

CHARLES

My Jewish Journey began with my parents, who grew up Orthodox in England, the children of immigrants from Eastern Europe. They moved to America with me and my brother and sister when I was a year old. During World War II, when I was in grade school, we lived in Tacoma and my parents worked to save Jews in Europe. My father contributed money and guaranteed support for a couple of Polish men who had escaped the Nazis. He provided a job for one, maybe both of them, in his business. I only remember meeting one of them, a small man with graying hair, wearing gray work clothes. About 20 years ago someone told me he had seen that man recently. He was old and living in Council House or The Summit, and had fond and thankful memories of my father.

My mother, whose parents and most of whose siblings had moved to Palestine after the First World War, was very concerned about the survival of Jewish children in Europe. She focused on Youth Aliyah, a Hadassah program that rescued thousands of children from Nazi Germany and resettled them in kibbutzim and youth villages in Palestine. I was told she founded the Tacoma chapter of Hadassah, and I remember her endlessly on the phone, raising money for Youth Aliyah.

My parents also practiced "welcome the stranger," particularly during the War. Tacoma was an active military town, with many Navy ships on Commencement Bay and large numbers of soldiers at Fort Lewis. Most Friday nights we had Army and Navy men at our Shabbat table, mostly officers but some enlisted men. In the table conversation rank didn't count; we were all Jews together. Seders were crowded, with extra tables brought into the dining room and, to the confusion of

most, we did not all have the same Haggadah. Nonetheless we eventually got through the evening and made new friends.

I remember one Navy officer who took me on a tour of an aircraft carrier moored on the Tacoma waterfront. I was 8 or 9 years old and was in awe of the complex machinery, the airplanes in the carrier's hangar, and all the sailors and officers in uniform. To me it was all very glamorous. Now, a Navy veteran myself, I work against the glamorization of war through the organization Veterans For Peace.

After the War we moved to Seattle where I grew up Jewishly and became Bar Mitzvah at Temple De Hirsch. During high school, college and Navy service I did not do much Jewishly, but after Jonis and I were married I always felt the need to be a member of a synagogue—many different ones over the years—and, for the last eleven years, here at Kol HaNeshamah.

JONIS

My Jewish journey also began at home. My home was Providence, Rhode Island, where my mother was born, and my father in nearby Central Falls, both to parents who had immigrated in the 1890s and early 1900s.. Our household, which included my maternal grandmother, was modestly observant. My father was always active in the leadership of our congregation, Temple Beth El. My mother was soft-spoken but clear in her values. If I complained about something a teacher had said or done, for example, she always asked how the teacher would describe the situation, which annoyed me, because I wanted her always to see it my way. But she taught me to look for at least two sides to every story.

My journey also began in Sunday school. Rabbi Braude talked to us about the Prophets as the conscience of the Jewish people who appealed to our better impulses and called us to account. They presented a powerful drive to justice and the need to struggle for it.

My opportunity in high school came with the Supreme Court decision, *Brown v Board of Education*, which ruled that racial segregation in schools was unconstitutional. I didn't know much about racial segregation. My public high school had white, black, and "Portuguese" students (from Cape Verde, off the Atlantic coast of Africa, as I learned later). We were Ashkenazi Jews and European Catholics, Italian, Irish, Armenian. The black students were mostly Protestant, and there were a few white Protestants. This mixture was normal to me. It wasn't about black and white. Each ethnic and national group was distinct and different. We were mostly children or grandchildren of immigrants.

My class president, James Potter, was black. The two of us were asked to represent students on a public panel at the downtown library to react to the *Brown* decision, he representing Negro students (as we said then) and me representing whites. I remember this experience as entering into a different world. It was a bit scary. My father actually asked the rabbi if it was a safe thing for me to do. This was the paranoid 1950s.

Skip to the 1970s. Charles and I had moved to Madrona, on the edge of the Central Area, then Seattle's black neighborhood. At the time black construction workers were trying to integrate the well paid, all white building trades. I saw this as a righteous struggle. The black construction workers were being supported by a Quaker organization, the American Friends Service Committee. Some of our new

neighbors were Quakers and involved in these efforts. I asked if I could participate. That was my introduction to working on racial justice with black workers and Quakers. The Jewish community was not involved. The AFSC gave me an experience of strong faith-based work for racial justice. A few years later it also got me interested in Israel and Palestine. Until then I had resisted Israel because I was put off by heavy handed one-sided doctrinaire pressure from official Israeli speakers. They were trying to scare us into donating money. Instead I appreciated the AFSC approach of listening to both Israelis and Palestinians. I think some of my Jewish friends were as annoyed with me about this—as I had been when my mother asked me to see the teacher's side.

Two incidents stand out:

In about 1983 AFSC organized a joint speaking tour of an Israeli former general, Mordecai Bar-on, and a Palestinian former West Bank mayor, Mohammed Milhem. This was a new thing, to have a prominent Israeli Jew and a West Bank Palestinian on the same platform. It was scary to many. Some feared violence, and Security was hired for the public talk at the UW. It was a lively event but peaceful. I helped coordinate the Seattle visit and spent time with both men as they also got acquainted with each other and compared notes about growing up in Jerusalem. "We smelled the same almond blossoms," they said, and learned English from the same textbooks, Morris I and Morris II!. It so happened that those textbooks had been written by Charles' uncle, Isaac Morris. That made me feel connected to both of them, a Jewish leader and a Palestinian leader who shared many childhood experiences in Jerusalem, though not together. Now they wanted to listen and talk to each other because, they said, violence isn't getting us anywhere. I can't emphasize enough how shocking this joint effort was, to both sides, at the time, especially in Seattle.. One outcome was the formation of a Jewish-Arab dialogue

group called SCIPP - Seattle Committee for Israeli-Palestinian Peace. Its goal was to "create a climate in this area where people could speak openly from both sides." We talked to each other, and often had heated discussions where people shared opposite perspectives on events, such as what happened in Palestine in 1947. In pairs of a Jew and an Arab we talked to whatever groups would listen to us, showing it was possible to talk even when we disagreed. In 1988 Charles and I travelled with a dozen mostly Jewish and Arab members of other dialogue groups to Jordan, Israel and Palestine, meeting with Palestinians, Jews and others, journalists, activists, academics, politicians, ordinary people. At the end of each day we debriefed our reactions, possibly the most intense part of the experience, since Jews and Arabs reacted in such different ways to the people we met with.

CHARLES

As Jonis said, in the early 1980s we both became involved in Arab-Jewish dialogue, first here in Seattle through SCIPP. I became SCIPP's representative to ACMED, the American Coalition for Middle East Dialogue. ACMED consisted of about a dozen groups around the country. For a year or two I was its National Coordinator. This was the group we traveled with.

We were heavily criticized by some in the Jewish community for meeting with Palestinians and other Arabs, and some of our Arab partners were likewise criticized for meeting with Jews, particularly Jews who supported Israel. A few members dropped out of SCIPP, especially over the issue of aid to Israel, but most of us persisted despite disagreements. More important, as we talked to our Jewish friends and others about what we were doing, the climate did start to change.

I believe our efforts had a small but positive effect. There had been very strong opposition, not just in the Jewish community but in the secular community as well, to recognizing the Palestine Liberation Organization as a legitimate political entity. When word came out of the secret negotiations in Oslo between representatives of Israel and the PLO, the expected outrage was muted, both in Israel and the US, including here in Seattle. I think the dialogue work here and around the country had the effect of spreading the word among Jews that Palestinians were real people with many of the same hopes, fears and aspirations as Jews.

Meanwhile, during the 1990s a number of Jews and African Americans in Seattle started the African American/Jewish Coalition for Justice (AAJ CJ). We testified to the school board about employment practices and raised money for scholarships. One of our activities was the Pairing Project, in which African American and Jewish individuals met together and got to know each other. I paired with Zachary Bruce, the assistant pastor of New Hope Baptist Church. A few years later he started a new church, Freedom Church of Seattle. Freedom Church serves a very needy congregation of the working poor—mostly single mothers and their children, but older people as well—and as an institution is very needy itself. After several moves it is now settled in Skyway. Zach and I are still in close touch—we talk to each other on the phone very week or two. Jonis and I have been able to help the church in various ways.

I wish I had time to tell many stories about Freedom Church, about the Coalition, about Jewish-Arab relations in Seattle. It's been an interesting and, I hope, useful journey, and I'm glad to share more stories with any of you who might be interested in hearing them.

My conclusion is that we can make a difference, even if only at the margins. It is worth the effort and the results can be satisfying. I encourage others to be active. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, whose writings I admire, said this about becoming observant: Do what you feel comfortable with—and a little bit more. I am not religiously observant, but I try to be morally observant, and I do like his approach.

JONIS

The guiding Jewish value to me remains the principle of seeking justice, and the understanding from my mother that how people see justice depends on who they are and what their experiences have been. It means that our biggest challenge is understanding people from different perspectives and hopefully developing and working toward a shared vision of a more just world. The more just world is the point, because I realize that not everyone has the same vision.

We gravitated to Kol HaNeshamah as a progressive congregation. Today KHN's Tikkun Olam leadership helps me know what is happening on issues like immigration, and who is doing what in our community. I also learn from and join with FAN - Faith Action Network - a statewide interfaith advocacy and action organization, of which Kol HaNeshamah is a member and on whose board I am a member.

So thanks to you all, for your collective impulses and work for justice. These make us a righteous community of which we are proud to be part.
