



#soulify High Holy Days 5780/2018

By Student Rabbi Kolby Morris-Dahary

Sometimes Divine and unexpected connections are made between us that turn into lifelong friendships. This was certainly the case for the very special friendship between Rabbi Jacob Schram (played by Ben Stiller) and Father Brian Finn (played by Edward Norton) in the 2000 American romantic comedy



“Keeping the Faith,” which remains one of my favorite films to this day.

Here at Judaism Your Way we pride ourselves in offering many different ways of doing Jewish. This is reflected in the incredible diversity of Judaism Your Way marriages, family structures, partners, and friendships. In the spirit of this year’s theme of Courage and Connection, I would like to tell you about a very special connection (and “keeping the faith” friendship of my own) in my life.

His name is Reverend Ken Brown and he is the Senior Pastor at Trinity Methodist Church. We were introduced last year by my father and now our friendship has blossomed into one of my most treasured blessings. We meet most Tuesdays at a local restaurant and “break bread together,” study, talk, and connect.

Jews seldom study Torah alone; the study of Torah is a social and communal activity. Pastor Ken taught me that studying Bible in groups is also deeply ingrained in the Christian tradition, especially among young people.

Very quickly through our meetings I realized that my new friend Ken is also my hevruta. Jews study Jewish texts in pairs, a method known as hevruta (“fellowship”). In hevruta, the pair struggles to understand the meaning of each passage and discusses how to apply it to the larger issues addressed and even to their own lives. The word hevruta derives from the same root haver, or, in English, friend. The Babylonian Talmud particularly extols the value of learning in pairs: “Two scholars sharpen one another” (Ta’anit 7a) meaning that two scholars, through discussion and debate, help to sharpen each other’s insight into the text.

This is certainly the case with hevruta Pastor Ken, and oh-so-much more. In our weekly meetings, hevruta Pastor Ken and I study text, each other's faith traditions and interesting differences between the two, what it means to be a spiritual leader, and all matters of the heart. Even though I learn so much from hevruta Pastor Ken about Christianity, what has been the most surprising has been the insight I have gained about my own faith tradition: Judaism. To see my faith through the eyes of another has been incredibly valuable in asking myself important questions.

In a reality where religious groups are becoming increasingly divided from one another, interfaith understanding has undoubtedly solidified its place in the important goals of modern society. The conventional terms such as 'co-existence' and 'interfaith dialogue' no longer prove effective and there is an immediate need for more novel and out-of-the-box thinking ideas. One of these such ideas is called 'Holy Envy', developed by Krister Stendahl; a Swedish Bishop, ecumenist, scripture scholar, and former professor emeritus at Harvard Divinity School.

Holy Envy, as introduced by Stendahl and defined by many (such as the following definition by Padraic O'Hare) is "experiencing something so profound in the beliefs, rituals or practices of another tradition that one wishes his or her own community of faith also encompassed or practiced it."

Stendahl and many scholars of interfaith understanding have since stressed the importance of Holy Envy when achieving true connection between people of two faiths. The concept of Holy Envy stretches beyond simply thinking that aspects of another religion are interesting or desirable. The word 'envy' implies a sort of darkness and weight, and is by no means a passive or subtle emotion. The feeling of envy is intense and often times uncomfortable, and ironically one of the seven deadly sins in the Christian tradition. Thus the paradoxical nature of Holy Envy reveals itself to the interfaith scholar; in order to achieve "love" we must first engage in "envy."

One of the most fascinating aspects of Holy Envy for me is thinking about understanding of one's own faith before being able to feel envy for another, and how this understanding changes over time through the process of Holy Envy. Mary C. Boys (a practitioner of Stendahl's teachings through interfaith work) in her article "Authenticity, Not Demonization: An Education for Paradox," outlines the requirements for spiritual companionship with the most important being "knowledgeable about one's faith and grounded in its traditions and practices in such a way that their religious identity is manifest in the way one lives." In other words, a prerequisite for Holy Envy is a deep understanding of our own faith; a sort of confidence and mastery of practice is required before taking the risk of seeing beauty in another religion.

Professor Menachem Fisch in a lecture at the 2009 annual Theology conference at Shalom Hartmann convention explained the terms of engagement for meeting another and listening for beauty as meeting the richness of another's tradition as well as our own and having to confront that which we take for granted within our own faith. If we become committed to studying and articulating the beauty of our own faith, the dialogue becomes an "echo-chamber of beauty." The journey of Holy Envy, according to Fisch, is best understood as self-exploratory and then reflective. We must be able to look at something radically different than us as great, desire it, but because we have a strong sense of who we are, we do not appropriate it.

I have been able to better understand who I am through my learning with hevruta Pastor Ken. I have also experienced Holy Envy on multiple occasions based on the beautiful ways that he teaches and practices his own tradition. I have also been able to deepen my appreciation and love for those that are

different from me. Because of the incredible blessing that my friendship with hevruta Pastor Ken has added to my life, I extend a recommendation to us all to deepen our connections with people from other faith traditions this year. One way you can deepen these connections is to join our new Judaism Your Way Multifaith Volunteer Initiative by reaching out to [Josh Klasco](#).

Holy One of Blessing: During 5780, may we all make courageous connections with those from other faiths. May these connections continue to nurture and deepen our own spiritual growth as well as our sisters and brothers, and all of humanity. Amen.

Reflection Questions:

- Have you ever experienced Holy Envy?
- How do interfaith friendships and connections contribute to your understanding of your own faith?
- How do you hope to grow your understanding of people of other faiths this year?

To read more #soulify posts, please visit Judaism Your Way's [blog](#). For more information about Judaism Your Way, visit [www.judaismyourway.org](http://www.judaismyourway.org), call 303.320.6185, or email [askus@judaismyourway.org](mailto:askus@judaismyourway.org).