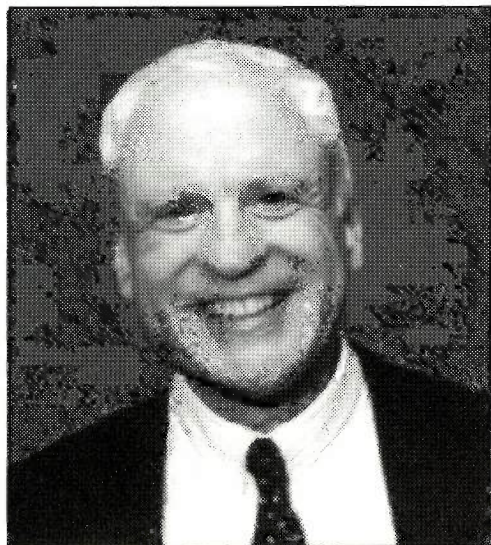


WHAT BEING JEWISH MEANS TO ME



Alfred H. Moses
United States Ambassador to Romania

I had the good fortune of being raised in a traditional Jewish home where the Sabbath was a day of rest, the holidays were days of joy, and the dietary laws were strictly observed. This set me apart from my friends and neighbors. Still, in my early years religious observance interfered with my favorite pastimes, playing football and baseball. The highlight of my week was seeing how many innings of baseball I could play before my father dragged me off to synagogue. But by my late teens, I took great pride in being a Jew who knew Hebrew, could recite the traditional prayers from memory, and was a wiz at Jewish Trivial Pursuit. The rise of Hitler, the devastation of European Jewry and the creation of the State of Israel etched in my heart a sense of Jewish peoplehood that would later take me around the world in support of endangered Jewish communities.

During my lifetime, I have seen enormous changes in the Jewish world. While external threats to the Jewish people have diminished, Jewish continuity in the United States is being questioned as never before. Young Jews ask me "Why be Jewish? In America today you can affirm your identity as a Jew or ignore it." The level of acceptance in our country makes both options acceptable. Being Jewish then is increasingly a matter of choice.

To their question I answer: Judaism has a 3000-year-old tradition of infusing the spiritual into our everyday lives, not for personal redemption, but to uplift the lot of mankind through adherence to ethical and moral principles, and to preserve through this common endeavor a sense of connectedness with a people. This, the essence of our Covenant, gives us tools to deal with the disparate and often confusing aspects of modern life.

For me this has meant combining my career as a lawyer in private practice with communal and public service - as an officer in the Navy, later as Special Assistant in the Carter White House, then as President of the American Jewish Committee, and now as United States Ambassador to Romania, a country I first came to know through helping Jews and others escape from behind the Iron Curtain. In all these endeavors I have been inspired by the teachings of the Torah and the Talmud that each of us has an obligation to work to make peoples' lives better.



The American Jewish Committee

Robert S. Rifkind
President

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Executive Director

The American Jewish Committee is proud to present this message, the eighteenth in a series on the meaning of being Jewish today. It is published to coincide with the Jewish High Holy Days which begin on September 13 with Rosh HaShanah, the Jewish New Year.

For information on a variety of programs which can help you explore your connection to the Jewish people, write or call us at 1-800-551-3252.

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