

TribeHerald

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- **JAY ELECTRONICA IS ANTISEMITIC. WE SHOULDN'T IGNORE IT.**
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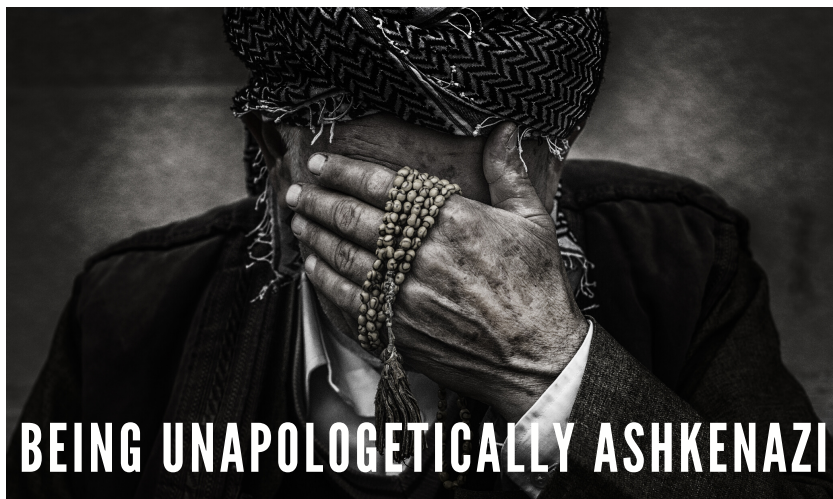


MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome, everyone, to the inaugural issue of the Tribe Herald newsletter, great to meet you!

We're really excited to have you along as we navigate this wild and crazy ride called "Judaism".

The Tribe Herald mission is to be a Jewish publication that, unlike every other "mainstream" Jewish publication, goes beyond white/Ashkenazi writers writing for white/Ashkenazi audiences from white/Ashkenazi points of view.



SHOSHANA NE'ORAH RISHON

Being a Jew who has skin shaded past the color described as olive—but is not Ethiopian—is a unique identity to occupy in American Jewish spaces. Identifying as Black or biracial means that there's more to me than Ashkenazi.

Now re-read that sentence.

More to me.

There's more to Judaism overall than Ashkenazi practices. There are more types of Jews than just Ashkenazim. Those two statements are the ones most employed when conversations around what it means to be a Jew of Color (that don't conflate Hebrew Israelites with Jews, but that's another article) are brought to the forefront. That the general American Jewish public must remember that there's more types of Jews than just Ashkenazi Jews, and therefore Jews of Color not only exist, but belong. Well, what about us?

What about Jews of Color that are Ashkenazi, not only in practice and our decision to convert through an Ashkenazi movement and identify as such, though that's certainly true as well, but that's a choice...What about by birth? What about those of us who have Holocaust survivor grandparents, just like the rest of "real" Jews? Who name places in Germany, or Russia, or Poland, that our Jewish roots stem from most recently, before they landed in America?

Jew of Color spaces, in an unfortunately tough struggle to authenticate and validate and congeal a solid identity, often must separate the definition of "Jew" from "Ashkenazi", stating that we're here because not every Jew needs to eat gefilte fish or know what bagels and lox tastes like or have the Holocaust directly impact our family to be legitimate, or even generational. Living in Jew of Color spaces is mostly the most comfortable place for me to be, where I'm a person instead of a bunch of labels, because these labels are shared by most people in the groups. It's our invisible knapsack space.

Judaism is far more than Ashkenormativity, Ashkenazi goes beyond "White", and White goes beyond Ashkenazi. Furthermore, when it comes to Jews of color, too often our presence in mainstream mags are relegated to special appearances when we're the flavor of the moment, or reaction pieces to somebody White and Jewish saying something shockingly racist, or reaction pieces to somebody ethnic and non-Jewish saying something shockingly anti-Semitic. But we happen to think thoughts even when "mainstream" (whatever that means, as if Jews of color aren't present in every denomination) Jews aren't looking at us.

We have views on Israel, politics, parenting, love, family, current events, and yes, even Judaism that don't revolve around being reactionary to something white and Jewish and is very much informed by the skin we're in. This is where you can hear them.

But we're not a "Colored Only" space either. Not everyone white and Jewish propagates the dominance of the Ashkenazi narrative to the exclusion of the importance of all others, and not every white Jewish ally is painfully patronizing or experiencing white saviorhood towards Jews of Color. This is where you can find them.

Jews come from the four corners of the Earth, not the four corners of the shtetl. This is where you can find all of them.

YOU are one of them.

And, as always, we are constantly looking for writers and contributors. Is that you?

Then drop a line to shaisetribeherald.com

Welcome to the Tribe.

Shalom, y'all.

MANISHTANA

I have to define me; I'm a writer, I'm an editor, I'm a fighter for social justice, I'm an environmentalist, I'm a woman, I'm a person who likes to wear sweatpants in every setting but can't anymore because I'm conscious of tzniut now (and also a grown up, and people say that sweatpants aren't appropriate work attire. Boo.). But I'm also Ashkenazi. More importantly, I'm also not not Ashkenazi. And it's really hard to be otherized in the group that exists because we're often otherized; in the space that exists so I don't have to feel that way.

Sure, I'm complaining and whining and it's like the skinny girl complaining about how no matter what she tries, she can't gain 10 lbs, or the married friend complaining to her single gal pals that her otherwise-perfect husband forgot to take out the garbage. My cultural Jewish identity, if not my phenotype, is normative in American Judaism, and I should just be happy about it. Don't get me wrong, I am.

I love who I am, and I love that in some small slivers, some parts of me are "normal" because anyone who knows me knows how rare that is.

So what's my point? I'm not sure. But I'd guess it's something like this: Ashkenazi Jews with both parents who are Ashkenazi, Ashkenazi Jews with one Ashkenazi parent and one non-Jewish White parent, Ashkenazi/Sephardi mixed Jews who often pass for Ashkenazi, you all look around at yourselves and debate whether or not you're White in America. Some of you know that's how you're identified by others, some fight it, and some don't even think about it at all.

Guess what?

You're not the only kind of Jew out there, and not everyone looks like you. Not even in America. And no, Ethiopian is not the only alternative, nor is Yemenite, nor is darker-skinned Sephardic. Biracial Ashkenazi Jews (or any other for that matter), you're not alone out there.

So no, not every other Jew out there looks like your mom or dad. Claiming your Jewishness doesn't claim your Whiteness automatically. This last sentence might be an embarrassing admission and message to my younger self, and I definitely insulted a Sephardic friend and an Iraqi Jewish classmate with that confusion. If we, with Ashkenazi and/or White privilege can realize that, it'll make all spaces much better. It'll make overall Jewish spaces much easier for all Jews to exist in freely, without identity being questioned unfairly. It'll make Jew of Color spaces—which will still be necessary because we still have the add-on of dealing with race in America and just like there are Jewish Farmer spaces and Jewish Artist spaces and Jewish lawyer spaces and Jew camps. We like to have our conversations in a religiously monolithic (if not observantly monolithic) space, too—less reactive, which means that otherization won't happen in the way it does now, and "not-Ashkenazi" won't have to be a semi-automatic label to take on or forcefully cast off.

So broaden your horizons. Check into your Jewish identity, and define what it DOES mean to you to be Jewish, rather than what it doesn't. Find out what it means to others, and stop delegitimizing others' in your quest to validate your own.

Don't grasp for self-validation at the expense of other Members of the Tribe. Because guess what? We're all here, too. And I'm standing in front of you saying brother, sister, let's just be.



JAY ELECTRONICA IS ANTISEMITIC. WE SHOULDN'T IGNORE IT

PHIL MANDELBAUM AKA AWKWORD

I'm surprised this was a hot take, but it was.

I didn't see anyone, anywhere, mentioning the long-awaited Jay Electronica solo debut album *A Written Testimony* in the context of the strained relationship between Jews and non-Jewish Black Americans. I pitched the story, with historical and current context, to *The Forward*; they said "Unfortunately this isn't quite the right fit for us at this time." Then, within a few hours of receiving this response, I noticed a tweet from *The Forward* that nearly quoted my email verbatim. They decided, instead of putting any work into covering this highly sensitive subject, to republish an "article" from Gabe Friedman in the *Jewish Telegraph Agency*, in which Gabe did what so many "journalists" do today: embed a couple tweets and call it a day.

Gabe "quoted" my friend and high-profile Jewish Hip Hop persona Peter Rosenberg, who said "Not feeling this bar from Jay Electronica and I know I'm not the only person who felt a way about it" and then added "songs [sic] dope besides that cringe though."

I have a hard time calling any song dope in which an artist raps "And I bet you a Rothschild I get a bang for my dollar/The synagogue of Satan want me to hang by my collar." Not only are these lines anti-Semitic, they represent at least the second time this artist has referred to Jews as "the synagogue of Satan," and they follow the album intro featuring infamous anti-Semite Louis Farrakhan, head of the Nation of Islam, saying Black Americans are "the real Israelites."

Here's the thing. I'm not a rabid right-wing Zionist who harps on every utterance of the Muslim population; while I'm proud to be blocked by Linda Sarsour, I am fervently in favor of a peaceful two-party solution, condemn the Israeli nation's abhorrent treatment of Palestinians, and recognize Donald Trump's "all Jews are Israelis" stunt for what it is: an opportunity to once-again "other" the Jewish people and open up the opportunity for future deportation.

I am a lifelong anti-racist, anti-fascist activist and protest music artist who has not only worked with the Anti-Defamation League but also the New York Civil Liberties Union. I was the only white person who attended Black Student Union meetings at

Vassar College. I have spent years volunteering in prisons, alternative to incarceration centers and inner-city teen centers and after-school programs, lobbying Congress and leading protest actions on the streets of New York City and Washington, DC, primarily on behalf of Black Americans and people of color who are disproportionately impacted by our racist criminal (in)justice system.

As a lifelong Hip Hop head and political rapper for nearly two decades, I have also always been careful to stay true to myself, never overstep my boundaries, and show deference as an ally and invited guest in what is essentially a Black urban culture.

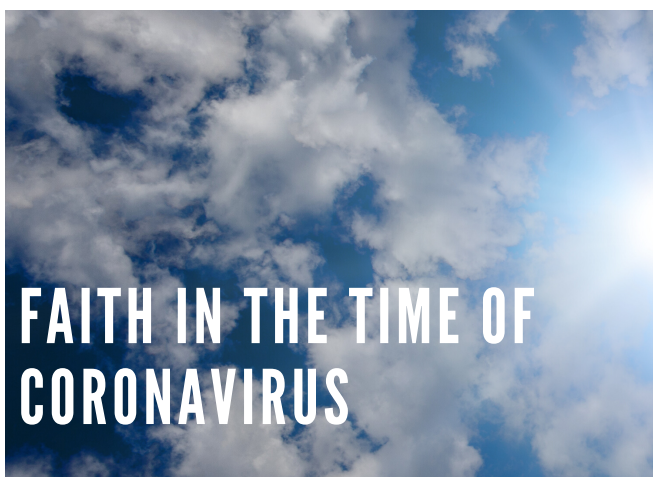
So, when I call someone or something out for being anti-Semitic, it's probably because they/it are/is. When I shed light on the anti-Semitism in Jay Electronica's music, I do so understanding the historical and present-day relevance. For thousands of years Jews have been persecuted, often for the very inaccuracies referenced by the rapper: Satanic-worship; shady financial practices; secret, centralized control of society.

The nation of Israel was founded on lands we always inhabited, where we were enslaved by Egyptians, from which we were banished time and time again, leaving us without a homeland. Israel was founded to offer us sanctuary after more than six-million of our people were viciously murdered by the Nazis and their willing executioners. Meanwhile, in America, Jews have always been integral to the movement for Civil Rights for all people, leading Students for a Democratic Society, marching alongside Martin Luther King, putting ourselves at risk, as symbolized by the photos of Democratic Presidential candidate Bernie Sanders chained to a Black woman in protest. On the other hand, in 1961 Elijah Muhammad, founder of the Nation of Islam, met with Ku Klux Klan leaders to coordinate efforts in separating the races.

I have continued the storied tradition of Jewish social justice activism since my junior year in high school, when I stopped punching White Supremacists in the face in favor of establishing my high school's annual Diversity Day and speaking at my town's annual Martin Luther King Day celebration.

Today, with the deadly shooting rampage at a Jersey City kosher market by an extremist branch of Hebrew Israelites, and substantial increases in violence against Jews by non-Jewish Black Americans across New York and the United States, tensions are especially high. According to research conducted by ADL, 61% of Americans believe at least one anti-Semitic trope, like the ones used by Jay Electronica; 27% of American adults still think Jews killed Christ; and 11% harbor "deep-seated anti-Semitic attitudes." But what I've witnessed in online Jewish communities is less a re-focusing on what we can do to combat anti-Semitism from all corners but an insistence that Jewish liberals are wrong in targeting White Supremacy and Neo Nazis when the focus, they say, should be on anti-Semitism in communities of color.

Not only is this dangerous, it's wrong. And the result has been that the nearly two-million Jews of color in this country are facing racism and ostracization from within their own Jewish communities. This is why my friend Yitz Jordan and Rabbi Shais Rishon are working tirelessly toward opening a Jewish community center for Jews of color in New York City, and why ignoring the anti-Semitism in Jay Electronica's new album is not only irresponsible, but could also be deadly.



MANISHTANA

A few days ago on Facebook, I came across a post by my colleague Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg in response to being asked as to whether or not the coronavirus was a test or punishment from G'd.

She responded as follows:

"This is not a punishment or test from G'd.

Covid-19 is a virus that evolved into existence (because of science reasons--not my lane). The test has been of leadership--failing at the top of the US, but showing powerfully in many places in the US, at the local and state level.

The part that has G'd in it is about what we all choose to do from here.

The Torah commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Right now, for those of us with lower risk, that looks like punctiliousness around limiting our own exposure in order to keep others safe, and reaching out to the people who need us most in the ways that they need.

The part that has G'd in it is in whether we check in on those who are more vulnerable, whether we offer to run errands for them or bring by a casserole, how we reach out and towards one another during a time when everything feels stressful and scary.

The part that has G'd in it is in our awareness that we're all interconnected, and that each of us is an irreplaceable manifestation of the divine image.

And in our decision to fight for one another--now, by staying home, not hugging, washing hands, but also in calling elected officials and others who have the ability to impact the shape of this moving forward--to demand free testing, paid sick leave, increasing and expanding access to nutrition assistance, and other systems that can support those most vulnerable now.

G'd shows up in our doing everything else we can to try to help mitigate the impact of this pandemic. Personal level, family level, community level, systemic level. All hands on deck. The part that has G'd in it is in our showing up.

The part that has G'd in it is when we tap in to the divine, connect to that great, shimmering interconnectedness, draw from the wellspring rather than our tiny, individual selves, to pull down rather than be used up. To find the Source that can fuel us; we so need it.

The part that has G'd in it is in the traditions and ethical systems that remind us that preserving life is the most important thing, the thing that pushes off any other choices we might make. That help us to orient our choices towards care and concern and connection.

The part that has G'd in it is the people working tirelessly, selflessly, sometimes around the clock to take care of other people even at risk to themselves, because ill people need care, better tests need to be developed, vaccines need to be created, people require care and support and it must be done.

The part that has G'd in it is in how we are going to come together (ok, probably on a Zoom call) to find a way out of this, because we have to, even if it's hard, even when it's hard.

The part with G'd in it is in what happens when suffering f shows up, unbidden, at our door. What resources can we draw on? Resilience? Care and love and bravery and risk?[...] There are so many ways that we can manifest the divine in the world now, and do the holy work that is needed. Let's show up."

Now, with all due respect, this is perhaps the first time I've ever publicly disagreed with a rabbinical colleague I love and respect. And perhaps I'm not even disagreeing so much as asking: Why not both?

To be clear, my frame of reference is Orthodox/traditional (the "traditional" caveat because both socially and theologically "Orthodoxy" has steadily been trending towards a right-wing/fundamentalist ideology that is evolving it into the same kind of "Judaism-inspired" religion/cult as it accuses liberal Judaism of being). But we believe in tragedy being tests and wake up calls/punishment.

Yes, finding G'd during this epidemic is calling upon our higher natures. But yes, this epidemic can also be a test.

However, tests aren't inherently "evil" or "bad". That's as much true in life as it is during our school years. The purpose of a test is to see how well we have used our opportunities and resources that have been available to us the entire time. So yes, from my point of view this *is* a test, and part of a plan. A test of leadership at the highest echelons, and an interpersonal test of who we really are. What we value. What *midot*/virtues we believe are expendable, and which we will defend even in dire odds.

Is it a punishment? Well, in a world which has been increasingly defined by polarization, dehumanization, and a distinct lack of kindness and respect, of leaving and abandoning others to deal with "their" problems because they don't affect "us"...well, traditionally punishment has always abided by the concept of *midda keneged midda*. The circumstances of the punishment fit or match the circumstances of the crime.

Seeing as how the "remedy" for this epidemic is to be in isolation--much like how we've "isolated" those different from us, much like how the *metzora*/leper is isolated and removed from society just as we've done to those we perceive as "different", just as how the *metzora*'s isolation is meant to be a time of self-reflection on how we've caused others to be socially isolated--you tell me.

Stay safe, practice social distancing, abide by curfew if such is in effect in your area. But, most of all, reflect.

This too, shall pass.

The logo for TribeHerald, featuring the word "TribeHerald" in a white serif font centered on a solid yellow rectangular background.

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