

A Conversation with a Rabbi About Introversion

I recently had the good fortune of meeting Rabbi Dan Fink from Congregation Ahavath Beth Israel in Boise, Idaho. We met in the context of my introduction as a coach of introverted leaders and began to discuss introversion as it relates to faith and leadership. We recently met to continue our conversation at a local coffee shop in Boise. If you were a fly on the wall, here are some of the thoughts that you would have heard us exchange.

Highlights from our conversation that are meaningful to introverts:

- According to Rabbi Fink, God appears to have introverted traits, especially from a Jewish mystic tradition. He seems to hide Himself and asks us to search for Him.
- In the U.S. on January 1st we say, "Happy New Year!" with the emphasis on "happy." Not so in Judaism. They celebrate their new year in September and say, "*shannah tovah*," translated "have a **good** year." There is a great difference between happiness and goodness. The Hebrew word *tov* refers to things being right, whole, the way that they were intended to be. It is this wish that Jews exchange during *Rosh Hashannah*.
- I had made the comment that Americans don't know how to grieve well, that our culture is so obsessed with happiness we don't know how to do sorrow well or to lament. According to Rabbi Fink, Jewish culture is different (though many in his congregation are affected by the American culture). In Jewish tradition, grieving follows a much more deliberate and lengthier process. For example, you don't leave your house for the first week, the community comes to you, services are held in the home, etc. Sounded like a much healthier way to recognize loss.

- We discussed famous introverts in the Hebrew Scriptures including: Abel, Abram, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, and Solomon. We also spoke about famous extroverts in the Hebrew Scriptures: Cain, Esau, Reuben, Aaron, and Saul.

- I told Rabbi Fink that I had recently read *Clash: 8 Cultural Conflict That Make Us Who We Are*. In that book, Hazel Markus and Alana Conner discuss the core cultural difference between a society based on independence and one that values interdependence. We both saw the correlation between the independent mindset of the West and extroversion and the opposite tendency toward interdependence assumed in the culture and mindset of the Jewish faith.

Thanks to Rabbi Fink for a stimulating conversation that continues to shed new light on the nature of introversion and leadership.