

WHAT BEING JEWISH MEANS TO ME

In my family, being Jewish has always meant devotion to study and commitment to ethical behavior. As a small child, I worried that this treasured heritage might be obscured when my father decided to change our family name. My father was a writer, and when he chose "Jonathan Finn" as his pen-name, he also changed the family name from Finkelstein to Finn. Proud as I was of my father and his writings published under that name, I dreaded the thought that people would think we wanted to hide our Jewishness. My mother dealt with the problem by laughingly calling ourselves the Finklestein-Finns. My way has been to identify the higher priorities of my life ever more strongly with Jewish values.

This has been particularly true in relation to the Jewish ethical tradition, an approach to life that I absorbed from my uncle Louis Finkelstein, the former chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary. When weighing the moral consequences of business decisions, for example, the Ethics Committee of our public relations firm seeks knowledgeable counsel to guide our thinking. I will always remember how some years ago a professor at the Seminary helped us make the decision to resign the sizeable Greek tourism account after three colonels seized power and installed a military dictatorship.

There are other elements, too, that lie at the core of my Jewishness. One is the electric sense of homecoming I feel on visits to Israel as I look out the airplane window and catch my first glimpse of the biblical landscape below. I feel a similar sensation at Jewish life-cycle events that provide meaning for our family—circumcisions, bar and bat mitzvahs, Jewish holidays. I feel it, too, when reciting the mourner's kaddish, reliving the past with loved ones who have died.

My wife and I have been married 48 years, and I want our ten grandchildren to know that one reason our life together has been so fulfilling is our sense of being part of the Jewish people. We fervently hope that those who follow us will be able to share that Jewish rootedness — whether by birth or by choice — with their loved ones.

The American Jewish Committee is proud to present this message, the seventh in a series, on the meaning of being Jewish today. The Jewish community offers an abundant diversity of intellectual, spiritual and cultural opportunities that can enrich and deepen one's life.

For more information, write or call us at (212) 751-4000, ext. 267.

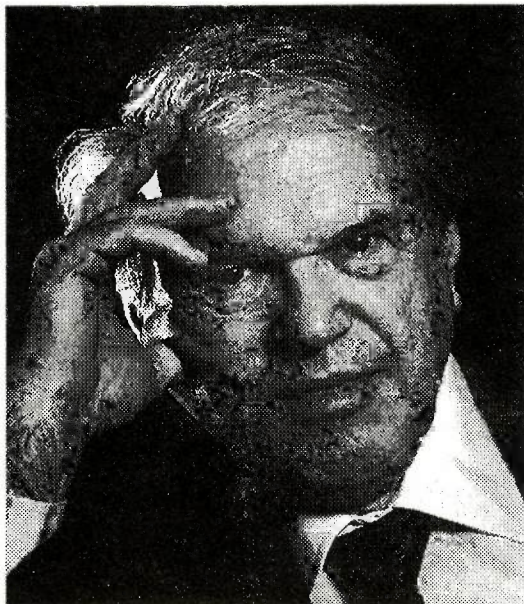
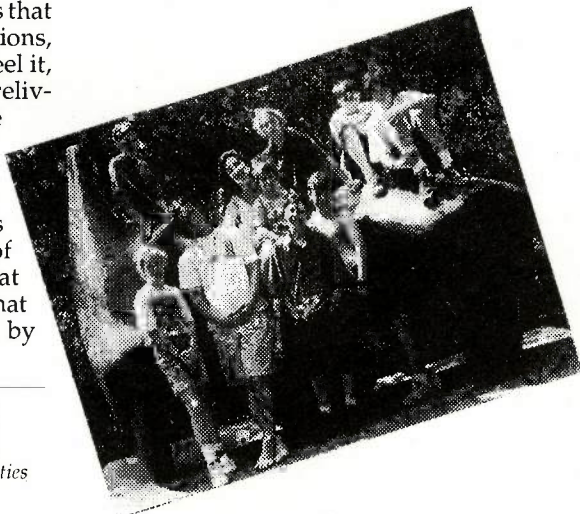


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