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Are Reform Jews less Religious than other Jews?

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Are Reform Jews less Religious than other Jews?

By Mike Fuld

Exploration of Topic

When some disciples of a deceased *tzaddik* came to the *Seer* of Lublin and expressed surprise at the fact that his customs were different from those of their late master, the *Seer* exclaimed, "What sort of God would that be who has only one way in which he can be served! God does not say, 'This way leads to me and that does not.' Instead God says, "Whatever you do may be a way to me, provided you do it in such a manner that it leads you to me."

-Martin Buber, *The Way of Man*

Religious (adjective)

1. Having or showing belief in and reverence for God or a deity.
2. Of, concerned with, or teaching religion: a religious text.
3. Extremely scrupulous or conscientious: religious devotion to duty

-Dictionary.com

"You're Reform, you aren't religious."

I first began hearing this statement when I got to New York University (NYU). One of the big differences between where I grew up and campus was the wide range of Jewish observance I observed, compared to the predominantly non-Jewish environment of home. It was the first time I had encountered more traditional streams of Judaism and the first time I felt the need to defend the way I practice Judaism.

I am an observant Reform Jew; I attend Shabbat services weekly, partake in many Jewish learning opportunities on my campus and observe Jewish holidays. I wasn't less religious than those of the more traditional branches; I just observed my Judaism differently. But, it took a long time for me to feel comfortable as an observant and religious Reform Jew.

Pluralism (noun)

1. A condition in which numerous distinct ethnic, religious, or cultural groups are present and tolerated within a society.
2. The belief that such a condition is desirable or socially beneficial.
3. *In philosophy*: The belief that no single explanatory system or view of reality can account for all the phenomena of life.

-Dictionary.com

Recently, pluralism has become a buzzword in Hillels around the nation, as the main Jewish organization for college students in North America learns about the many different ways in which Jews celebrate and observe Judaism. As an involved Jewish student with Hillel at NYU, I have had numerous opportunities to meet and learn from other Jews - not just those of my own denomination, but from across the spectrum. This idea of continuous learning enables us to make knowledgeable choices in Reform Judaism, but Judaism in all forms requires us to continually learn about Judaism. As Reform Jews, we also have an obligation to teach others about Reform Judaism and why we practice Judaism the way we do.

Martin Buber, a renowned Jewish philosopher and author, states in the quote above that there are many different ways to reach G-d, which allows us to choose religious practice that we believe in and find the spirituality that connects us to Judaism. Each of us has the choice to wear a *kippah* (the Hebrew term for the Yiddish yarmulke) or to keep kosher. We don't have to make this choice because we feel obligated or because it is the "religious" thing to do, but because we can feel a stronger connection to Judaism through it.

Related Questions

What's the difference between being religious and being observant?

Religious and observant can mean different things to different people. Within the larger Jewish community, traditionally observant generally refers to the traditional practices of Judaism, (not driving on Shabbat, keeping Kosher, etc.). Religious has more to do with the belief in Judaism as your religion, and not so much with how you practice your Judaism. Within any stream of Judaism, including the Reform Movement, one can be both observant and religious.

I want to know more about the resources that the Reform Movement has to offer me when I get to a pluralistic environment in college. Where do I find them?

KESHER is the College Department of the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), and has tons of great resources and information available to both high school and college students about Reform Judaism on campus. KESHER is also a partner agency of Hillel, which means that they work with Hillel to provide pluralistic programming on campus, and work to develop Reform friendly programming within Hillels on campuses across North America.

Taking Action

Do Pluralistic Programming Now

Work with other Jewish youth groups of different denominations. Just like the Reform Movement has the [North American Federation of Temple Youth](#) (NFTY), there are other similar organizations within the Jewish community, such as: [United Synagogue Youth](#) (USY), from the Conservative Movement; the [National Conference of Synagogue Youth](#) (NCSY), from the Orthodox Movement; [Young Judea](#) (YJ), a Zionist and pluralistic organization and [B'nai Brith Youth Organization](#) (BBYO), a pluralistic organization. Get together with these other groups and learn from each other about what each group thinks is important to their Judaism, under the premise of recognizing that participants in all of these youth movements are "religious Jews."

Think About Your Own Religious Practice

Take some time to think about the different rituals of Judaism that you personally observe. Consider why it is that you observe some rituals, and why you don't observe other ones. What does it mean to be a Jew in today's society? Learn more about Reform Judaism and the choices it allows you to make.

iTorah Lishmah

Your place in cyberspace to explore the lessons further!

See what others think about this topic and tell others what you think on our [online discussion forum](#)

Should we as Reform Jews learn about the other denominations of Judaism? Should the other denominations learn about Reform Judaism?



Resources

Inspired by this week's iTorah? Want to learn more? Check this out ...



KESHER is the campus program of the Union for Reform Judaism. It is dedicated to connecting Reform Jews on campus. Learn more about KESHER and Reform life on campus, and also take advantage of their resources.

Hillel: the Foundation for Jewish Campus Life is the predominant Jewish organization for Jewish life on campus. Learn more about them and Jewish life on campus.

Packing for College is a curriculum created by the URJ that helps high school students prepare for Jewish life, and Reform Jewish life, on campus. Encourage your congregation to utilize this exciting program.

Mike Fuld is a junior at **New York University** (NYU), studying Jewish History and Civilization & Public Administration, with a minor in Pre-Business Studies. Mike has been involved with the Reform Movement for the past four years, after attending a L'Takein Seminar at the **Religious Action Center** of Reform Judaism in Washington, DC during his sophomore year in high school. Mike is the immediate past President of Hillel at NYU and has served in many different leadership positions within **KESHER** and Hillel at NYU. He is currently serving as the Shabbat and Holidays Chair for KESHER at NYU. He is also a member of the KESHER North American Student Leadership Council. Mike has spent the past two summers as a Resident Advisor at the Union for Reform Judaism's **Kutz Camp** and is the Senior Youth Director for the Reform Temple of Forest Hills. This summer Mike is extremely excited to be serving as staff for **NFTY in Israel**.

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