

The Long Road Home

By Mark Young

I was born in Ohio, but in the early fifties my family moved everything we had to Florida in a one-wheeled trailer hitched to the back of our Studebaker. A country music radio-station owner who would later become the mayor of Ocala invited us to the First Presbyterian Church. When I heard the booming voice of Reverend Fred Turner, it was like God himself was in the house. Renowned as a biblical scholar, Turner seemed more interested in the stories of the Old Testament than what came after. I have vivid memories of dramatic accounts of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses.

After one especially rousing sermon, I asked my parents what God looked like. They wisely deferred to authority—Reverend Turner—who kindly told me that no one really knows, because God is a spirit that nobody ever sees. *If God doesn't look like people*, I inquired, *then how are people like God?* This concept began a lifelong quest for the underlying non-physical meaning of “man is made in God's image.”



One of my friends was raised by an old-style tent-revival evangelist. I once asked the Bible-thumper to explain man's relationship with God. He laughed at me, said it was all a lie—except for the money. Disgusted by all the holy hypocrisy, I threw the baby Jesus out with the bathwater. It was easy to be convinced that all organized religion was a waste of time and a bane to our planet.



In 1973, as I was finishing undergraduate study at the University of North Carolina, I decided to learn Transcendental Meditation (TM). Here I would



MY FIRST SHABBAT AS A JEW.

discover a clean, natural way to experience higher states of human consciousness. My daily meditation practice got me through graduation, and the possibility of enlightenment led me to the Maharishi International University in Iowa. By 1976 I had become a TM instructor, teaching in Europe, the U.S., and Central America.



In 1980 I moved to Washington, DC to take part in a federal government pilot project involving TM. Thousands of transcendental meditators lived in the DC area during this time, and one of the cutest was a short, perky young musician named Jane Adlman from Rockville Centre, Long Island. She was invited to a Valentine's Day hot-tub party at my house in Bethesda and as soon as she heard me play one note on my bass guitar...that was it. Jane and I began spending all our time together. We married on July 15, 1982 in a small civil ceremony.

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My relationship with Jane and her family developed richly and slowly, like a good brisket. At their colorful social events, meals, holidays, I was heartily accepted. No one pressed me toward conversion; everyone appreciated that I shared in holiday celebrations and was proud to have our son, Harry, raised as a Jew. Still, I felt somewhat of an outsider—neither Jewish nor Christian. When anyone would ask whether I was Jewish or Christian, I'd answer “spiritual—not religious”...but this stock reply began to wear thin, sounding more like a rationalization than a reality.



We joined Beth Haverim in Mahwah, New Jersey in 1990. At my first Yom Hashoah service, listening to the stories of survivors, I felt moved to do something concrete to express my outrage and sympathy. A matching pair of ornate brass menorahs had become bent and tarnished from decades of use in the synagogue. Perhaps by cleaning and adjusting these Jewish symbols, I could play a role in their repair. When worshipers came for the next Friday night service, the menorahs were back in place—straight, strong, and shining. This, my first *mitzvah*, whetted my appetite to do more.

Meanwhile, Rabbi Milton Weinberg, *z'l*, was having a profound effect on Jane, Harry, and me, offering us great traditional wisdom in a firm, loving way. Synagogue members were becoming the center of our family's circle of friends. And we were attending more services, joining committees, and participating in social action events.



Having enjoyed my first Biennial convention in Boston (while visiting