewish, I am half English. Sometimes I fantasize that I am confronted by an anti-Semite super-American patriot, in which case I will say, aha! I gottcha. Where were your anti-Semite ancestors persecuting my Jewish ancestors when my father's people were building this country? My English Puritans were here before yours, unless yours came on the Mayflower with my William White and his family. And if that doesn't satisfy you about my heritable Americanism, I wish you to note my certificates of membership in the Society of the Descendants of the Mayflower, the Sons of the Revolution and the Sons of the Civil War. My English forebears also fought in the War of 1812 and homesteaded Indiana when the land sold for \$1.25 and acre in 1840.

On June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1949 I married June Lind who was a devout Missouri Synod Lutheran. I was baptized and joined her church. June and I had a wonderful married life for 42 years until death did us part, November 9, 1991. We begot 4 perfect children and 14 grandchildren. I had never realized that the phrase "till death do you part" in the marriage ceremony actually meant death. We were too young and we were going to grow old together in St. Charles and walk to the mall every day forever. We were there when the mall was built on an empty prairie, and when Becky was young, she fell out of a tree in that field and I had to suture her lacerated knee at my St. Charles office. Now June is gone and the mall is old and empty. We debated religion frequently, I as an agnostic, she as a true believer in Jesus as her savior, in God, in heaven, in the power of faith. I would in later years ask her occasionally what she would think if I joined the synagogue. She always said that it would mean I did not love her. I did not join the synagogue.

Rabbi Hyman Agress and I were having lunch at the restaurant 2 blocks from Temple B'Nai Israel. It was summer of 1996. I didn't pay attention to how kosher the meal was, but no matter, I'm sure we did not eat pork. Probably we were having chicken soup. There is a saying, when a Jew eats a chicken, one of them is sick. Well, neither of us was sick in the flesh, but Rabbi was getting ready to retire from being a rabbi, and I was afflicted with the desire to rejoin the tribe. According to Rabbi Agress, I was a "sinning Jew" but a Jew nevertheless. I eventually decided that I could not in good conscience continue to call myself a Lutheran because I did not hold fast to the many doctrines of that church.

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“Do you feel Jewish” was the big question, the rabbi asked. So that’s how he would decide if I could be a member of the synagogue. Not a litany of doctrinal beliefs, not a matter of taking courses or standing before the congregation to recite a pledge, no secret password, no swearing an oath. Just, do you feel Jewish? Absolutely, I said. After all, half of my relatives when I was growing up were Jewish. There were Mandelbaum, Hamburger, Darmstadter, Bloom, Friend, Lans, and Yaffe. Mother was a Mandelbaum. They just didn’t observe the rituals and the kosher rules. They didn’t attend synagogues, at the least the living ones didn’t, and we all had secularized Christmas trees. I didn’t even know about Hanukkah bushes. Mother had attended synagogue or religious school as a child and had been confirmed at a temple in Chicago, but we even had pork roast on Sundays anyway. In a way, mother is in a synagogue again, because I arranged with Rabbi Agress to have a bronze plaque installed on the wall with the others of Temple B’Nai Israel who had passed away, and if you should ever go to Temple B’Nai Israel, you can find mother’s name on the wall in Hebrew and English, just as if she had been a member,

Next question. “What do you like about Judaism?” Easy: I love the ethics. Like Pirke Avoth, the Chapters of the Fathers. I like a lot of Maimonides in The 613 Commandments. Don’t bear a grudge. Pay your workers the day they work.

Don’t take revenge. Don’t cheat in business. Be respectful to your teachers. Good commandments. I call them, since I am a physician, the prescriptions. The Ten Commandments ought to be called the Ten Prescriptions. The famous psychoanalyst Erich Fromm said in a lecture I heard him give that if a tree in an oasis could talk and you told him how much water he needed, he would say yes, else he would die. That’s how Fromm explained the Ten Commandments. They are not commands, but prescriptions for living a good life. That is what Judaism is about; not the next life, but this one.

No big deal from Rabbi Agress about my baptism and acceptance into the Lutheran Church in 1949 when I married June, the love of my life. She was always a devout Lutheran. I studied the catechism well under Pastor Daniel Ludwig’s and June’s tutelage. They persuaded me. We named our first-born, Daniel, in honor of kind, gentle, personable Pastor Daniel Ludwig. But didn’t baptism make me an irretrievable Christian? No, all it means is that you were a sinning Jew, the rabbi said. Like a *Converso* in Spain. Conversos’ descendants sometimes returned to their roots centuries later. You have a Jewish mother; you never stopped being Jewish. You are a member of the tribe. I had shown Rabbi Agress 25 years earlier that I had a Jewish mother when I asked him to translate my maternal great grandfather Ephraim Hamburg’s *Ketubah*, his marriage contract, to Anna Darmstadter. The ceremony of the *Ketubah* is a lovely tradition among Jews; it’s really a prenuptial agreement. Our lawyers seem to have thought of this idea several thousand years later.

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My maternal grandfather, Jacob Daniel Mandelbaum, born in 1877, whom I loved and who never had a cross word for me or anyone else in my presence, belonged to the Masons and was buried by his Mason lodge brothers in 1955. He was never observant of Judaism so long as I knew him. His non-observance might have been due to a story the family told about his life: His mother died in childbirth, her fifth pregnancy, at home in Dyer, Indiana, when Jake was about nine years old. The story is that he was so grieved by his loss that he never forgave God and would become angry with anyone who argued with him about God. I don't know if he was an atheist or not. It doesn't make any difference to me and it didn't matter to anyone else. He was well known as the kind and generous hardware store owner on Lincoln Avenue in Chicago, and had his photograph on the front cover of Fortune Magazine once. When I was a child I often visited him and grandmother at the store. Oh what a wonderful place, with walls of drawers, a ladder on wheels, nails in bins, a roll top desk and a little kitchen in the back. And Grandpa smoking a cigar. The smell of a cigar was perfume to a five-year-old boy and the nickel to go next door to the old candy store was a trip to paradise.

I came to really understand grandpa when I learned from my cousin Betty Lans Kahn, who was at his bedside in the hospital in 1955 just before he died, that he could recite the poem *Abou Ben Adhem* by heart. The title means "Abou, son of Adam". He in fact recited it to Cousin Betty the day before he died. The poem is about a man who does not know God, but who is kind to people. This is what Grandpa Mandelbaum was all about. This is what Judaism is all about, it seems to me. Here is the poem: read it and see what I mean:

*Abou Ben Adhem*

*By James Henry Leigh Hunt*

*Abou Ben Adhem (May his tribe increase!)  
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,  
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,  
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,  
An Angel writing in a book of gold:  
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,  
And to the Presence in the room he said,  
"What writest thou?" The Vision raised its head,  
And with a look made of all sweet accord  
Answered, "The names of those who love the Lord."  
"And is mine one?" said Abou. "Nay, not so,"*

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*Replied the Angel. Abou spoke more low,  
But cheerily still; and said, "I pray thee, then,  
Write me as one who loves his fellow-men."*

*The Angel wrote, and vanished. The next night  
It came again with a great wakening light,  
And showed the names whom love of God had blessed,  
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest!*

About Ben Adhem was Grandfather Jacob Daniel Mandelbaum so far as I am concerned.

*There are many stories told about the founding of Judaism. In one, in which Abraham's father, Terah, is a maker of idols, an old man walks into the shop to buy an idol. Terah is out and Abraham is minding the store. The old man chose his idol carefully. Abraham asked the man how old he was. The man replied, "70". Abraham then called him a fool, for worshipping an idol younger than he was.*

*In another, similar story, Abraham is minding the store. He smashes all the idols but the largest, and puts the hammer in that idol's hands. When his father comes home, he is angry, and asks what happened. Abraham says that the largest idol got jealous and destroyed the others. The father yelled at Abraham because that couldn't happen, the idols were just stone! For whatever reason, Abraham turned from the moon-worshipping of the farmers of Chaldea and came to a monotheistic belief. It was at this point that he left his father's house, and started Judaism.*

*(--Anonymous)*

The above stories are obviously not to be understood literally. They are *Midrashim*, or parables, to be understood seriously, not literally. Seriously, I probably descended from Abraham. But I also descended from millions of others who were of other persuasions, ethnicities, and even races. I am not pure Jewish, but who is? It matters not. I belong to a tribe. It is comforting to lots of folks to belong somewhere. I used to belong to the Lutheran Church, to the Rotary, the Kiwanis, and the American Medical Association. I am even a member of the Descendants of the Mayflower Society on father's side, having three English Pilgrim ancestors on the ship. Everybody belongs somewhere whether he wants to or not. Once I was going to be a survivalist and have the capability to take my family to the cabin in the North Woods in the event of the Bomb and live alone. Not

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possible. I used to joke about taking my 57 acres of land and seceding from the union. Not possible. When June died, I thought of becoming a hermit and locking myself away in the house. Not possible. We all belong somewhere so we might as well belong where we have a choice. I rejoined my Jewish tribe.

We should talk about the word *tribe*. I like the word. The world literature overflows with references to the tribe of Abraham and to the lost tribes of Israel Alan Dershowitz, the famous lawyer, says that Jews are a *people*. Maybe that's a polite way of avoiding the word tribe or race. Ethnicity, ethnic group, nationality, nation, family, and clan are other ways to say the same. However, all these words are loaded one way or another. I never thought tribe was pejorative until I talked with a fine fellow in the office who said he was a Tamil from Sri Lanka. I said, oh, that's your tribe. He had a pained expression and I asked is that the wrong word? He said yes, because white people use the word tribe to mean persons of low class. I replied I had never heard that and furthermore I was writing my autobiography called Rejoining the Tribe. He suggested I use the word *roots* instead, but that isn't a memorable title, so I'll keep using the word tribe till I think of a better one. Maybe there won't be any Tamils who will be reading my autobiography anyway. I looked up the story of the Tamils and found that there is a Tamil State in India where millions of Tamils live. That would probably explain his Caucasian-like features and dark skin.

The Encyclopedia Britannica says the following:

*In its primary sense, the **tribe** is a community organized in terms of kinship and its subdivisions are the intimate kindred groupings of moieties, gentes, and totem groups. Its territorial basis is rarely defined with any precision, and its institutions are typically the undifferentiated and intermittent structures of an omnifunctional social system.*

It's hard to think of the English side of me as tribal because no one has ever, at least in my presence, referred to the English as a tribe. Maybe the Celts, Saxons, and Vikings were tribal, but by the time my Mayflower ancestors were hounded out of England because of their Puritan religion, they seem just to have been English. Americans are not a tribe. Neither are the different components. We are a nation of nations, not a nation of tribes. The nation of all the nations. Isn't that amazing; everywhere else the nations war against one another, yet when those same nations are in America, they do not war. They say the melting pot is an obsolete metaphor. I don't think so. The boiling of the stew is from constant moving around for jobs and better living. People don't get a chance to develop new borders they have to defend. I predict this will eventually happen to the

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Europeans who stay united in the new Euro community. Check back in 400 years to see if there is a United States of Europe.

## Religious Tales

I have some religious stories to tell. The first one is about the only Grayson I ever found who left a religious story behind. Maybe all the rest were unbelievers. Anyway, great great grandfather John Wren Grayson sounded as if he had been frightened off by the Cumberland Presbyterians. Here are his actual words in the matter:

*"I was born in Scott County, Kentucky on the second day of November, 1805. My father's name was Wren Grayson and my mother's maiden name was Betsy Owens".*

*"I have six brothers and one sister; brother Lewis died in childhood and another, Henry, died after raising a large family. My other brothers are Wren and Sanford Grayson of Decatur County and Joseph and Benjamin Grayson of Tipton County, Indiana, all men of honest repute among those who know them. My only and beloved sister is Mrs. Nancy Hamilton, widow of William Hamilton of Decatur County".*

*In 1807, when I was two years of age, my parents moved to Tennessee and settled in Bledsoe County. There I almost grew to manhood and was familiar with the scenes and incidents attendant upon those early times, in adventures with Indians and wild animals in the Sequatchie Valley and upon the Cumberland Mountains".*

*"I was always physically strong, healthy, and hearty. At the age of seventeen, at a religious meeting held at the house of Richard Stone, I began to be conscious about my condition as a sinner. Mrs. Stone had been converted to God, embraced the faith of the Cumberland Presbyterians, a very earnest set of Christian people".*

*"Mr. Stone, as soon as he had found peace, constantly appealed to his friends and neighbors to 'flee from the wrath to come.' While listening to him I was deeply convicted, felt very bad indeed, and was glad when the meeting closed, remarking as I left that they would not get me back there again. But the spirit of the Lord had*

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*taken strong upon me, and I realized the necessity of yielding to the call of my Master, and led by his help, to a new and better life." (Copied from the Madison Courier, February 1, 1882; "an autobiography of the deceased written by him some years ago and carefully placed away by him".)*

My father, Roland, great grandson of the aforementioned John Wren Grayson, attended a Methodist church as a boy, although I don't know if it was only for his baptism or more than once, and he seems to have inherited the fear of the wrath to come, that being from the church. The reason I say that, is because my sisters Patricia and Priscilla and I grew up without benefit of any church except for a brief interlude in the Christian Science church in Maywood, Illinois when I was 13, and an even briefer interlude in the Maywood Congregational church where I remember going to Sunday school a few times and not learning a thing. Mother and father later were frequent members of that same Congregational church and father was president of the men's club. Mother joined the church because she did not have to say that she believed in Jesus.

When she was in her last illness, lymphoma, my mother, Sylvia, wanted to join our St. Marks Lutheran Church in St. Charles. Pastor Reuben Baerwald, a kind and good friend, pointed out that she would have to agree to the doctrines as enunciated in the Nicene Creed, such as belief in Jesus as her savior from original sin, and she was so incensed by this outright discrimination and possibly downright anti-Semitism, that she not only did not join but she apparently gave Reuben a word or two of disapproval. He was shaken to his shoes, never before having crossed a person who wanted to be a Lutheran without actually being a Lutheran. Father always said grace as a matter of tradition at the family gatherings, but I never heard him utter a theological thought except to say that when you die the only place you go is into the ground.

Another religious story I like to tell is a funny one. It's about the last orthodox observant Jew on my mother's side of the family. Mother's maternal grandfather, Ephraim Hamburg was known as the genius in the family tree, he being the owner of 33 patents and having made his living in Germany and England as a magician. He was born in Prussia about 1837, went to England about 1850, and then to New York and Detroit in 1860. He outlasted four wives (some say only three) who afforded him the mitzvah of being fruitful and multiplying, having fathered 11 children. The last was my grandmother Estella Hamburg Mandelbaum. I always quote my great grandfather Ephraim to my male patients as a sterling example of manhood and a lesson for them, generally when they are asking for a vasectomy referral. Alas, the days of emulating such a paragon of virtue as my great grandfather Ephraim have virtually disappeared.



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The story is that when Ephraim was old and retired and had outlasted his 4<sup>th</sup> (or 3<sup>rd</sup>?) wife, Anna Darmstadter (my great grandmother), his grandson Eugene Henry told me, Ephraim would *daven* (*pray*) after breakfast in the kitchen corner with his prayer shawl over his head. After prayers one year, he started disappearing down the stairs to some unknown place for an hour or so. His daughter, Hattie, Eugene's mother, couldn't stand the secrecy after awhile, and one day she bundled up little 5 year-old Eugene and they quietly followed the old man. It seems he went to a local park bench where he met a lady whose name I think was Lottie. She eventually became his last wife and companion, although there is some dispute as to whether she was his 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> wife. Ephraim died in 1912, poor in possessions but wealthy in ex-wives and descendants.

## Beliefs and Faith

When I was in high school, I learned the word *agnostic*, which means "I don't know". I decided I was an agnostic, since I didn't know if there is a God or Jesus. Once in awhile I would slip into atheism, but it never seemed too logical to me that I could disprove God. I still think that it is unscientific to say that I can prove or disprove anything. My college roommate, Earl James Rowland, an intellectual from the west coast and son of an anthropologist, introduced me to the Catholic idea of "The Uncaused Cause", or Prime Mover. This seemed to me at the time to be actual proof of God, but now I am not so sure. I think the argument from design is a better one.

I have given a great deal of thought to the idea of *belief* and have decided never to use the word again. The same holds for the word *faith*. I think the Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe is correct, but there is no way to prove it. The preponderance of evidence is that it is right. I will never say I believe in God or that I have faith that there is a God or that I believe all the doctrines of my *Faith* but I might say that there is a preponderance of evidence that there is a Designer. The evidence for God is weighty, and I'll go along with it, but why should I commit myself to a non-falsifiable being? My friend, Jim Griffin, a physicist emeritus from Fermi Lab, who knows everything about particle physics and quantum mechanics, and I had lunch the other day. Jim is an avowed atheist who doesn't like to debate the subject of religion because he is tired of it. I asked him if he knew any physicists at Fermi Lab who were theists. He said there were a few but he mused that they had some kind of mental derangement.

Stanley Levine, my best friend, now dead 21 years, was at the other end of the faith spectrum. He not only believed, he *knew*. He and his wife Celia had abandoned Judaism for an East Indian religion called Sant Mat, which means "The Way". The adherents are

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Sat Sanges. He believed in meditation for two hours a night, which he called “dying daily”. I tried it a few times, but nothing happened. He said it might take 20 years of training but I was unwilling for such rigor. He said you can, under certain conditions, go into the next world in meditation but he was not allowed to tell me what happened there. The conditions were strict vegetarianism and instructions from the Master. There always is at least one Master on earth and he had met his guru in India several times. Other beliefs in his system were reincarnation and Karma. Stan was looking forward to his death with equanimity. I know a lot about Sant Mat, and maybe it’s right and maybe it isn’t. The best I can say is that they have a good product to sell. If you do everything right in this incarnation you don’t have to come again and you can live with the Creator.

When Stan died, I wept for the first time since I was a child. He was a friend and the brother I never had. When June died, I wept 18 times a day for days on end. My father was a weeper also, and now I think June and my father have willed the weeping business to me. June wept at all the hymns in church and father wept at all the TV movies. Now I’ve taken over for the both of them. Pretty soon, I suspect I’ll be weeping at TV commercials.

Right now I am not only conflicted about the word **belief**, but also I am afraid of it. Do you realize how many wars and how much hate has been generated by differences in belief? The Hindus believe doctrines antithetical to the Muslims so they hate each other. The headlines today are about the Hindus and the Muslims massacring each other in India because of a holy shrine that the Hindus want to build on a holy place where there once was a holy Mosque that the Muslims once owned. Three thousand people were killed 10 years ago over this argument, and as of today the last week’s death count is up to 400. Because of *beliefs*. Allegedly. How is the old saying; an eye for an eye and soon everybody is blind.

One of my favorite songs from the Vietnam era when I was making a collection of protest songs is National Brotherhood Week, by Tom Lehrer:

*Oh, the white folks hate the black folks  
And the black folks hate the white folks  
To hate all but the right folks  
Is an old established rule*

*But during National Brotherhood Week  
National Brotherhood Week  
Lena Horne and Sheriff Clark*

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*Are dancing cheek to cheek  
It's fun to eulogize  
The people you despise  
As long as you don't let 'em in your school*

*Oh, the poor folks hate the rich folks  
And the rich folks hate the poor folks  
All of my folks hate all of your folks  
It's American as apple pie*

*But during National Brotherhood Week  
National Brotherhood Week  
New Yorkers love the Puerto Ricans  
'Cause it's very chic  
Step up and shake the hand  
Of someone you can't stand  
You can tolerate him if you try*

*Oh, the Protestants hate the Catholics  
And the Catholics hate the Protestants  
And the Hindus hate the Moslems  
And everybody hates the Jews*

*But during National Brotherhood Week  
National Brotherhood Week  
It's National Everyone-Smile-At-  
One-Another-hood Week  
Be nice to people who  
Are inferior to you  
It's only for a week, so have no fear  
Be grateful that it doesn't last all year!*

There are the Israelis, who, rightfully, do not want to be put in gas chambers again, have a Hatfield and McCoy feud going on with the Palestinians next door because they do not believe the same things. They seem to be trying to match each other's daily death toll because of holy places dictated by **beliefs**. And it's not much better within Israel itself where if the Orthodox had their way, the Reform and secular Jews might be in trouble. And don't forget the Catholics and the Protestants in Ireland who have some differences

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of doctrine which seem to deserve killing one another. The Muslim Pakistanis and the Hindu Indians seem bent on killing one another. The Wahabbi Muslims apparently would kill almost everybody.

Jews are not Jewish because of what they **believe**. There's a saying that if you have to ask who is a Jew then you must be a Jew. A Jew is not necessarily someone who believes in the doctrines of Judaism. Otherwise a lot of the Jews in Israel who are secular, non-observant, and even atheistic would be cast out. Furthermore, there is no hierarchy in Judaism to dictate a body of doctrine. There is no chief rabbi, no bishop, no synod, no missionary standing over you with a catechism you must squeeze your mind into else you die. The closest Jews come to having a set of shared beliefs are the 13 principles of faith enunciated by Moses Ben Maimonides in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. But you don't *have* to hold to these doctrines. Officially, if your mother was Jewish, you automatically are Jewish according to Jewish law in Israel, and by custom in most other places. That's the matrilineal line of descent. In the Reform branch of Judaism, apparently many congregations and rabbis also respect the patrilineal line of descent as proof of kinship.

You probably wonder what the 13 principles are that Maimonides said are necessary to be a good Jew. Here they are; see how many you agree with:

*1 There is a God.*

*2 There is one God.*

*3 God has no physical body*

*4 God is eternal*

*5 Only God may be worshipped*

*6 Prophecy--God communicates with humans*

*7 Moses was the greatest of the prophets*

*8 The Torah came from God*

*9 The Torah is the authentic word of God and may not be changed*

*10 God is aware of all our deeds*

*11 God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked*

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*12 The Messiah will come**13 The dead will be resurrected*

I noticed that when Rabbi Agress asked me if I felt Jewish he did not ask me if I loved God, as it says in the poem Abou Ben Adhem, or even if I believed in God. I might have answered that the preponderance of scientific evidence suggests that the theory of God might be valid. Well, that would have been satisfactory to him, I am sure. There is a saying somewhere in the Talmud, I think, that says if you don't believe in God now, but follow his commandments, you will learn to love God later. That is acceptable to me and I like to teach the commandments to my 7<sup>th</sup> grade class at the synagogue in the same way. And not just the ten prescriptions, but some of the 613 commandments from the book of that name by Maimonides. There are so many commandments, all in the Torah, from which I can choose; such as the 209<sup>th</sup> commandment. Now, what teacher would take exception to the 209<sup>th</sup> which asserts that the student must respect his or her teachers and elders?

In this commandment it says that the student must rise before the hoary (gray) head. This means that out of respect, you rise when your elder or teacher walks into the room, even if your teacher is younger than you. I sometimes have my class practice this to get the idea. Rabbi Markowitz was unexpectedly subjected to this treatment and I think it rattled him. Come to think of it, the custom when I was a Lieutenant in the U. S. Air Force was the same. Once I walked into the back of a room of cadets to give them their V.D. lecture (I was 24 years old) and someone without warning shouted "ATTENTION!" All 100 cadets suddenly stood up, making a noise on that wooden floor like a cannon going off in the room, and it almost giving me cardiac arrest, since I had never been subjected to such respect before. Probably not one of us in that lecture room suspected that the 209<sup>th</sup> commandment was behind it all.

## The Meaning of Life

There is a famous Jewish joke that goes like this: two rabbis' are sitting on a park bench, thinking. Or maybe they were just plain philosophers or old men. Anyway they just sit there thinking. Moshe says to Jacob, what is the meaning of life? Jacob thinks and thinks. He thinks a whole year. Finally he answers. Life is like a fountain. Moshe

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thinks and thinks for another year. Finally he can stand it no longer and he says, incredulously, life is like a fountain? They sit there, both thinking and thinking for another year, and then Jacob's eyes light up and he replies: OK so life is NOT like a fountain.

A lot of people don't get this joke, but I think it's funny and also true. As soon as one of us figures out the meaning of life for him, your friend says that certainly sounds right, only upon reflection, it isn't. If life is a fountain, that means that when you are born, someone turned on the fountain, and then when the faucet is turned the other way, the fountain disappears and there is nothing. Then there is silence again and we are back at the beginning asking the same question. What is the meaning of life, or even, what was the meaning of the fountain?

I have a patient, Robert Elenz, who is much older than I am—about five years I think, and he starts our doctor visit usually with the question, have you figured out the meaning of life yet? What he means is that he is depressed because he is alone in this world and has no relatives left and he lives by himself with his memories and ailments in a big house, wondering why he is there and whether he should simply end it all. So we end up telling each other jokes for the rest of the doctor visit. He knows more jokes that I do. Actually, he comes to visit to tell me the jokes. I love practicing medicine in my semi-retirement this way; just having people to talk with who don't have much wrong with them that I have to worry about. Some of my very favorite people are born-again Christians, because they love to talk about their favorite subject, which happens to be my favorite subject: religion. Then besides the delight of debating theology, I get the added benefit of having someone pray for my soul, assuming I really have one. Other people might take offense at being proselytized, but I regard the experience as a compliment and an act of love. I wish I could believe their doctrines just to reciprocate the honor.

One answer to the meaning of life was given by Richard Dawkins in the book *The Selfish Gene*. Current writers about DNA have expanded the theme, which simply says that DNA and genes are immortal and our bodies are here only to act as carriers for these eternal genetic codes. The body dies, but your DNA code lives on in your progeny. A religious corollary to this is that the genetic code was written by God. Naturally there is no way to prove the corollary, but it is an attractive thought.

The selfish gene is an embellishment of the theory which I invented when I was in high school 60 years ago. I decided that the only meaning to life I could prove, having witnessed the goings and comings of my extended family, is that my purpose was to have children. Then I added the corollary that if you are to have progeny, you should try to

## Memoirs

have perfect children and your purpose in life must be to mold them to perfection. So that was the sum and substance of my thesis. My purpose in life was to have a perfect family and it was my responsibility. As it says in the Hebrew bible, you are not a man unless you marry and have children.

*(Torah commands us to marry, to have children, and to be faithful. Torah clearly encourages the viewpoint that men and women do better, emotionally and spiritually, when married rather than single. In fact, it can be argued that the Torah sees men as having a greater need for the protection and nurturance of marriage than do women. Thus, for men marriage is not only advised but is an absolute commandment. This is commandment #213 in Maimonides' listing of the 613 commandments.)*

The problems inherent in the selfish-gene hypothesis are 1. Who decided this scenario anyway and 2. What is the purpose of all these eternal genes? This brings me back to the fountain joke. OK so life isn't a fountain.

I like the Jewish meaning of life. The Talmud says that we are *co-creators* of the world with God. It says that He is not finished. God knows that must be right, because there are so many things going wrong around the world. Like earthquakes, war, pestilence, and famine. There is another beautiful idea in Judaism, the idea of *Tikkun Olam* which means to repair the world. We are commanded to help repair the world just as we are co-creators of the world. These are pleasant myths to live by, literally true or not. Don't think literally, think seriously about myths. If someone asks me why are we here, remember these two myths and answer: to help God repair and create the world. I don't know why we are supposed to do that, but it's something to do while you're here.

On the other hand, in the Talmud, it says that we already have all knowledge, but we forgot it at birth:

*"While we are still in our mother's womb, the Almighty sends an angel to sit beside us and teach us all the wisdom we'll ever need to know about living. Then, just before we are born, the angel taps us under the nose -- forming the philtrum, the indentation that everyone has. And we forget everything the angel taught us."*  
*(From Aish.com)*

This sounds like what Socrates taught: he said that everyone was born with all knowledge but forgot and that if he asked enough questions of a student, the person would remember the answer because he already knew it. Thus was born the Socratic method of teaching.

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Maybe that's why Jewish scholars argue with each other; they are trying to remember the answers.

## Afterlife?

### Did June Send a Message?

Among the many arguments for God, a compelling current one is the near death experience. There are now countless books, videos, and documentaries about the near death or afterlife experience. Testimonials about having died, going into a dark tunnel with a light and people at the end of it, and then recovering are more frequent since the advent of successful CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation). Alas, these tales remain non-falsifiable and therefore outside the realm of science, but I hope some day some one will formulate this phenomenon into a believable theory. To be falsifiable means that you must be able to test the theory in such a way that you could prove it wrong. For example, if you said that all swans are white, then the falsification of that theory would be the first black swan you discovered. Meanwhile, I must be satisfied with the one good story I personally can relate about my beloved wife's possible message from beyond. The following is from a tape recording I made at my office of an interview with a faithful patient:

*Near-Death (Out-of-Body) Experiences by a patient*

*(I tape recorded the following conversation June 5th, 1994)*

**Ms. J. T.**

**Age: 47**

*My first experience I remember as I was coming home from work in Aurora, Illinois from the Copley Hospital, I was head of the Acute Team for the Dialysis Unit there and I was crossing a main street and a drunk driver ran a red light and hit me broadside at 65 m.p.h.*



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*The next thing I remember is just being on the roof of my car, not the hood of the car, but looking down between my legs kind of because my legs were over the windshield, and watching the paramedics take my body from the car and put on a stretcher with a brace on my neck and all this stuff.*

*I had a very good feeling of well being and not unhappiness, not fear, you know, not afraid of anything or being unhappy that this was happening, just a good, good feeling about myself and I can even remember smiling while I watched them. I did not have another incident.*

*Dr. Grayson: Do you remember going back into your body?*

*Ms. T.: No, it was just like when, as soon as my body came to, lying on the car, I came to before they completely had me onto the stretcher, and then I was back in there.*

*Dr. Grayson: Back in your body.*

*Ms. T.: Yes, I was just there. I came to and I was there.*

*Dr. Grayson: And did you have any tunnel or light experience?*

*Ms. T.: That I do not remember.*

*Dr. Grayson: No tunnel, or no light, no other people?*

*Ms. T.: I don't remember.*

*Dr. Grayson: Or voices?*

*Ms. T.: I feel like I saw people, but I just don't remember, it's been so long.*

*Dr. Grayson: Okay.*

*Ms. T.: This happened January 14, I went into the Elgin, St. Joseph Hospital for surgery for a spine reconstruction and fusion which was a very serious thing. I had nothing on my mind except me. I had no thinking of anyone else that had passed away, or people that I knew or was I going to die, or anything, it was just the fear of being put to sleep and that the surgery was going to be okay.*

*Sometime after the surgery, and I believe according to what my husband has told me and what my daughter has told me in my mind because I could not put a time on the incident because I was on Morphine of course, after surgery and all, and I*

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*went in and out of sleep, so I felt that the last thing that I heard was a nurse say she is in shock. They put several hot blankets over me, but I was gone.*

*Dr. Grayson: What do you mean you were gone?*

*Ms. T.: I mean just unconscious or sleeping, or whatever, you know, knocked out, I remember the hot blankets, saying that she was in shock and that was it, okay? At that point in time my husband said that they made him leave the room, and I guess I went into PAT after that which I have been treated for that condition several times.*

*Dr. Grayson: Were you in ICU at the time?*

*Ms. T.: I was in ICU, yea. And, sometime during that, like I said, I could be vague on the specific time, this is the time I felt that this happened, not, you know, during the Morphine, I remember being awake at many other times before this, before going into shock and a lot of times afterwards, so this is the time and place according to my daughter and my husband.*

*After I came out of that, that they kept saying, I thought there was people standing there and I was telling them about certain things of this vision or out of body or what ever you want to call it. The main thing that struck my mind is that I was sitting on a stool...*

*Dr. Grayson: Now this is in the vision?*

*Ms. T.: In the vision itself, right, the main thing that I remember, and remembered as well is as if it happened to me right now.*

*I was sitting on a stool and it felt like a low stool, you know, close to the ground, and Jesus Christ was sitting in a higher chair or stool, or something like that, and I could remember like we were having this conversation and it seemed like it was going on hours and hours that we talked, you know, a long period of time, not just a fleeting thing or anything like that. I remember touching his robes and I still can remember the feel of his robes and how rough the cloth was and how coarse it was, the material, and how primitive,*

*I guess it's a better work, of, you know, the roughness of the cloth, the weaving in it and all, and that he had a crown of thorns on his head. He held my hand and his hand radiated, I had my hand like on his leg, I am showing Dr. Grayson, on his lap like this and he had his hand over the top of it like this, just exactly like that.*

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*The warmth radiated from his hand, it was like almost like he had a heating pad, it was just so extremely warm. We talked about a lot of things at the time, but I remember the part, Dr. Grayson's family would probably be the most interested in, and I still feel that I saw this and this was real. I do not feel that this was a dream brought on by morphine; I have mulled it over and over in my mind for the last four and a half months now.*

*I feel this was a real vision, or real out of body, or whatever, but that there was like an image of people, hundreds of people, or at least a hundred, hundred and fifty people standing, and I had a feeling of I knew all these people, but I really couldn't pick out faces except that of June Grayson, whom I dearly miss and love, was standing up close, more close towards me, like four or five feet away and she had on a royal blue and navy blue kind of a herringbone or hound's-tooth knit dress, that could have been a one piece dress or a two piece dress and I remember she was barefoot. (You have to excuse me).*

*She looked at me and I looked at her and she just had this glow, this warm ring, it just like radiated from her head and she said I was to tell Dick that she is okay and everything is fine. I felt that from her, that she was content or whatever, because I had the same feeling sitting here and I had a long talk with Jesus.*

*He told me things about my kids that, you know, what was happening, or that I kind of guessed the things, and told me how to solve those kinds of problems. I was kind of putting this to the back of my mind, because I am afraid it will hurt people if I say too much.*

*But he gave me one specific message for my youngest daughter who we have had a lot of problems with over the years with drug use and alcohol use, and that I was to immediately find her, seek her out, and give her this message and that I was immediately to find Dick Grayson and tell him what June said. From the time I left that hospital, that was my main goal, but it was a very difficult thing to do.*

*I did seek, before I even went home, after 170 mile trip, before I could even go home, I had to find my youngest daughter in that town and tell her the message from Jesus Christ, which was that he was still waiting for her and that he loved her. I took that, I don't remember if he said that he was still waiting for her to pray, or because of what he said, I'm waiting for her, that he wanted me to, you know, I just had that sense that that's what he meant, that she, you know, it's time to come back to me.*

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*There was some other details about other children and stuff, and right now they are all kind of off the top of my head, my main thing is that I have been thinking about June and since this has happened, and it was very difficult for me to tell Dr. Grayson this because I thought he would think I was crazy or something, but if it gives anyone any peace or mind in this family, or it gave me peace of mind, I came away from there with no fear of dying. I have absolutely no fear of dying, I think it is wonderful and it's beautiful, I mean no one wants to lose us, but I have no fear of dying now.*

*Dr. Grayson: Was there a light or a tunnel?*

*Ms. T.: There was, the way these people were standing, in fact I just saw a movie on TV the other night and I thought, God, was like they were in darkness, but there was a light reflecting behind them that, you know, how a movie camera or bright lights or pictures will glow behind you and it will just make a halo like around all of the whole group, that is kind of what the people were like, the faces weren't clear to me, that is what that part was like. But June was just as plain and like that to me.*

*Dr. Grayson: You said originally that she was radiant and beautiful?*

*Ms. T.: She was radiant. Her face glowed. She had a light of like the same kind of light, the halo of light that was showing behind these people standing all around here, that she had that same thing around her own self, separately from them.*

*Dr. Grayson: And she didn't say anything else.*

*Ms. T.: No, not that I remember. She may have, but I just, you know, it kind of scared me, and it kind of freaked me out a little bit, and it touched me because, I know you asked me on the phone was I thinking about her and I said, "No, I was only thinking about me at that time." But what I was going through, I had no thoughts of her or anyone else, or, you know, thoughts of dying, just fear of being put to sleep and being cut open and....*

*Dr. Grayson: You have not had any dreams like this or anything since?*

*Ms. T.: No, but I spent a lot of time thinking about it, mulling it over, you know, whether to leave it alone, and you know that the tendency...*

*Dr. Grayson: Are you a religious person, do you go to Church?*

*Ms. T.: Yea, I'm very religious, I feel I am.*

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*Dr. Grayson: What church?*

*Ms. T.: The Organized Church of Jesus Christ and Latter Day Saints.*

*Dr. Grayson: Okay. Well, the family will appreciate this.*

*Ms. T.: Well, if it helps them at all, I'm glad. I don't want it to hurt anyone, and that's I guess, why I didn't want to even tell you, you know, and but I felt I had to. I mean, Jesus Christ told me...*

*Ms. T.: God bless you all.*

*Dr. Grayson: Thank you.*

## Thy Will Be Done

There used to be a tradition in the Mandelbaum family. I hardly ever said it to June and the kids, but I remember Grandma Mandelbaum saying “It’s God’s will” when I was a little boy, although now I don’t remember why or under what circumstances she said it. So naturally it’s a superstition that I have to this day. It’s a lovely superstition. I guess this is how family values and traditions go from one generation to the next without anyone ever noticing. “It’s God’s will” is full of mystery, like what great thing does He have waiting for around the next corner? It reminds me of what the Patriarch Joseph said to his brothers when they found him to be their overseer in Egypt years after they had sold him into slavery:

*Joseph said to his brothers, I am Joseph. Is my father still well? But his brothers could not answer him, so dumfounded were they on account of him. Then Joseph said to his brothers, come forward to me. And when they came forward, he said, I am your brother Joseph, he whom you sold into Egypt. Now, do not be distressed or reproach yourselves because you sold me hither; it was to save life that God sent me ahead of you. It is now two years that there has been famine in the land, and there are still five years to come in which there shall be no yield from tilling. God has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival on earth, and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance. So, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his household, and ruler over the whole land of Egypt. Now, hurry back to my father and say*

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*to him: Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me without delay. You will dwell in the region of Goshen, where you will be near me you and your children and your grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all that is yours. There I will provide for you for there are yet five years of famine to come that you and your household and all that is yours may not suffer want. You can see for yourselves, and my brother Benjamin for himself, that it is indeed I who am speaking to you. And you must tell my father everything about my high station in Egypt and all that you have seen; and bring my father here with all speed. With that he embraced (Lit. fell on.) his brother Benjamin around the neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. He kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; only then were his brothers able to talk to him.*

When I studied logic, we would have called “the Lord’s will” a **rationalization**. When I studied clinical psychology, we would have said that is a **defense mechanism** to justify suffering. The evolutionary psychologist could ascribe all humankind’s foibles and wars to the instinct of **territoriality**. When I think as an atheist, I would say that is **chaos**. A fundamentalist might say it was **Satan** who did it or it was the result of **original sin** and Adam’s fall from grace. Freud might have called it some kind of a **complex**. Stan Levine would have said it is **Karma** and due to something that happened in a previous life. Now, one or more of these ideas might be right or might be wrong. A Calvinist would believe in **predetermination**. Take your pick. Today, I think I’ll accept the tradition of Grandma Mandelbaum, and say that what travails I suffer are for a purpose and are part of a grand design. If God is outside the space-time continuum, then all that has happened and will happen must be outside of time, or in the present and simultaneous. Unless God IS the space-time continuum, in which case I can’t tell whether the past and future are separate to Him. Another explanation of relativistic time is the analogy of flying to Singapore. You are going to Singapore but you’re not there yet. It takes time to get there. Singapore is already there but you have no way of experiencing it while you are on the way.

Then, there’s the famous philosophy of the fictional Forest Gump, who wondered whether life was destiny, as his friend, lieutenant Dan said, or whether living was like a feather blowing on a breeze, “or maybe it’s both”. I don’t think I really know what that means, but it sounds as profound as all the other ideas I just mentioned.

Remember Sholem Aleichem’s fictional Tevye in **Fiddler on the Roof**? He was always arguing with God. That’s a Jewish tradition; if you are alone and there is no one else to argue with, you can always look upward and argue with God.

*“Surveying his sad situation: five unmarried daughters, a dry cow, a lame horse, Russian pogroms against his people, he looked up to God and said, God, it’s nice that you chose*

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*me to be one of your chosen people, but would you mind choosing someone else for a change."*

## The Chosen

*"Jerusalem (SatireWire.com) Update — Jews, whose troubled, 10,000-year term as God's "chosen people" finally expired last night, woke up this morning to find that they had once again been hand-picked by the Almighty. Synagogues across the globe declared a day of mourning.*

*Asked if the descendants of Abraham shouldn't be pleased about being tapped for an unprecedented second term, Jerusalem Rabbi Ben Meyerson shrugged. "Of course, you are right, we should be thrilled," he said. "We should also enjoy a good swift kick in the head, but for some reason, we don't.*

*According to a worldwide survey of faiths, not a single group expressed an interest in being chosen, and the only application submitted before last night's filing deadline, on behalf of the Islamic people, proved to be a fake."*

The more customary story in the Talmud is that God went to all the nations to find one that would forever teach the Torah and was rejected by all save the Jews. Previously there was only polytheism; ever after there has been monotheism. It follows that God did not choose the Jews but the Jews chose God. And then came the covenant between Abraham and God which led to monotheism being the prevalent view of the supernatural today. Some say the idea of

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monotheism was so obnoxious that they hated the Jews for forcing it on them. Well, that's the story but I don't take it literally.

The covenant is in Genesis 22:16, 17, and 18:

16            *Again the LORD'S messenger called to Abraham from heaven*  
              *and said: "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you acted as you*  
              *did in not withholding from me your beloved son,*  
17            *I will bless you abundantly and make your descendants as countless as the stars*  
              *of the sky and the sands of the seashore; your descendants shall take possession*  
              *of the gates of their enemies,*  
18            *and in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing--all this*  
              *because you obeyed my command."*

On the other hand, it does seem that monotheism started with the nomadic tribe of Abraham coming out of Sumer into Canaan. They were so stiff-necked about the pagans who worshipped many deities and who apparently practiced human sacrifice that the descendants of Abraham became intolerant and started all those rules and regulations in the Torah. That seems to have annoyed the Philistines and the Egyptians a good deal. The Arabs today believe in monotheism, but they seem to be annoyed anyway.

Some people remember this myth about the "chosen people" and some misunderstand it. They have the notion that Jews, because they are *chosen*, think they are better than everyone else. No, Jews don't think they are better than everyone else; other people do. Consider that the stereotype fostered by anti-Semites and their fellow travelers is that Jews own the banks, the movie industry, pay off the government for all policies and laws that are bad for the common people of the world, and start all the wars with the connivance of a secret world-wide society that owns the Trilateral Commission and in addition chooses all the leaders of all countries.

But if there is a stereotype of excellence, is it factual? Reflect on the following:

## **JEWISH NOBEL WINNERS**



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*0.2% OF WORLDS POPULATION**14.1 Million Jews****Literature***

1910 - Paul Heyse

1927 - Henri Bergson

1958 - Boris Pasternak

1966 - Shmuel Yosef Agnon

1966 - Nelly Sachs

1976 - Saul Bellow

1978 - Isaac Bashevis Singer

1981 - Elias Canetti

1987 - Joseph Brodsky

1991 - Nadine Gordimer

***World Peace***

1911 - Alfred Fried

1911 - Tobias Michael Carel Asser

1968 - Rene Cassin

1973 - Henry Kissinger

1978 - Menachem Begin

1986 - Elie Wiesel

1994 - Shimon Peres

1994 - Yitzhak Rabin

***Chemistry***

1905 - Adolph Von Baeyer

1906 - Henri Moissan

1910 - Otto Wallach

1915 - Richard Willstaetter

1918 - Fritz Haber

1943 - George Charles de Hevesy

1961 - Melvin Calvin

1962 - Max Ferdinand Perutz

1972 - William Howard Stein

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1977 - Ilya Prigogine  
1979 - Herbert Charles Brown  
1980 - Paul Berg  
1980 - Walter Gilbert  
1981 - Roald Hoffmann  
1982 - Aaron Klug  
1985 - Albert A. Hauptman  
1985 - Jerome Karle  
1986 - Dudley R. Herschbach  
1988 - Robert Huber  
1989 - Sidney Altman  
1992 - Rudolph Marcus  
2000 - Alan J. Heeger

### *Economics*

1970 - Paul Anthony Samuelson  
1971 - Simon Kuznets  
1972 - Kenneth Joseph Arrow  
1975 - Leonid Kantorovich  
1976 - Milton Friedman  
  
1978 - Herbert A. Simon  
1980 - Lawrence Robert Klein  
1985 - Franco Modigliani  
1987 - Robert M. Solow  
1990 - Harry Markowitz  
1990 - Merton Miller  
1992 - Gary Becker  
1993 Rober Fogel

### *Medicine*

1908 - Elie Metchnikoff  
1908 - Paul Erlich  
1914 - Robert Barany  
1922 - Otto Meyerhof  
1930 - Karl Landsteiner

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1931 - Otto Warburg  
1936 - Otto Loewi  
1944 - Joseph Erlanger  
1944 - Herbert Spencer Gasser  
1945 - Ernst Boris Chain  
1946 - Hermann Joseph Muller  
1950 - Tadeus Reichstein  
  
1952 - Selman Abraham Waksman  
1953 - Hans Krebs  
1953 - Fritz Albert Lipmann  
1958 - Joshua Lederberg  
1959 - Arthur Kornberg  
1964 - Konrad Bloch  
1965 - Francois Jacob  
1965 - Andre Lwoff  
1967 - George Wald  
1968 - Marshall W. Nirenberg  
1969 - Salvador Luria  
1970 - Julius Axelrod  
1970 - Sir Bernard Katz  
1972 - Gerald Maurice Edelman  
1975 - David Baltimore  
1975 - Howard Martin Temin  
1976 - Baruch S. Blumberg  
1977 - Rosalyn Sussman Yalow  
1978 - Daniel Nathans  
1980 - Baruj Benacerraf  
1984 - Cesar Milstein  
1985 - Michael Stuart Brown  
1985 - Joseph L. Goldstein  
1986 - Stanley Cohen [& Rita Levi-Montalcini]  
1988 - Gertrude Elion  
1989 - Harold Varmus  
1991 - Erwin Neher  
1991 - Bert Sakmann  
1993 - Richard J. Roberts  
1993 - Phillip Sharp  
1994 - Alfred Gilman  
1995 - Edward B. Lewis

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***Physics***

1907 - Albert Abraham Michelson  
1908 - Gabriel Lippmann  
1921 - Albert Einstein  
1922 - Niels Bohr  
1925 - James Franck  
1925 - Gustav Hertz  
1943 - Gustav Stern  
1944 - Isidor Issac Rabi  
1952 - Felix Bloch  
1954 - Max Born  
1958 - Igor Tamm  
1959 - Emilio Segre  
1960 - Donald A. Glaser  
1961 - Robert Hofstadter  
1962 - Lev Davidovich Landau  
1965 - Richard Phillips Feynman  
1965 - Julian Schwinger  
1969 - Murray Gell-Mann  
1971 - Dennis Gabor  
1973 - Brian David Josephson  
1975 - Benjamin Mottleson  
1976 - Burton Richter  
1978 - Arno Allan Penzias  
1978 - Peter L Kapitza  
  
1979 - Stephen Weinberg  
1979 - Sheldon Glashow  
1988 - Leon Lederman  
1988 - Melvin Schwartz  
1988 - Jack Steinberger  
1990 - Jerome Friedman  
1995 - Martin Perl

*It is astonishing that of the 700 Nobel Laureates in the first 100 years of the Nobel prize, 18% of them are Jewish, while Jews are 1/24<sup>th</sup> of one percent of the world's population. This is more than a matter of historic pride; it is an enormous statistical improbability. It still seems insufficient to credit all this to reverence for education, skill at theoretical*

## Memoirs

*thinking or competitive instincts forged in a millennial-old struggle to survive and prosper. Perhaps the desire to understand the world is also a strong or defining Jewish cultural trait, leading to education and careers suited to exploration and discovery.*

Inasmuch as no one has developed a scientific theory which has tested true to account for this, perhaps it would be just as well to resort to the Torah for an explanation:

***He says, "It is too small a thing that  
You should be My Servant  
To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to  
restore the preserved ones of Israel;  
I will also make You a light of the nations  
So that My salvation may reach  
to the end of the earth."***

*(Isaiah 49:6)*

Joseph Telushkin in *Jewish Literacy* explains chosenness:

*"After all, how did the notion of one God become known to the world? Through the Jews. And according to Jewish sources, that is the meaning of chosenness: to make God known to the world. As Rabbi Louis Jacobs has written: "We are not discussing a dogma incapable of verification, but the recognition of sober historical fact. The world owes to Israel the idea of the one God of righteousness and holiness. This is how God became known to mankind."*

*Does Judaism believe that chosenness endows Jews with special rights in the way racist ideologies endow those born into the "right race"? Not at all. The most famous verse in the Bible on the subject of chosenness says the precise opposite: "You alone have I singled out of all the families of the earth. That is why I call you to account for all your iniquities" ([Amos 3:2](#)). Chosenness is so unconnected to any notion of race that Jews believe that the [Messiah](#) himself will descend from Ruth, a nonJewish woman who converted to Judaism.*

*Why were the Jews chosen? Because they are descendants of [Abraham](#). And why were Abraham and his descendants given the task of making God known to the world? The [Torah](#) never tells us. What God does say in Deuteronomy, is that "it is not because you are numerous that God chose you, indeed you are the smallest of people" ([7:7](#)). Because of the Jews' small numbers, any success they would have in making God known to the world would presumably reflect upon the power of the idea of God. Had the Jews been a*

## Memoirs

*large nation with an outstanding army, their successes in making God known would have been attributed to their might and not to the truth of their ideas. After all, nonMuslims living in the Arab world were hardly impressed by the large numbers of people brought to [Islam](#) through the sword.*

*The Chosen People idea is so powerful that other groups have appropriated it. Both Catholicism and Protestantism believe that God chose the Jews, but that two thousand years ago a new covenant was made with Christianity. During most of Christian history, and among Evangelical Christians to the present day, Christian chosenness meant that only Christians go to heaven while the nonchosen are either placed in limbo or are damned.*

*Mohammed, likewise, didn't deny Abraham's chosenness. He simply claimed that Abraham was a Muslim, and he traced Islam's descent through the Jewish Patriarch."*

Leah Raisin, president of Hadassah (year 2002), tells this story of the covenant: She was visiting the Hadassah Hospital in Israel and saw a surgeon working valiantly to save the life of a Muslim terrorist. She asked the doctor if he was trying to save the life of his enemy because of the oath of Hippocrates or because of the words of Maimonides. The doctor said, no, it was because of Moses. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he brought with him the commandments, one of which was the sixth, thou shalt not murder. The surgeon said that if Jews should disobey the commandments then the covenant with God would be broken and the Jews would disappear like all the other nations.

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## Anti-Semitism

### Afraid to Rejoin?

I am writing this in April, 2002, in the middle of the Israel-Palestinian war. There are disturbing reports in the press about increasing acts of violence against synagogues in France, Tunisia, and Canada. Historical acts of anti-Semitism were not been triggered by a Jewish homeland fighting in self defense as in the present morass. Throughout the past 2,000 years, it was only our mere existence that caused pogroms, exile, and executions.

So why should I voluntarily announce my allegiance to my Jewish heritage instead of remaining in the camouflage of an Anglo-Saxon surname like Grayson? Maybe it's because I am by nature a gadfly. I have the reputation of starting debates and then leaving them. A gadfly according to the dictionary is a persistent, irritating critic, a nuisance or one that acts as a provocative stimulus; a Goad.

The main reason I have no qualms about going to a synagogue is that I have not and do not experience any anti-Semitism, so I do not fear being free. However, I remember as a child, once when my parents took my sister and me driving in Chicago, that I saw a sign that said "For Rent, Restricted". I believe that meant no Jews, no colored, and no dogs. Or maybe the dogs were allowed. But I think that's the only anti-Semitism I can remember. It's not that I have been hiding; I have announced a thousand times to everyone in sight that my mother was Jewish and in recent years that I have renounced Lutheranism, joined the Synagogue and even teach religious school to 7<sup>th</sup> grade Jewish children. I wear a Star of David lapel pin occasionally; hang a Happy Hanukkah sign in the office annually and put an electric menorah in our window when appropriate. Nobody has thrown a rock through the window. My present wife is a member of the local Congregational Church, but just between you and me, I think she is such a free thinker

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that she would really prefer to be a non-observant Jew than a non-observant Christian. I figure that if any of my patients or friends had any bigotry in them, then either I have converted them to admiration, or else they are hiding it. I get a big kick out of emphasizing to the Born Again that without Moses there would have been no Rabbi Jesus. I likewise point out to black and white patients alike that the entire human race came out of Africa 200,000 years ago and once we all were black. It is mathematically provable that each of us is related to everyone else on the planet and that we are no further away from anyone we meet than 50<sup>th</sup> cousins.

I understand, however, that all of the above would be moot if someone spray-painted my house with a swastika. I guess that's why I have an unlisted phone number; they can't find the gadfly. It also doesn't hurt to take other precautionary and protective measures with the full recognition that there are persons out there with a screw loose who are in need of lifetime therapy behind bars. Fortunately, I don't seem to meet those people, so perhaps I have a false sense of security. I once told my colleague Abe Steinberg that my mother was a little paranoid about anti-Semitism; his answer was classic: "It's in the blood, Dick, it's in the blood." Meaning, of course, that the habit of being a victim for 2,000 years becomes a family tradition. My friend David Lome, who is Sephardic (Spanish Jew) only felt safe in Israel because of the history of expulsion from most of the countries of the world ever since the Diaspora in 70 C.E. (common era). Consider that the Jews in Spain had been Spanish citizens for a thousand years until in 1492 when they suddenly were ordered either to leave the country or to convert to Catholicism on pain of death. He claims it could happen in America sometime; I don't agree.

Frankly, because of the Arab suicide bombers, I would never feel safe in Israel. I like it right here. Another thought supports me, and that is I am also by heritage, since my English line traces back to the Mayflower, a son of the founders of this country. I in no way feel like an immigrant or an outsider. Frankly, all you people whose ancestors came after mine are the outsiders. Better be careful or we descendants of the Mayflower and the American Revolution will send you back. Well, I don't really mean that, because if I did, that would give my friend Ernie Perez, who is an Apache Indian, the right to send me back. And I won't go. I like it right here, as I said.