**A Minority Within a Minority Within a Minority…**

Except for the modern state of Israel, Jews are a minority everywhere, including the United States. Among people who identify as Jewish, there is a minority who have disabilities and within that group is a minority who are blind or have low vision. A minority within a minority within a minority. You get the picture.

Judaism is more than just a religious faith. It is history, culture, family connections, and community. Like many other religious and ethnic groups, it contains different denominations. Examples of these include Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, etc. This is similar to Christianity, with its Protestant, Catholic, Greek or Russian Orthodox variations. All have core commonalities, but also different traditions, and practices.

The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in Judaism was formed many years ago so that members and other blind people who are Jewish can share concerns and ideas, and work to be part of their Jewish communities. In addition to meeting during national conventions, the group has begun to meet via zoom during the year.

One area of discussion for this group has been ways to reach out to other blind persons who are also Jewish, encouraging more Jewish people to become active in the NFB. In thinking about being as inclusive as possible, it is suggested that NFB national divisions, committees, state affiliates, and local chapters should consider the practices of observant or traditional Jews.  A traditional or observant Jew is an individual who observes the practices of traditional Judaism.  This includes most Orthodox, many Conservatives, and some Reform Jews. As always, asking the actual person how they manifest their Jewish identity – how they observe and practice their Judaism, is a good idea. Here are general examples of traditional Jewish practices:

* Observance of Shabbat (the Sabbath).  Shabbat traditionally runs from just before sunset Friday evening to just after sunset Saturday evening.  This time is considered holy by observant Jews and is therefore differentiated from the rest of the week.  During this time, some people will not drive or use any motorized transportation, will not use electronics, or attend to regular business activities.
* these same practices are followed during major holidays which include the following:
  + Rosh HaShanah (The Jewish New Year)-celebrated just before or during Autumn, This is celebrated for either one or two days.
  + Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) – observed ten days after Rosh HaShanah
  + Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles)-Observed after Yom Kippur, the first two and last two days of an eight-day holiday)
  + Pesach (Passover-celebrated in Spring, first two and last two days of an eight-day holiday)
  + Shavuot (Feast of Weeks) – Roughly six weeks after Passover.
* Special dietary practices, referred to as Kashrut or keeping Kosher.  In general, this includes separation of milk and meat, not eating pork or shellfish, and eating meat that is produced in a special way.  Some people who keep kosher will eat fish or vegetarian dishes outside the home, others will not.

What is described above is very basic and does not include everything. There are many Jews who do not observe all or even some of the above. Again, ask the individual.

Here are some suggestions that could make NFB activities more inclusive to observant Jews:

* Particularly, in an area of the country with a relatively high Jewish population, consider not holding chapter or affiliate activities on Saturday, choosing instead either Sunday afternoon or during the week.  At the very least, when possible, avoid having activities on Saturday morning, as this is when services are held.  (This would be the same as holding activities on Sunday morning when many people attend church services.) Consideration should be given to not holding NFB activities on major Jewish holidays.
* If meals are a part of any activity, offer either to arrange for kosher food or at least a fish, vegetarian or vegan option.  For those people who choose not to eat out in non-kosher settings, allow them to arrange or bring in their own food to enjoy with others.
* If invocations are a part of an NFB activity, such as a state convention, Jewish members may be invited to lead some of the invocations as the members of other religions are.
* The NFB should stand ready to advocate for our Jewish members to be full participants in the activities of the Jewish community.

Jews are a minority in our country and in the NFB. Therefore, these suggestions for inclusion are just that: Suggestions. It may not always be possible to follow these practices.  For example, a local chapter may not be able to meet on any other day than Saturday due to transportation issues. If a meeting is required to take place on a Saturday, then having it in the afternoon would at least allow potential members to attend the meeting, following morning services.

Or, If a national division, committee, or group has a meeting that takes place during a major Jewish holiday, having a second session not on that holiday would be a good idea. By having more than one meeting or session, participation may increase overall.

The NFB has a lot to offer to blind people who are Jewish, as it does for those of all faiths. At the same time those people have a lot to offer to our organization. We need to reach out to people who are a minority with a minority.