

Corey Dolgon for Bat Mitzvah of Ruby

I teach at a Catholic College. Sociologist Bill Gamson wrote an article entitled, “On Being Jewish at a Jesuit University: Reflections on Organizational Cultures. He suggests that there may be a distinction between being “in” an institution and being “of” an institution. This distinction, however, had unpredictable results for him. He explains: “I genuinely believe that my late developing interest in Jewish thought and early history was nurtured by the organizational culture in which I do my professional work. That it was a Jesuit university that facilitated this deepened interest in Jewish thought is one of life's charming ironies.”

While the organizational culture of Stonehill College has yet to inspire such theological or philosophical inquiries for me, it does offer countless moments of observation and experience about what it MEANS to BE Jewish. I'm constantly reminded of Jewish identity from the perspective of a Christian gaze. After all, I am always under the watchful eye of the Jewish guy on the cross hanging on the wall of every classroom. In American popular culture, Jewish characters offer redemption. If not through sacrifice, than through therapy. From Ordinary People's Dr. Tyrone Berger and M*A*S*H*'s Sidney Freedman to Dr. Joyce Brothers and Dr. Ruth Westheimer, Jews help Americans through grief, sorrow, marital struggles, and even sexuality. So when my students raise issues about the Bible, I often remind them that my people prefer the older version.

After all, it is the Old Testament, or more appropriately the Hebrew Bible, that really establishes why Jewish people do redemption so well. It is full of torment and turmoil. It's full of suffering and questioning, of falling and getting back up, of sorrow and punishment, of making mistakes in trying to discern God's teachings but always pursuing knowledge all the same. The Hebrew Bible hurts, but from the pain comes the painstaking task of trying to understand, to forgive and in the process discover empathy. From the maelstrom comes a sense of peace and yearning for justice and the faith and commitment for courage all with the goal solidarity and love and from those things, JOY. And it's also the Old Testament that makes Jews so damn funny.

I say this as background for my thoughts on my amazing daughter, Ruby. She is an Old Testament kind of Gal. She is a walking maelstrom of great emotions—deep love and compassion, bold reflections on the world around her and what it all means. She sings loudly, she plays soccer with ferocity. She performs for the laugh and embraces and displays all of her feelings all of the time. She gives big bear hugs and instinctively crouches to be at the level of children or seniors to show her respect and interest in their worlds from their perspectives. She is a tempest in a moment that reminds us all of the great joy and the great sorrow that we must all ultimately embrace if we are ever to understand and reflect and understand again.

As Ruby becomes a Bat Mitzvah I realize how important SHE has been to my thoughts on being Jewish. She is becoming a person who can work from her own experiences of unfairness and injustice to understand the impact of social unfairness and political injustice. She informs emotion with her intellect but also her intellect with her emotions. She has suffered disappointment and embarrassment (pretty much anytime she has to be seen with her parents for

example) and even failure but she has learned to get up, and bounce back, and proceed having learned lessons. She is a great student and a great athlete. She is fiercely loyal to her friends and her family and is quick with a joke not only to lighten a moment but to remind us of the possibility of joy. For me, today is a celebration of Ruby's Jewish Identity, but I can't help consider the charming irony of it also being a time to reflect on my own. Thank you Ruby for the absolute joy of loving you and being loved by you.