

Face to Face

Welcome to **Face to Face** where you will meet authors and activists, playwrights and poets, pundits and politicians. Every few weeks a new interview will appear in this space. You will be familiar with many of these people and their work, but in our interviews we will bring a distinctive emphasis to bear. CLAL is specifically interested in the multifarious ways in which Jewishness - Jewish concerns, values, sensibilities, humor - gets expressed in the lives we lead and in the work we do, and in how the contemporary meaning of Jewishness is being reshaped along the way.

In our interviews we will focus on these themes, with the aim of bringing to the fore the sometimes overt but more often subtle Jewish meanings that are expressed by these thinkers and creators in their work.

To access the Face to Face Archive, click [here](#).

Our authors are especially interested in hearing your responses to what they have written. So after reading, visit the Face to Face Discussion and join in conversation with CLAL faculty and other readers.

Athens versus Jerusalem: An Interview with Stephen Elkin

By Shari Cohen

From its inception in 1999, the Jewish Public Forum was to be a different kind of Jewish institution. Seeking to generate fresh thinking about the social, political and cultural trends affecting ethnic and religious identity and community, it is an unprecedented effort to broaden the conversation about the Jewish future by engaging leading figures in the worlds of academia, business, the arts and public policy, most of whom have not been involved in organized Jewish life.

One of the earliest, and most enthusiastic Jewish Public Forum participants is Stephen L. Elkin, Professor of Government at the University of Maryland, Chair

of the Executive Board of PEGS (The Committee on the Political Economy of the Good Society) and the Editor of the PEGS journal, *The Good Society*. Professor Elkin is the author and editor of six books, including *City and Regime in the American Republic* (University of Chicago Press, 1987); *Citizen Competence and Democratic Institutions* (Penn State University Press, 1999); and over forty papers. He has served in an informal advisory role to the Forum, offering insights from his think tank, PEGS – a network of political scientists, economists and political activists interested in a political science that plays an active role in shaping a good society, alongside its academic role of analyzing political phenomena.

In this interview with Shari Cohen, Ph.D., director of the Jewish Public Forum, he talks about his lifelong commitment to moral theory -- and to a political science that is engaged in the world -- as a mirror of the observant, learned Jewish life, which he did not choose. Inspired by Leo Strauss, he talks about how he might begin to engage the Jewish tradition alongside western political theory – Jerusalem alongside Athens -- and he reflects upon his hopes for an evolving Judaism that goes beyond the synagogue.

SC: How do you think that your Jewish identity, however you want to define that, has affected the choices you've made about your work?

SE: Well, I think Judaism has had a profound effect because it was something to which I was clearly connected in some way, and of which I had direct experience, so it was present to me in a way that, say, Islam was not. It posed a question for me right from the beginning of my intellectual life as an adult, simply because there plainly were highly gifted people who thought there was some kind of transcendent being. It became terribly important to me right from the beginning to understand the relationship between that belief that I didn't share, and what I was doing. This was particularly true because there were people who held that belief whom I plainly admired. It became a question about the value of a secular intellectual life versus the value of a life deeply embedded in some kind of Jewish way of living. This led me to the idea that I needed to do a lot more work in political and moral theory.

SC: Now when are we talking about here?

SE: Well, I think we are talking about from the beginning. But in a quite alive and real way, for the last fifteen, twenty years. I wasn't on some kind of quest because I'm not put together that way. It was always right here, right in front of me all the time. The understanding that there was this deeply serious alternative way of life made me feel that I needed to believe strongly in what I

was doing instead. What I was doing had to be judged by the same standard of seriousness that a learned and believing Jew's life could be judged against. It always had to be directed at the same kinds of very serious questions that I thought Judaism itself had kept in view. This is a complicated way of saying what I suspect is true for lots of Jews: the vision of a deeply serious and learned way of life was always a measure or a standard against which one had to think of one's own life. In other words, what I was doing couldn't be the equivalent of selling shoes, just a way to make a living, however attractive a way of making a living it might be.

So a lot of the effect of Judaism on me is that it shaped how I evaluate my own life. I have not been willing to do anything in my professional life that I didn't take to be perfectly serious. I just didn't do the other stuff. I probably did the largest single piece of survey research organized by and for which the money was raised by one person. Twelve hundred respondents in ten English cities clustered in four neighborhoods per city—that's forty neighborhoods. Along with all of the data from each of the respondents in the survey, I attached all of the data from the census about the character of the neighborhood—a huge data set. I wrote one article out of it and I stopped. I said, "This is really boring." I don't even know where the data is now.

SC: What caused you to begin on that project if it was going to become so tiresome?

SE: Because the survey part was actually ancillary to, or the first step in, answering a question I still find really interesting: What effect does political leadership have on what people say and do? The first thing you have to know in order to answer that is what people are saying and doing. That was a really simple thing and, obviously, I should have done it in a simple way. I dropped it when I realized I couldn't immediately go at the questions that I thought were really important.

SC: You talked about moral theory. Can you be a little more specific about some of the questions to which this led you?

SE: The beginning ones. Socrates. How should we live? How do we know what's good? Is what we think is good for individuals the same as what we think is good for societies? What makes for good societies or good political regimes? And if it isn't a good one, what if anything can you do about it? It's only latterly and lately that I really understood a basic piece of Judaism, which is that it's not a religion, or only a religion. It is literally a way of life—that is, your whole life is structured around it. What is significant in it and how the

significance is shown and so forth is all there. It is a very serious alternative to the life of a secular, justice-oriented individual living in the world I live in. I take it that the alternatives are real and serious. My life has largely consisted of trying to figure out how I got to the one I chose. In more recent years, I have also been trying to determine what the alternative, which is Judaism, would mean for me. I could never just not be a Jew. Maybe that's the simplest way of saying it. I couldn't just say: "The hell with this, I'm done. Who are those guys?"

SC: Why is that?

SE: Because I believed, and believe even more so now, that people with enormous intellectual and other kinds of gifts have come to a different conclusion.

SC: Are there any specific individuals who loom in your mind in that regard?

SE: Leo Strauss is one. For a long time, I knew Leo Strauss only as a distinguished political theorist. But sometime in my late forties, I discovered that he was someone for whom the question of Judaism was absolutely central, and for whom there was also a real question about the relationship between both ancient and modern philosophy and Judaism. That, in some sense, is what I was worrying about, but had no way to think about—I just didn't know enough. And since I had enormous respect for Strauss I thought, "Well, okay." It was through Strauss that I discovered there were people like Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber. I had always been puzzled, once I knew who Martin Buber was, why he never went to synagogue. What was that all about? After all, my mother, that paragon of Jewishness, had Martin Buber's books on her shelf. So I discovered, and this is really the point, that there were people of enormous gifts who both knew the western philosophical tradition and also took Judaism seriously. And when I discovered this I was furious—no other word for it. The thing that finally did it for me was reading Yitz Greenberg's "The Third Great Cycle of Jewish History" and "The Third Era." I said, "Oh, that's what it's about. Gee."

This is what I say to my wife -- who is the most morally serious person I know -- all the time. She thinks not only that religion is the opiate of the masses, but that it's made them murderous morons. I say the best evidence for staying with the question is that people with incredible gifts say there is something there. God knows I'm arrogant enough, but I'm not that arrogant. I take it there is a real choice and the choice is a very complicated, hard one in which people with enormous gifts have come down on different sides and I'm not satisfied with where I have ended up.

SC: Do you know when it was that you started to frame it that way to yourself?

SE: Yeah, I do actually. I had a terrible graduate education because, at Harvard, they did not care if you died in your room. But the one thing that some of the faculty did for me was to give me examples of first-rate minds who were morally serious. That doesn't mean they were religious believers of any kind, but their writing was heavily directed, in some sense, at making America a satisfactory society. In other words, I never got this kind of scientific "we study the world" baloney. These were morally engaged scholars. Probably the best example, though she is dead now, is Judith Sklar. For her, doing political theory was the equivalent of going to synagogue. I wouldn't have been able to say it then, but I think that's what was true. That's the idea I got in some kind of inchoate form.

SC: Did she articulate it that way?

SE: No. She was a woman of alarming seriousness. She had an easy way about her too, God knows, or she never would have put up with me. But if I were to pick out a person who was the template of someone for whom studying and reading and writing were the most serious things they could do with their lives, it would have been her. And not serious in an abstract way, but serious as in "I was born in Riga. I ran from the Nazis." This was true with Strauss, too. Do you know Mr. Dooley, a comic strip figure in the early twentieth century who used to go around saying, "Politics ain't beanbag"? Both Strauss and Sklar understood this because it turned out to have mattered what political theorists and moral philosophers and everybody else had been saying in Germany throughout the 19th century. The two of them were debating whether the Enlightenment led to disaster. Strauss was saying it had and Sklar was replying, "No, no. Enlightenment is probably the thing that's going to save us." Well, right! Yeah, that's a real question! I'm ready for that one.

All this is a very elaborate way of simply saying that from the beginning something was lodged in my head about the kind of moral and intellectual seriousness that characterized the good life. At that time, I didn't have the idea that Judaism was an alternative version of what I had seen. That I didn't know.

SC: I'm curious about Judith Sklar and Strauss. You've presented this wonderful narrative in which people arrive at various key moments to influence you, to remind you of this Jewish standard. At the same time, you've spoken in passing about some very negative childhood and family experiences with things Jewish. I was wondering whether you feel your idea about your

professional identity—the idea that “If I’m not doing Jewish, I have to do this other thing with great moral seriousness”—is rooted in your family history, or whether you only came to this later?

SE: No, it was from the beginning. Like everybody, I had a complicated childhood—some people must grow up fairly simply but I’ve never met them. It’s an interesting question as to how a kind of moral seriousness, in the sense that “this is what I had to be,” was given to me from the beginning. It’s puzzling to me because my father was a very quiet guy, although he was much more formidable than I had any clue about. He was born in Russia, but he came here when he was a year old. My mother was born in Omaha, Nebraska. Believe it or not, her father and his two brothers went to homestead in Nebraska, which is a whole other story. She was a highly intelligent and very frustrated woman, a victim of having been born at the wrong place at the wrong time.

Neither of them ever explicitly indicated anything beyond simply the expectation that I would be a good boy and do well in school—the usual stuff—which of course I dutifully did. At least, I did well in school; I’m not entirely sure I was quite a good boy, but you can’t have everything. But they conveyed something else to me, I now see. They were people who took their own obligations enormously seriously. My father had a very large family and so did my mother, and there was incredible attentiveness to fulfilling obligations because that was what you were supposed to do, period. Any sort of shoddy behavior would have been unthinkable.

So I think what did come across—and I’m sure this came from Judaism in my mother’s case—was the sense that someone was supposed to do something good in the world, period. I didn’t find anybody in undergraduate school who shared that sense. I loathed graduate school, which I started in 1961. But my salvation really was James Q. Wilson, who did share it. I mean it was just dumb luck, and maybe also, since he was obviously not Jewish, it must have been that I was highly tuned to anybody who would talk political science and moral philosophy in the same sentence, who would take both things very seriously as a form of normative inquiry.

When I went to Smith after graduate school in 1966, it was like the narrative you described—someone walking in from the wings at a key moment. There was a man named Leo Weinstein, who was, in fact, one of Strauss’ students. Again I was tuned to the right melody because I went right to Weinstein. I think I literally said—which is embarrassing—“I really want to learn, will you help teach me?” I told him I was interested in classical political thought. I have to say that none of the people I’ve turned to ever laughed at me, because it would have

been real easy.

When I got to Maryland, I guess I decided I was just going to have to do it myself. I was going to have to set up organizations and vehicles for finding people to talk to me. It was no longer a question of finding someone to teach me because I had already concluded I would have to teach myself, but of finding colleaguesCpeople who were engaged in this kind of common enterprise.

SC: Were you involved in any activism during the '60s?

SE: No. I'm very uneasy with enthusiasm.

SC: You mean you're not a joiner.

SE: I'm really not. I'm very gregarious and I like talking, but there's something about group effort that doesn't do much for me. I'm getting better at it; it requires a kind of careful attentiveness I had to learn to cultivate. You have to believe that most people have something really useful to say if you just listen.

SC: But there must have been, to go back to your earlier experiences, something directly related to "the Jewish" that impressed you early on for you to set up this contrast between "those people over there who are doing this Jewish thing which I'm not doing, which means that I must be"

SE: . . . over here. I guess I'd put the question like this: What was it about my experience with Judaism that made me hold onto it long enough not to kill it? "Kill it," meaning to pack it up. I'm not sure I have any idea what the answer to that question is.

SC: The experiences that you describe are negative; I've heard you mention, for example, "prayers without meaning." So what did make you want to hold on to Judaism?

SE: I am someone who was brought up in a Jewish household in which Judaism was taken very seriously. My father was an Orthodox Jew. Even though he stopped putting on tefillin, Judaism was central. And yet I had, at some point, walked away completely. There was something about the synagogue environment that made it like an invitation that in the end never lived up to its promise. As a child I was always asking questions like, "Why is the sky blue, Daddy?" That suggests the five-year-old or eight-year-old moral philosopher was coming to synagogue or Hebrew school with this on his mind.

But I wasn't able to go from my questions to discussion or study or something. This didn't leave me saying, "I'll never touch this again." It just made me very sad in a way I didn't actually know until much, much later.

For me, the great defining moment of my religious career, or non-career, came when I was in graduate school. I decided that it was time to try again, that is, to start going to synagogue or whatever. So on Yom Kippur I put on my suit and walked to the Hillel and the door was locked. It turned out that Yom Kippur had been the day before. I took this as a sign that my religious vocation was hard to discern and so that was it. I never, as it were, went back. Of course, I cleverly increased the odds that I would never go back by marrying a woman who is not only gentile, but someone who thinks Judaism—or any religion—is nonsense. And we were clever enough not to have children and that sort of finished it off entirely, no hope whatsoever. And yet I never dropped my sense of myself as a Jew or my sense of the importance of Judaism, but I had no way of making sense of it. It makes my heart ache. There is something missing, something profoundly important to me.

My wife really understands that this is somehow terribly important to me and she probably puts it in the same category as my being an academic: "Difficult to understand, but I love him so what can I do?" It is entirely possible that, had I married a Jewish woman who had any real interest in Judaism, I might have gotten started earlier, but frankly I probably would have ended up in the usual synagogue in the usual bored way with the usual children and that would have killed it. That really would have done the trick. Maybe Judaism is a live option now because I'm so ignorant. If I knew any more it might be too late.

After the closed door at Hillel, I never went back because it wasn't a real live alternative, it didn't exist for me. After I came to Maryland, I was trying to decide what the hell I was going to do with my intellectual life—since I wasn't going to do survey research and other things—and I went back to reading. I don't even know if I wrote anything for five years; I certainly didn't do much. A lot of what I read was Leo Strauss, as it turned out. I wasn't quite sure even after that what was going to happen, but I did know that either I was going to do a kind of morally serious political science or I was going to quit. I was just lucky because I found a way to do it, one that suited me anyway.

SC: What did you actually start doing at that point? What was the next project?

SE: It turned out to be a book called *City and Regime in the American Republic*. Which is a book about, not surprisingly, cities, understood in the way Toqueville and John Stuart Mill understood them, in which local governments

are “schools of citizenship.” I had been teaching urban politics, and as with the survey research, I was thinking to myself, “There must be something here that makes sense.” I decided that city politics isn’t just about problems of distribution and power—this is what studies of urban politics always focused on—but about how people are formed into certain kinds of citizens. That is, institutions aren’t just relationships of authority; they are forms of relation among citizens, and between citizens and leaders. Institutions define the terms on which people have access to one another. They help form people’s characters. Character for what? How do you judge that? In order to talk about that, I had to find a normative way to talk about American politics without cutting loose from our empirical understanding of it. *City and Regime* was the first attempt to do that. A relatively successful attempt since it kept me in clothes for quite a while.

SC: The activist part of your work is something else I’m curious about. When you founded your first organization, the Conference Group on Political Economy, and then PEGS in 1990, and your new center, the Democracy Collaborative last year, were you thinking about the same questions?

SE: Yep. It was 1978 when I founded the Conference Group, and with that and the two later efforts I was trying to find my way to a new form of political science, something which was simultaneously highly theoretical and relentlessly practical. There are plenty of historical examples of this: the Federalist papers are both and so is John Locke; Aristotle is the other obvious example. But I thought it would be nice to discover whether there was anybody else out there doing it. The particular idea that I turned to was political economy, which historically had been the theory of practice of a certain kind of regime, the science of legislation for a commercial society as practiced by Adam Smith. So I just assembled tons of people who were, in one way or another, running around worrying about this. What I offered them was a chance to do normatively oriented work that was also empirical so that they didn’t have to choose between positivist political science and political philosophy of the traditional sort. I simply said, “Look, there’s something else. We’ll call it political economy.” I didn’t use these words then, but I was looking for a theory of democratic practice.

I brought together a whole range of intellectual types who were interested in political practice, not just political science, people for whom the question of practice was really important but who were not themselves activists. I had always promised myself that the project would include activists, but of course I wildly underestimated the amount of time and effort that it was going to take to do even what I ended up doing. There were just limits. Universities will only let

you sit around not writing things for so long. So I built PEGS as a way of continuing to do mostly academic work. But there's no doubt now that even though the activism part is hard to do, it is going to get done. Either that or we'll just fail.

SC: Is this connected to the question of whether Judaism remains a "live option," or a "live alternative," for you? What does being a "live option" mean exactly?

SE: That's another one of those doozeys. It means having a choice between two things without knowing what I'm going to do about either of them. It certainly means study, careful study. I'm just constituted that way. It also means practice. At the Jewish Public Forum seminar in June 1999, I learned to take seriously the claim that practice is probably more important than thinking. You do, first, and then comes the thinking. That's crazy. No academic worth five cents thinks that. It's just for ordinary people. We just think about things; then afterwards, of course, we don't do anything at all.

At the same time, I have all of the deficiencies of an intellectual snob. It's a terrible burden. Every year for about three years now, I've been saying that I really ought to join a synagogue. I haven't worked out whether what I am really interested in is the synagogue as a place to pray or whether I'm interested in being with Jews talking about Jewish things. I'm sure the latter is better than the former. It's ridiculous, this kind of intellectual snobbery. It gets in the way a lot. So I'm waiting for another sign, another person to walk in offstage. A burning bush?

SC: A burning bush sounds good. Have your encounters with CLAL in some way addressed your need for thought and practice—for "being with Jews talking about Jewish things"?

SE: Oh, absolutely. I stuck with it at first because it was Jews. It's interesting: most of the people I'm close to in Washington, as opposed to my family, are gentile, which is really odd for a Jew with my general background and age. About two years ago, I went to see an old college friend. We both grew up in the Bronx and I realized that that part of my life had just simply disappeared. When I went out to see him, it was back to that world. I reverted, as it were, to some kind of childhood Bronx self. We had a whale of a time. My wife—an English woman from a very different culture who is also a gentile—thought we were nuts. There's a little bit of that feeling of familiarity here at CLAL.

When I finally worked out that you might know what you were doing I thought,

“Oh well, so that’s what they’re trying to look at. Alright. Good. That I understand.” You’re up to something that I know is serious and I might or might not be of use.

SC: What was your response when David Elcott (who at the time was Academic Vice President of CLAL) invited you in 1997 to participate in a focus group that would eventually lead to the founding of the Jewish Public Forum? Did it seem odd to you to be invited to a Jewish organization?

SE: Sure. But it only became clear to me later how odd it was. Some guy was willing to pay my train fare and Gar Alperovitz, my longtime colleague, was going anyway, so how dangerous could it be?

SC: He didn’t come to you because you guys were Jews, he came to you because he was researching think tank models.

SE: Right. Still, I didn’t figure out why he invited me, even though the source of it was in the conversation I had with him when I told him about this business of growing up in this ridiculous Jewish/non-Jewish way and just being furious about it. I think that’s why he invited me. But I didn’t know that until I got here.

I sat through the entire morning wondering what I was doing here and not understanding half of what was being said. Then, about 4:00 pm, David said, “Well, Steve, why don’t you tell us what you told me.” That was the first time I really told anyone how sad I was, and how angry. And then some really smart person asked me what had provided me with the clue that there was a Judaism worth having. I said, “Leo Strauss.” So then I thought, “Well, David has me here as a specimen of what can go wrong, of failure. That is, of the way in which Judaism, as it has been, has just failed some of its perhaps most thoughtful possible adherents.”

Now that I’ve thought some more about what you all are doing, I realize I’m here because I’m someone who still thinks of himself as a Jew and who is struggling to connect that feeling to the world in which I am now operating, this public/semi-public world. And what you want is some guys like me, for whom thinking about the changes in the society and what those changes will mean for communities is connected up in a very inchoate way to Jewishness; it’s the connection between the two which is the actual subject. So if you get those guys in the room, plus lots of other guys, you might actually have a conversation.

I thought I was doomed to wander aimlessly through the religious night,

garments rent, hair tousled, to fall into my grave and then there would be a little whisper: "Stupid son of a bitch, he didn't pay attention." Not a happy prospect, I admit. But I see CLAL as a place where someone who is fumbling around like I am is extremely useful. In fact, it gives me a lot of hope, to tell you the truth. I may not be able to get to synagogue but I can get on the train and come up here. I have to say, all silliness aside, part of what has kept me coming is that the CLAL staff strikes me as just intelligent, thoughtful people. The feeling is not, as you know, "we know, we teach" (it wouldn't help with me, since I don't listen), but more "we're sort of fellow searchers even though we know a lot of things you don't know about things you do want to know." It's very open and inviting, which makes a difference because I'm not easy to invite. But the people around here are all just very good at it. If you'd been different Jews, who knows?

What I think I see is that it's possible to think about Judaism in a way that makes it okay for me not—at the moment in any event—to worry about the synagogue and to worry about rules of kashrut and so forth. It was a genuine question: "How should Judaism be understood?" The level of my ignorance was so profound that it had never occurred to me that the rabbinical Judaism that I was "taught" was in fact just one version of Judaism. It might be the normative version of the world I inhabited, but it certainly wasn't the only possible one. And there have been all kinds of people who have tried to rethink all this.

So what I like about CLAL is that it is an effort to keep those doors open and also to make some possible connections between the lives that people actually lead in this world and Judaism itself, between, on the one hand, Judaism as a certain kind of religion and, on the other, Judaism as a set of practices in the world. And I like the idea that out of that kind of back and forth conversation something will emerge. The third covenant? I don't know.

But the point is that it's now time—its been time for a long time—to get a lot of Jews together who are pretty sure about two things. The way in which the Jewish community is organized and what actually happens in synagogues are not doing the trick. No one quite knows what might do the trick, but we'll never find out unless we talk about it. Not only do we have to talk about it -- we have to talk about it a lot over time consistently, persistently.

Amazingly enough, both CLAL and PEGS are actually taking off from the same point of departure, which is that "there's something happening out there, guys, and it's making a big difference." My version of it is that two things are going on. There's an increase in both the desire and the respect for democratic

political practice and at the same time there's a deterioration of it.

SC: That makes me think again about the importance Leo Strauss had for you. Could you say a few more words about the role his ideas played in your making these conceptual links?

SE: It's captured by his phrase that the real alternatives are Athens and Jerusalem. As soon as I read that I said, "You know, Leo, you're probably right." I mean it had never occurred to me to think of it that way. To think that in order to understand the pole of religious belief you needed to understand the way in which classical thought was the sort of progenitor of much of secular and liberal civilization. And that these really were alternatives. He taught that you might not be able to settle which one is better because they are the permanent alternatives and that's it. As he says, and who knows whether he meant it because he spent a lot of time not saying what he meant, Spinoza demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that you can't finish the argument from Revelation. You can try, but you just can't do it. That made Judaism a real live possibility.

Then there's the larger question of why Judaism as opposed to anything else. My solution to that is just straightforward. You have to start where you are. Look, in the end it probably doesn't matter one way or the other. If there is some sort of transcendent whatever, he's surely not going to be only interested in Jews. There's no reason to start one place rather than the other except for one being the place where you are, the place from which you know how to talk. I didn't know until relatively late that Strauss was a real Jewish thinker and not just a teacher of political theory. In the beginning—though I got the Athens and Jerusalem idea—I didn't realize how much work he had done on explicitly Jewish subjects, and I didn't know at all that that's where his work had started, biographically speaking. He wrote on Maimonides and Spinoza very early on. He got to the United States because he received a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship that got him out of Germany and he never went back, but all of his work when he was in Germany was on Jewish subjects in a Jewish institute.

The idea that one would really want to read Maimonides -- that I would ever think that reading Maimonides was likely to be decisive for anything important in my life -- seemed an utterly ridiculous thing before I read Strauss. It may be ridiculous now, too, who knows? I genuinely think, though, that if I could ever spend the time and have the ability, that this would be one of the most important things I could do. We'll see. That was all Strauss, it was as simple as that. There's a guy of vast learning and penetration of mind who's telling you, "This is it. You can pay attention or not. It's up to you." Considering I don't have

7/1/2009

Face to Face: Shari Cohen, Athens...

children, and that I have lots of money in the bank, that I still have my health, that I love my wife, whatever—why not? I mean what else am I going to do? Or alternatively, I think about it like, “Schmuck, is there really anything more important than this?” So that’s where Strauss got me. We’ll see.



E m a i l
this article



P r i n t
this article



To join the Face to Face Conversation, click [here](#).

To access the Face to Face Archive, click [here](#).

To receive the Face to Face column by email on a regular basis, complete the box below:

 **Receive Face to Face!**



Copyright c. 2001, CLAL - The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited.