

Thoughts From THE HEART

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"FINDING MY PLACE" PART II

AS A CONSEQUENCE OF GROWING UP HALF BLACK AND JEWISH IN A NATION DIVIDED ALONG UNHEALTHY RACIAL LINES. I HAVE NEVER FELT AT HOME IN THE UNITED STATES. I IDENTIFIED WITH THE LINE JAMES BALDWIN WROTE IN THE FIRE NEXT TIME² ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE OF BLACK GIs RETURNING FROM WAR ONLY TO DISCOVER THE DEMOCRACY THEY'D RISKED THEIR LIVES TO DEFEND ABROAD CONTINUED TO ELUDE THEM AT HOME. THIS SAME DIVISION—OF UNHEALTHY ^{RACIAL} LINES WERE WOVEN INTO OUR FAMILY. MY JEWISH SIDE DIDN'T ACCEPT ME NOR MY TWIN SISTER BECAUSE OF WHO OUR FATHER WAS—NOT WERE WE ALLOWED TO ATTEND A JEWISH SCHOOL: THEY WOULD SAY "KUSHI" WHICH MEANS [DARKIE IN HEBREW] THEY WOULD START TALKING IN YIDDISH; NOT KNOWING AT A VERY YOUNG AGE I LEARNED TO SPEAK YIDDISH AND UNDERSTOOD IT QUITE WELL. BUT I NEVER LET ON TO ANYONE THAT I KNEW WHAT THEY WERE SAYING. AN OLD JEWISH GUY TAUGHT ME YIDDISH IN EXCHANGE CUTTING HIS GRASS AND WORKING IN HIS GARDEN. I LEARNED MORE FROM HIM THAN MY OWN MOTHER, WHO NEVER

Really talked about her family - later in years I came to know why even more. I told him one summer that I was thinking about going into the military, he just said, "Never, never, get a tattoo it's forbidden" - LEVITICUS 19:28. No matter what people may say about you, under Jewish law: "You are Jewish". An aunt on my father side of the family who didn't like my mother, called her a "Christ killer". I was sensitive to both sides of the family anger which was at once historical and personal. I was acutely aware of the family members lost to a racially motivated hate crime under Jim Crow and the family members lost to a racially motivated hate crime during the Holocaust. There were ghosts in our houses. I knew at a relatively young age what the word "Diaspora" meant. So the next day we started our journey, to find the Jews that looked like me. First I met the Falashas - which means - "Landless ones, wanderer, exile, stranger" - it is used to describe the Beta Israel, Ethiopian Jew whose traditions hold that they descend from the line of Moses himself - specifically from the lost tribe of Dan. Though the origin of their Jewish presence dates back to the period of the First Temple. Ethiopia is mentioned more than fifty times in the Bible. The Israkli Rabbinate recognized the status of Ethiopian Jewry - just as

THE LEMBA, A SOUTH AFRICAN TRIBE OF BLACK JEWS WHOSE DNA HAS LINKED THEM TO ANCIENT JUDEA. THEN WE WENT TO HAIFA. THE NEXT DAY I MET UP WITH THE "AFRICAN HEBREW ~~ISRAELITES~~" WHO LEADER OR PROPHET IF YOU WILL, BEN AMMI-BEN ISRAEL, A FORMER FOUNDRY WORKER FROM CHICAGO, BORN BEN CARTER, WHO THEY CALL "ABBA" AND BELIEVE TO BE THE MESSIAH. IN 1966, "HE CLAIMS" TO HAVE HAD A "45" (FORTY-FIVE) SECOND VISION FROM AN ANGEL WHO TOLD HIM IT WAS TIME FOR HIM AND THE REST OF HIS LOST TRIBE TO RETURN TO JERUSALEM. THEIR TRADITION HOLDS THAT THEY WERE EXILED FROM THE HOLY LAND DURING THE ROMAN INVASION (ABOUT TWO THOUSAND YEARS AGO), MIGRATED SOUTHWARD, DOWN THE NILE, THROUGH THE CENTURIES, AND WESTWARD TO THE COAST OF AFRICA, WHERE A GREAT NUMBER OF THEM WERE CAPTURED AND SHIPPED INTO MODERN BABYLON AS A CURSE FOR SINNING AGAINST GOD'S LAW. THEY DISTINGUISH THEIR PROGENITOR FROM SUDAN, THE JEWISH FATHER, THEIR FATHER IS ADAM. THEY DISTINGUISH THEIR CURSE - REFERRED TO IN "LEVITICUS AND DEUTERONOMY" AS A GREAT DISPERSAL AND A VOYAGE INTO CAPTIVITY BY BOAT, FROM THE ETERNAL CURSE OF HAM - WHILE HAM'S CURSE CANNOT BE REDRESSED, THEY BELIEVE THEIR CURSE CAN BE, BY LIVING ACCORDING TO CERTAIN PRINCIPLES. BEN AMMI CONVINCED 30 BLACK FOLKS OF HIS ANGELIC VISION. THEN IN 1969, THEY SHOWED UP IN ISRAEL AND WERE TOLD BY THE RABBINATE THAT THEY

WERE NOT JEWS. THEY REFUSED TO CONVERT, CALLING THE ISRAELIS - "HEATHENS". THEY ARE KNOWN AS THE KINGDOM OF YAH. I WAS ASK ABOUT MY JEWISH ROOTS, I TOLD THEM MY MOTHER'S FAMILY IS FROM POLAND - WHO JOURNEY TO THE UNITED STATES IN 1924. MY FATHER'S FAMILY ARE IMMIGRANTS FROM ^{BARBADOS} TRINIDAD, AND I'M A "CULTURAL MESS", I HAVE MY FOOT IN TWO WORLDS - MY HOST TOOK MY HAND AND SAID SHE KNEW AND UNDERSTOOD WHAT I WAS GOING THROUGH - SHE WAS ISRAELI AND ETHIOPIAN - SHE WENT ON TO SAY, THERE ARE A LOT OF BLACKS HERE. THE MIZRAHI IS BLACK, THE BEDOUIN IS BLACK, THE YEMENITE IS BLACK, THE MOROCCAN IS BLACK, AND THE ETHIOPIAN IS THE MOST BLACK, BECAUSE WE CAME TO ISRAEL LAST. MY HOST WAS A BEAUTIFUL ETHIOPIAN WOMAN WHO HAD JUST SERVED HER TWO YEAR SERVICE IN THE ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES WHICH IS ISRAEL ARMY. I INVITED HER TO COME TO THE UNITED STATES AND I WOULD SHOW HER "NEW YORK CITY." SHE THEN ASK, "WILL YOU DO "ALIPAH" I STATED, "I DON'T KNOW" - HAVE NOT REALLY FELT AS IF I BELONG HERE"..... OTHER THAN MY COUSIN, NO OTHER MEMBERS OF MY MOTHER'S FAMILY REALLY WANT TO MEET ME - I'M TIRED OF THE ONE ALWAYS REACHING OUT, THAT GOES AS WELL FOR MY FAMILY ON MY FATHER'S SIDE... SO AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED - ALL OF THEM CAN GO TO HELL ON A ONE WAY TICKET.