Elul is the month leading up to Rosh HaShanah. Each day during the month, a different Temple Beth Torah congregant will share a High Holiday reflection to help us prepare for this season of prayer, repentance and tzedakah.

How I Learned I Was A Member of a Minority

Herb Blumenfeld

I became a Bar Mitzvah in 1946. During most of my youth I lived in the east Bronx. The nearest commercial drag was Tremont Avenue with its numerous kosher delicatessens, appetizing stores, kosher butchers and the usual array of retail stores mostly owned by Jews. We lived in a two bedroom apartment on 175th Street, one of 72 such units in the building. There may have been a few non-Jews living in the complex but I honestly cannot recall a single one except for the building superintendent who had a basement apartment.

After graduating from PS 92 I completed grades 7-9 at Junior High School 44. Approximately 10% of my classmates were non-Jews. I started Hebrew school when I was nine. My education consisted of reciting from the Siddur in Hebrew. My instructor, Mr. Slutsky, was a public school teacher who supplemented his salary by acting as a Melamed for a class of fifteen youths who would all have preferred to be playing basketball.

I recall vividly how one day, probably in 1944 or 1945 Mr. Slutsky lamented to the class how Jews were being persecuted because they were a minority. Was he kidding? Was he so unaware of the world in which he was living? Did he think we were blind? My friend, Stanley Wasserman, raised his hand and expressed the sentiments of the entire class. "Mr. Slutsky, the Jews are not a minority. We're a majority. Look around you. Jews are everywhere."

Mr. Slutsky struggled to get us to see the big picture and finally came up with the perfect solution which I've never forgotten. He went to the blackboard and
drew four horizontal lines. "Imagine", he said "these lines are shelves in a
grocery store." On each imaginary shelf he drew four cans and labeled each
can, but one, "Green Peas." The remaining can he labeled "Beans." He then
turned to the class and said "To a bean in a can of beans the world is made of
beans but in reality its mostly green peas."

And that's how I learned I was part of a minority.

Herb and his wife Peggy recently celebrated their 50th wedding
anniversary. They have been members of Temple Beth Torah for 40 years.

Would you like to share your story? It can be a High Holiday memory, a first
experience or a ritual that is special to you at this time of year. Send your stories
to ravsusie@gmail.com.
If you missed any of the previous Elul Stories you can go to www.tbtby.org (media
galleries/elul stories).