



A Message from Rabbi Fasman

Rabbi Mark Fasman

Recently my father sent me a joke printed in the weekly San Francisco Jewish newspaper (thanks, Dad...usually I can't repeat

the jokes you send). Here it is:

A Jewish man, having just finished reading a book called "Man of the House," strode into the kitchen and up to his wife, pointed a finger in her face, and said:

"From now on, I want you to know that I am the man of this house, and my word is law. I want you to prepare me a gourmet meal tonight, and when I'm finished I expect a sumptuous dessert. Then, after dinner, you are going to draw me my bath so I can relax, and when I'm finished with my bath, guess who's going to dress me and comb my hair?"

His wife replied, "The chevra kadisha?"

Now that's Jewish humor. It doesn't translate to any other ethnic or national group.

There was a time in my life when I would have read the punch line with no clue of what it meant. I was teaching at a university in Moorhead, Minnesota and just beginning to explore the adult world of Judaism.

And here I sit in Jerusalem having just completed my fifth year at the Shalom Hartman Institute, "Rabbi Camp" for about 130 of us – Conservative, Orthodox, Reform, and Reconstructionist – from North America, Europe, South America, and Israel. We learn all day, in pairs, in classes, at evening lectures. It reminds us all why we entered the rabbinate: our passion for Jewish learning and engagement with the Jewish community.

Judaism needs community; it is designed to function only in this way (even the relatively solitary mystics lived relative to their Jewish community). Jews need community; we find that it is nearly impossible to maintain any kind of meaningful connection to the Jewish people or to Judaism when we are isolated.

Thus it was that evening in Fargo, North Dakota, I **came to love Judaism only after learning to love Jews first**. From the time that I began to invest myself in the life of the Jewish community, Judaism began to enrich my life, to give it meaning and direction, to give me a structure within which I could orient myself in time, in space, and in

relationships.

And it was the chevra kadisha of Fargo that most powerfully connected me to Judaism and the Jewish community. Quite by accident (if there are "accidents") I found myself standing among a small group of Jewish men washing the body of an Orthodox Jewish man whom I had never met. And yes, we dressed him and combed his hair in preparation for burial – he had lived his life in the Jewish community, and it was the community who buried

him (not hired professionals). Suddenly I was connected to a past I had never known, and to a present in the form of a grieving family and a living community.

It was after this time that my first tentative steps in Jewish learning took on new meaning and importance in my life. It was after this time that I began to invest myself in the life of the community as well as in my own personal life-journey. It was after this time that I found myself committed to a lifetime of passion for Jews and Judaism.

Sometimes, it takes death to give life meaning. It takes loss to give meaning to what we have. It takes past to give meaning to the future. It takes time away from a

community to reinforce just how much I love serving that community.

I hope that each of you has made time this summer to "get away," to recharge, and to return with a renewed appreciation of the blessings of home. That is part of the message of teshuvah, of return. Teshuvah (the central theme of the upcoming High Holy Days) is often translated as "repentance." But it is so much more than that. Yes, it begins with "repentance," with an honest assessment of where we have been and the wrong paths that we may have taken. But it continues with a statement (out loud, actually) of just what we have done that needs changing, followed by a commitment to making that change – causing a return to community, a return to family, a return to those we love, a return to our dreams, a return to what we know we could be and should be.

I look forward to my return on August 1. And I look forward to sharing the season of return with you in the coming weeks.

Shalom from Jerusalem, the Holy City, the place of ultimate return for 200 generations of Jews, our homeland, our home.