

How it was that I had lunch at the same table with President Harry S Truman, Chief Justice Earl Warren, Professor Louis Finkelstein and watched aghast as Professor Saul Lieberman drank his tea through a sugar cube.

I was a rabbinical student at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America from 1954 through 1959. With a Columbia BA in hand, and having had an extensive Judaic background, including Ramaz, Massad and The Seminary College of Jewish Studies, I entered as a four-year student. I took an extra year, probably due to my ongoing three times a week psychotherapy, being single and wanting to delay a career decision. It was quite fashionable back then to take a year to devote to the “heavy” stuff, during which one studied only Talmud and Bible. I actually had Professor (“***Read You, Bloom***”) Lieberman for Talmud for all five years, which I once thought qualified me for the Guinness book of records, though I later discovered that my good friend, Sheldon Schiffman trumped me. A stint as student body president, and three summers at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin, I became a very minor figure in the Seminary's administrative ranks. I worked for a couple of years as an assistant in the office of the Chancellor. I mostly did administrative work, which in the world of Talmud research was a competency not overly valued. It was this combination of humble administrative rank and past presidency of the student body that led to a most serendipitous event.

I was an administrative organizer of the September 1957 Convocation when Chief Justice Earl Warren came to visit the Seminary for a weekend. He had come to “study” Talmudic Ethics. That certainly was a Chancellor Finkelstein coup, and a high point in the Professor's (***which is what we always called him, not Rabbi or Doctor, or Moreh, almost never using his last name, or God protect us, Louis***) “bridge building.” A photograph of the Chief Justice and the Chancellor made the front page of the New York Times. One of my assignments that Shabbat afternoon involved greeting the limousine in which the former Chief Justice was to arrive at the Seminary. Upon reaching over to open the rear door, I discovered to my surprise and dismay (***it had not been planned for!!!***) that next to the Chief Justice sat former President Harry S. Truman. Legend has it that Chief Justice Warren had said to HST-”Harry, I’ve been invited uptown for a good Jewish meal, -want to come along?” {This of course demonstrates yet again the crucial place Kashrut has had in determining Jewish destiny.)

I ran to Seymour Fox who was my immediate boss, shouting;

"Fox, Fox Truman's here!! Truman's here!!!!"

Fox responded; **"Bloom I've got no time for your jokes; Don't bother me Bloom, I'm busy. Just do your job."**

But it was no joke. Truman's presence, a delightful surprise, had a down side. ***It upset the seating plan for the luncheon.*** Only one seat was left at the lead table. This presented a serious problem. Every bigwig and faculty member coveted that one remaining place. Having a faculty member would have resulted in hurt feelings of other faculty. Choosing a member of the upper administration the same. It was my dumb luck and good fortune that Shabbat to be the perfect solution to a highly politically sensitive protocol problem. The president of the student body, who was single and also helping administer the weekend, would do just fine! So it came to pass that I sat down for Shabbat lunch with Professor Louis Finkelstein, Chief Justice Earl Warren, President Harry S Truman and Professor Saul Lieberman. (Due to Shabbat restrictions there were no photographs, so my children and grandchildren will no doubt refer to this tale as one of the stories I told in my dotage.) I watched in some horror as Professor Lieberman sucked his tea through a sugar cube, (***Mah Yomru Hagoyim?***) (*What would the gentiles think?*) I heard President Truman, clearly oblivious to Professor Lieberman's indiscretion, praise Professor Shalom Spiegel's magnificent speech 'Amos vs. Amaziah', (***of which I still have a number of copies***) as being the finest talk he had ever heard. HST sent the following thank you note on September 17, 1957.

Dear Dr. Finkelstein;

You do not know how very much I appreciated the privilege of being present at luncheon with the Chief Justice of the United States.

I more than enjoyed the talk on the chapter of Amos quoting, "Amos, what seest thou?" And I said, "A plumbline."

I have known that entire passage word for word for a long time, and I wish you would tell that able and distinguished rabbi that I have never had a more pleasant experience than listening to his lecture.

Sincerely yours,

Harry S Truman

A follow up many years later.

After reading HST's biography by David McCullough I realized that he meant what he said and said what he meant. Unfortunately it was Shabbat and thus no photos exist of that evening, though I do have in my possession copies of the correspondence that have to do with it. They follow;

Mr. David McCullough
c/o Touchstone
Simon & Schuster Building
Rockefeller Center
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, New York 10020

Dear Mr. McCullough;

I have just finished your book on Truman. A magnificent book on a magnificent man.

Longer ago than I sometimes care to remember, on September 13, 1957, at The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, in New York, I was chosen as the President of the Rabbinical School student body to solve a political problem and was asked to sit at dinner with former President Truman and Chief Justice Earl Warren. The only others at the table were to the best of my recollection, Professor Louis Finkelstein, the Chancellor of the Seminary and Professor Saul Lieberman Professor of Talmud. You can imagine how honored I was.

It was at this dinner that Professor Shalom Spiegel delivered a classic address entitled "Amos vs. Amaziah, a speech that President Truman described as the "finest I have ever heard".

Because it was the Sabbath, there is no photographic record. What I am interested in is any record of that event that I can get a hold of, for my own family history.

Any help you can offer would be appreciated.

Sincerely,

Jack H. Bloom Ph.D

Mr. David McCullough
Music Street
West Tisbury,
Massachusetts 02575-0148

Dear Mr. McCullough;

I am enclosing for your enjoyment and files a copy of the speech, that Harry Truman described as the finest he had ever heard, Amos versus Amaziah, by the late Shalom Spiegel.

I have also, per your suggestion, written to the Truman Library to inquire as to whether they have anything pertaining to that weekend in September 1957.

Thanks for your help. Hope you too enjoy the speech.

Sincerely,

Jack H. Bloom Ph.D

Mr. David McCullough
Music Street
West Tisbury,
Massachusetts 02575-0148

Dear Mr. McCullough;

I trust by now that you have received the copy of "Amos vs. Amaziah", and enjoyed it.

I received a response from The Truman Library, and am enclosing for your files, copies of the correspondence between Dr. Spiegel, Dr. Finkelstein, for whom I worked at that time, and Mr. Truman. I am also sending them a copy of Prof. Spiegel's talk, for their files, for it seems that though Mr. Truman requested a written copy of the talk and one was sent, none was received.

Thank you for your help in this. I do wish that Dr. Finkelstein had had a photographer to capture the occasion, but such are the vagaries of religious observance.

Sincerely,

Jack H. Bloom Ph.D

The Harry S. Truman Library
Independence, Missouri

Dear Sirs/Mesdames;

I have just finished David McCullough's book on Mr. Truman. A magnificent book on a magnificent man. I have written Mr. McCullough about the following and he suggested that I write you.

Longer ago than I sometimes care to remember, on September 13, 1957, at The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, in New York, I was chosen, being the President of the Rabbinical School student body to solve a political problem. I was asked to sit at dinner with former President Truman and then Chief Justice Earl Warren. The only others at the table were to the best of my recollection, Professor Louis Finkelstein, the Chancellor of the Seminary and Professor Saul Lieberman Professor of Talmud. You can imagine how honored I was.

It was at this dinner that Professor Shalom Spiegel delivered a classic address entitled "Amos vs. Amaziah, a speech that President Truman described as the "finest I have ever heard".

Because it was the Sabbath, there is no photographic record. What I am interested in is any record of that event that I can get a hold of, for my own

family history. Perhaps there was a letter of invitation, correspondence, etc. pertaining to it.

I have forwarded a copy of that address to Mr. McCullough. If you do not have it in your archives, I would be more than glad to forward one to you.

Any help you can offer would be appreciated.

Sincerely,

Jack H. Bloom Ph.D

Mr. Raymond H. Geselbracht
Supervisory Archivist
Harry S. Truman Library
U.S. Highway 24 and Delaware St.
Independence, Missouri 64050

Dear Mr. Geselbracht;

I am enclosing for The Harry S. Truman archives a copy of the talk delivered by Prof. Shalom Spiegel that Mr. Truman so liked; "Amos vs. Amaziah."

I was thrilled to receive the copies of the correspondence you sent me. If there is a way of getting clearer copies, I would be glad to pay whatever is required to have such for my own files. I consider having sat with Mr. Truman and the Chief Justice, while Dr. Spiegel delivered that talk, one of the thrills of my younger years.

Thanking you in advance for your kind response, I remain

Sincerely,

Jack H. Bloom Ph.D