

In Shtetel Europe, Jewish life, culture and tradition were vibrant. Judaism was inter-woven through every day life. There were no Orthodox, Conservative or Reform synagogues. People went to shul. Life followed the ebb and flow of birth, death and chaggim. Chaiim did as his father Mendel before him and his son Simcha would – “G-d willing”, do the same.

Throughout our history, we have faced a relentless tide of persecution. Centuries of violence taught Jewish people the value of community and solidarity. Judaism was constant.

The catalyst of reformation and secularization of Judaism is rooted in Spinoza and Mendelssohn way back in the 17th and 18th centuries. But in the context of recent history, it was post Holocaust where “being”

Jewish evolved. Along the spectrum of observance there was a new and greater rift between those who clung to, and those who abandoned faith. The atrocities that devastated entire communities, on an individual level, often either intensified or diminished personal faith. The way of being Jewish had begun to change. New ways of practice were appearing and diversification was beginning.

Then, in 1948 the state of Israel was newly born and Jews worldwide united with a renewed spirit and purpose. A collective Holocaust memory embraced a new hope. This held world Jewry together. The “being” of being Jewish was again substantively re-created.

Sixty-two years later Israel has grown, and blossomed, and sustains a strong economy. The best of

technology, industry and information grows out of this tiny piece of land. Israeli culture has become distinct and strong. Israeli's no longer want our blue jeans when we visit. They have their own style – both literally and metaphorically.

Yet her struggle for autonomy and peace is nowhere near resolved. Israel's neighbors are no more her friends; and the world at large is less of a friend than ever. The international community is quick to criticize, judge, blame and point. That she survives despite her enemies seeking her total and complete annihilation is remarkable. Hope, faith and belief in Israel are the easy parts of being Jewish.

But it's not all that easy. There are times when it's difficult to condone some political, religious or military

decisions that are made in Israel. If we raise our voices to praise, we must too recognize when a decision merits criticism. Along with Israel's right to survive, is our expectation that all her internal policies be made and executed with a higher than average code of ethics. In reality, that doesn't always happen. Defining our Judaism through our love, hope and faith in Israel isn't easy. And, it's no not enough.

Anti-Semitism is still a reality in our world. But it has become complicated by, and entangled within the on-going politics of Israel. We now need to work to separate anti-Semitism from Anti-Israel. They inherently overlap and so defining their boundaries are tricky. This can create a chasm within our Jewish community. As personal Jewish politics spread the

breadth of a wide spectrum, this new complex anti-Semitism no longer has the same unifying effect it once did. Moreover, in most of the civilized world we don't experience the kind of anti-Semitism that creates a sense of mortal danger. This comfort unglues our global Jewish community. We have the luxury of disconnection, and dis-affiliation.

For centuries we were defined by our need to maintain a cohesive community in order to survive. To a certain extent, the expression "what didn't kill us made us stronger" was true of the global Jewish community - And is no longer

Within Israel today, a whole new problem is boiling, not simmering below the surface. The religious far right is a palpable force that burdens and challenges

internal peace. In fact, without the external conflicts, many believe there would be a civil implosion. Secular and religious Jews are not enjoying the shared community the way Ben Gurion envisioned. For those of us watching, listening and trying to broker a middle ground, defining our Judaism based on Israel's picture of who is Jewish isn't enough.

And still there are more challenges to our self-definition. Here in the Diaspora some of us are living a whole new re-creation of Judaism. Mixed marriages, and conversions are completely re-defining communities. Once tight, self-sustaining Jewish communities are becoming blended and diversified. This is the reality of our evolution and as such, demands self-re-definition.

Pluralistic synagogues like our own, are forging avenues of welcome and change. We are recognizing new gifts, and can no longer look to traditional Jewish models for all our answers. We are creating whole new ways to live, pray, celebrate and even be buried. We are not the synagogue of our grandmothers, and will not be the ones of our granddaughters.

So – we are no longer a community held together for survival. We are greater than a population whose sole purpose is the support of Israel. No more can we define ourselves alone by centuries of tradition . We are creating new ones daily. We are chardi, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Humaist and Reconstructionist, .
How do we be Jewish now?

We are who we were before we knew to look – when we were too busy surviving, building and protecting. We are more than a faith, more than a religion and greater than a culture – WE are a people.

Our liturgy is clear. Throughout the day we recite the Shema. “Shema Israel, Adonai Elohaynu adonai echad.” “listen” we shout – PEOPLE Israel, the Lord our G-d, the Lord is one. We are not just calling the politically left, the Orthodox, or the gay Jew amongst ourselves, are calling all the PEOPLE. We ARE the people

Philosophically and fundamentally this is liberating. This may not be a wake up call, but it’s a re-awakening. In it’s simplicity, it’s so profound.

This message fits today. On Rosh Hashanah we are engaged in private and communal prayer. Though we seek personal renewal, this is especially a time of collective rejuvenation. Yesterday and today, communities gather to heed the call to change. Personal changes are impossible when our surroundings don't allow for them. So, before we re-align our own Jewish souls, on each and every Rosh Hashanah we must define how we are a PEOPLE.

We need to be reminded of this truth. It won't resolve or demystify all that separates us one from another, but it's a fundamental clarification. And I hope it will be our new rally call to growth and greatness.

We the world Jewish community and especially the Saskatoon one must re-commit to our people. Whether

this means a personal resolve, a financial membership or greater involvement, we need to realign our mission and grow. Join, participate, celebrate, and create. No matter where you stand spiritually, politically, or socially, come; let us stand closer as a PEOPLE.

We are driven by a myriad of passions and politics. We are a politically diverse, spiritually varied, culturally assorted, centuries old, one G-d, PEOPLE.

I personally, am fundamentally committed to my Jewish family, Jewish community - my PEOPLE. In this coming year, I pray for us that we grow stronger and clearer as individuals, and an even mightier and better as a people.

