

## The 23rd Psalm: Pan-Religious

by Rev. Joe Dirt - Wednesday, November 09, 2022

<https://curmudgeon-alley.com/the-23rd-psalm-pan-religious/>



Some of my readers might not know that *Señora* – my principal muse – is not Hispanic. In fact she is Jewish. Of course, you can be Hispanic and Jewish simultaneously, but not in this case. Why I use *Señora* is a somewhat convoluted tale for another day. Most folks who are not familiar with Jews tend to think of Jews as they are portrayed in the movies or on television. Those are frequently Orthodox Jews or perhaps Conservative Jews. I have concluded that there are about as many types of Judaism as there are Protestant branches. *Señora* attends a Reformed synagogue.

If I were ever to get a wild hair and decided that I needed to join an organized religion again, I would strongly consider Reformed Judaism. Bear with my unscholarly “definition” of this recent branch of an ancient religion. Reformed Judaism takes a progressive, social justice-oriented approach to religion that incorporates many of the rituals and traditions of Orthodox Judaism without getting too wrapped up in strict adherence to religious laws, dietary restrictions, clothing styles, etc. It is a very liberal religion that is open to the outside world, and at the same time not afraid to revise their approach to religious practices. *Señora*’s synagogue tends to be fairly activist on social issues.

Being partnered with *Señora* for close to 15 years now, I have attended a fair number of Jewish funerals, usually Reformed with the occasional Conservative. I have not been to an Orthodox funeral. Even for *Señora* Orthodox Judaism is a different world, although one of her great grandfathers immigrated to this country to be a [cantor](#) at an Orthodox synagogue as well as the [kosher](#) butcher in a small town in northern Minnesota close to where Bob Dylan (Zimmerman) grew up.

I find these funerals to be very soothing with their consistent rituals. One ritual that I really like is that after the coffin is lowered into the ground the family members and whoever else wants to participate throw a few shovels of dirt into the grave. For the first couple throws the mourner uses the back side of the shovel symbolizing a [mitzvah](#) (duty/good deed) that is necessary, but that they wish they did not have to perform. The next few throws the shovel is used normally.

Another consistent feature at these funerals is the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. It is always printed on the handout given to the mourners and most generally read by the Rabbi performing the funeral.

I find this interesting for a couple reasons. The first being that in my tradition, Southern Baptist, this Psalm seems to be considered the most important Psalm. It certainly seems to be the most referenced. Both Judaism and Christianity are Abrahamic religions. I find it comforting that both emphasize these beautiful Bible verses.

The other reason is personal. I am not religious by any stretch of the imagination, but I have a copy of this Psalm under the clear blotter on my desk. I generally forget it is there, but I do read it from time to time when I am feeling a little down or stressed. I have been known to recite it in my head late at night while staring at the ceiling stressing over something. Yes I know it is a somewhat inconsistent action for an agnostic. But peace like love is where you find it.

I found something else interesting in today's funeral service for Bernice Davidson, a lady *Señora* considered her second mother. While the funeral was going on, while I was ruminating on the 23rd Psalm, the school across from this Jewish cemetery had let the students out for recess. The kids were running around, laughing, generally just being children. I could not keep from thinking about the circle of life. Rather than a distraction, I found the children's laughter a celebration, a reaffirmation of life as we remembered Bernice's 98 years of life that was by all accounts a good life.

I am going to include some links about the different types of Judaism at the end of this blog posting. And now, just for reference, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm:

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.*

*He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

*Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.*

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*

Shalom.

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The promised links:

[Types of Jews](#)

[Reform Judaism Today](#)

[The three branches of Judaism](#)

If you want a quick, easy read on this ancient religion you might try [The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Judaism](#). While the title of this series of books is a little unfortunate, they are generally good sources for the basics on any subject. This one is no exception.