

YAAKOV AND JAY: A TALE OF TWO WORLDS

Two invitations are in my Jerusalem mailbox today, one for Jay's Bar Mitzvah in New York, and one for Yaakov's Bar Mitzvah in Jerusalem.

Jay's invitation is on expensive blue and gold paper, with embossed cover, engraved letters, lined envelopes within lined envelopes, specially chosen postage stamps, all elegantly addressed in professional calligraphy.

Yaakov's invitation is on thin white paper, printed simply in ordinary black and white. It bears no postage stamps; in order to save money, it was hand-delivered to my mailbox, probably by Yaakov himself.

In New York, there will be a Temple service and a dinner-dance the following evening at one of the posh Manhattan hotels.

In Jerusalem there will be a pre-Bar Mitzvah reception in a small room in one of the neighborhood synagogues, at which Yaakov will deliver a complex *pilpul* on the laws of *tefillin*. His *aliyah* to the Torah will take place at the regular minyan on a Monday morning.

Jay in New York attends an exclusive, non-denominational private high school, with special programs in art, music, science, mathematics. He is very bright, and excels in them all. There are opportunities for extra curricular activities: drama, science, and computer clubs; hiking, track and field, a rich program of intermural and interscholastic sports. Jay can barely read Hebrew, but having been tutored by an expensive private teacher, he will recite his two *berakhot* flawlessly.

Yaakov in Jerusalem attends a small yeshiva. On very cold days, the rooms are inadequately warmed with little heaters, and the children wear coats and scarves indoors. The classrooms are crowded, teachers have no formal degrees in education, there are no extra-curricular activities. Yaakov is studying Talmud, has completed *Bava Kama* and knows it well. He also knows all of Humash and Rashi, and much of Nahmanides on the Torah.

By the time Jay is eighteen, he will have forgotten his Bar Mitzvah Hebrew but, having graduated near the top of his class, he will be gladly accepted by Harvard University, where he will encounter some of the brightest secular minds in the world, and where he will fulfill the ambition of his parents for him to become a physician.

By the time Yaakov is eighteen, he will be very skilled in Talmudic dialectic, having by then completed *Bava Metzia*, *Bava Batra*, *Gittin* and *Kiddushin*. He will have committed to memory much of Mishnayot, and will be very knowledgeable in Shulkhan Arukh. He will be at the top of his class, and will be gladly accepted by Ponevez Yeshiva, where he will encounter some of the brightest Talmudic minds in the world, and where he will fulfill the ambition of his parents for him to become a *talmid hakham*.

When Jay enters medical school at age twenty-two, he will become engaged to a non-Jewish girl. His parents, both Jewish, will be unhappy that he is marrying

out of the faith, but they will be willing to pay the price, especially since Jay has always been such a good boy. The young lady, an honest and believing Christian, will refuse to undergo the pro-forma conversion to Judaism, but will consent to have a rabbi co-officiate with her minister at the wedding.

Yaacov, an acknowledged scholar at age twenty-two, will marry a young lady who has had intensive training in Jewish seminaries, and whose great ideal is to have a genuine Talmud authority as a husband. He will enter a kollel, his wife will work part-time as a kindergartner, and they will manage to live on a monthly income of \$600.

Jay will become a physician, and by the time he is thirty-three will have two children, will be earning \$200,000 a year, and will heal many people. At forty-three, in addition to owning a splendid practice, he will teach part-time at the local medical school, write for medical journals, and will be a recognized expert in his field. His busy schedule will not permit him to become involved in the Jewish community, but he will sense in himself certain inchoate yearnings for Judaism. He will give generously to the annual UJA appeal, will thrill to the triumphs of the State of Israel, and will support organizations which fight anti-Semitism. He will spend Yom Kippur day in Temple, recite Yizkor for his deceased mother, listen carefully to the rabbi's sermon, but will wonder why the rabbi deals more with political than with religious issues. From time to time he will read a Jewish book or attend a lecture on Jewish themes, but will find in them no great satisfaction. His children will not be raised as Jews, Jay having reluctantly agreed to leave such matters to his wife. His family will observe the annual Pesach seder with Jay's father, and this will deepen Jay's curiosity about his Jewish roots. He will be a proud member of the local country club, which rarely admits Jews, but instead of playing golf on his afternoons off, he will volunteer his services at the local clinic for the indigent, where he will be loved by his patients because of his genuine concern for them. His annual income will be over \$500,000 by now, and he will own a three-acre mansion, plus a vacation home by the sea. His children will attend exclusive, non-denominational private schools. His father, though wishing he had Jewish grandchildren, will be very proud of his son.

By the time he is thirty-three, Yaakov will be the father of seven children, and he will barely make ends meet. By forty-three, he will have completed the entire Talmud and Codes several times, and will be teaching in a major yeshiva. He will have many disciples, who will admire him for his perception, insight, and his genuine concern for their welfare, and he will give them much time beyond the classroom. Members of the community will consult him about their personal and halakhic problems, and he will be a sought-after teacher of Torah. Although he will think a great deal about the world beyond Jerusalem, he will never leave the borders of Israel. He will sense in himself certain inchoate yearnings for contact with Jews outside his own circle, particularly non-religious Jews. He will be disturbed by the deep abyss which separates the religious and the secular Jewish worlds, will often wonder if he ought to make some efforts to close the gap, but the demands of his own learning and teaching will be so all-consuming that he will have no meaningful discourse with any Jews beyond his immediate world. His annual income will be \$12,000. His sons will attend a small yeshiva, poorly heated; his daughters, a girls' yeshiva, very drafty. His father will be very

proud of his son, and will take great pleasure in studying Torah with his grandchildren.

At fifty-three, Jay will attend a medical conference in Jerusalem, his first visit to Israel. He will be stirred by the living Jewish state and by the sounds of Hebrew, and will be unnerved by the sight of so many Jews who seem to be so passionately religious. He will be put off by their strange black suits and hats, so evocative of an age that he thought had long ago ceased to exist, but though he will feel like an alien among them, he will be drawn to them and will long for some genuine contact with them.

At fifty-three, Yaakov, now a recognized posek, will be a featured panelist at the same medical conference, and will deliver a talk on medical issues in the halakhah. He will be unnerved by the sight of so many Jewish physicians who seem open and curious about Judaism and yet are so unaware of the basic rudiments of Jewish faith and practice. He will be put off by their strange, garish clothes, so evocative of the values of the West, but though he will feel like an alien among them, he will be drawn to them and will long for some genuine contact with them.

In the lobby of the conference hall, the physician and the Rosh Yeshiva will walk out of the same door at the same time. They will nod perfunctorily to one another, and for a fleeting moment their eyes will meet.

As his plane takes off from Tel Aviv, Jay will gaze at the cities and the hills and the sand and the sea. He will think about the pious Jews of Jerusalem, and he will reflect on how it has developed that a Jew can feel so estranged from other Jews in the land of the Jews.

As Yaakov sits on the bus returning him to his yeshiva, he will gaze lovingly at the stone buildings of Jerusalem as they glow in the strange yellow light of the late afternoon. He will think about the physicians he has just seen, and he will reflect on how it has developed that a Jew can feel so estranged from other Jews in the land of the Jews.


EMANUEL FELDMAN

With this issue, we introduce a new cover design (by Ben Gasner Design Studio of Jerusalem) and a new text design (by Olivestone Print Communications, Inc. of New York). We trust TRADITION'S new appearance will make it even more attractive and inviting for our readers.

The Editors