By Christoph Schreiner

Was eigentlich ist der „American Way of Life“?


Auf meinem Roadtrip nach Dallas während der Weihnachtsferien hatte ich die Möglichkeit mehr über den „American Way of Life“, wie wir ihn in Deutschland nennen, herauszufinden.


An der ersten Tankstelle wurde ich gleich mit einem wichtigen Teil der amerikanischen Kultur konfrontiert. Ich tankte mein Auto auf Augenhöhe mit einem riesigen Pick up Truck. Und während ich vor Glück strahlte weil die Preisanzeige $18 anstatt der gewohnten über $70 in Deutschland anzeigte, wusste ich warum die Leute es sich hier leisten können einen riesigen Pick up Truck zu fahren.

Den I-35 hinunter zu fahren war fantastisch; Ich konnte dieses Gefühl der Freiheit nachvollziehen von dem die Leute immer reden wenn sie nach dem „American Way of Life“ gefragt werden. Aber wenn man mich fragen würde was die auffälligste Eigenschaft der Amerikaner und ihrer Kultur ist würde ich sagen es ist ihre Offenheit und Freundlichkeit. Egal mit wem ich sprach, ob mit der Dame an der Rezeption im Hotel, dem Angestellten im Mietwagengeschäft oder der Bedienung im Restaurant, sie alle waren sehr offen und begierig mehr von mir und meinem Leben in Deutschland zu erfahren.

Deshalb ist für mich der „American Way of Life“ mehr als Wahl zwischen tausenden Fast Food Restaurants oder einer Eismaschine an jeder Ecke im Hotel, es sind die Leute selbst die den Unterschied machen.
A Poet in Turbulent Times: Halevi

By Ran Sivron

Yehuda Halevi was one of the most interesting Jewish people that ever lived.

Since I was a little boy I loved his poetry. Later on in life I found out more about his other talents and tumultuous life. I discovered that he was an influential philosopher and Rabbi, had prolific exchanges with Christian and Muslim scholars of his time, worked as a physician for Muslim and Christian kings, and ENDED his life as a world traveler. His dramatic last voyage has become mythical in Jewish tradition. You may be amazed to learn that he lived in the middle ages, from 1071 to 1145 AD.

He was born in Spain in the town of Toledo (the Charlton Heston movie "El Cid" tells of that time). Spain was a land where despite occasional wars Jews, Muslims and Christians worked mostly together for hundreds of years.

Halevi was fluent in Castilian Spanish, Hebrew, and Arabic. His writings in Hebrew and Arabic are preserved, but the Spanish writings are lost. We don't know of all of his travels in his native Spain, but we know that he used his talent for poetry and got food and shelter at first, then a wife, and then royal reception everywhere he went. Can you imagine that?! A poet being a celebrity?

Here is the first verse of a love poem he wrote:

"Chen Mah’tzah" (He found her to be lovely - or: She found loveliness, meaning here she found god. The word games in the original Hebrew have triple meaning - at least!)

"He found her to be lovely... - the one that came towards you (god)
She wasn't imprisoned - but splendid - your love (her love of god?)
She went on her way in the name of god, her savior
She was all over him, pursued him - her lover
Nagging, boasting, about her faults!
She bragged, because she held in check... - your wrath
She never abandoned, nor forgot, your company..."

(Hebrew version at left)

You will find that Yehuda Halevi learned from everyone: He learned the method of skepticism from Al Ghazali, maybe the greatest Arab philosopher. He learned some poetic tricks from Muslim and Christian poets in Spain and Egypt. He learned from other Jewish Rabbis of his time.

More than anyone else he brought the "Golden Age" of Jewish culture in Spain. His famous philosophical work is also a masterful novel. It is called "The Kuzari". (Now how many books do you know of that were written so long ago?) In it Halevi tells of a Pagan king that was converted to Judaism by a simple traveler instead of converting to Christianity or Islam by fancy...
ambassadors. Instead of being a competition between religions, it is actually one of the strongest philosophical arguments in support of ethical monotheism and against secular ethics ever written.

Halevi decided to travel to Israel because he believed, as many Jewish people did at the time, that the crusades that just begun will result in great persecution of Jews everywhere. He moved to Egypt and then traveled to Israel where he died. He was probably killed by a soldier. Tradition holds that it happened at the Wailing wall in Jerusalem, the holiest place for Jews, but there is no support for that story.

Let me conclude with a poem of yearning for God and Israel, Halevi’s most famous: “Libi Bamizrach.”

Phonetically it is beautiful: (ch is pronounced as in “nacht” in German).

Libi Bamizrach Va’ani Besof Ma’arav / Eich et’amah etasher o’chal, ve’ech ye’erav?

Translation:

My heart is in the east – and I am at the very western edge (of the world)
How May I savor that which I eat, how can it have any flavor?
How may I fulfill my vows, my bonds, while Zion (Israel) is in the Edomite shire, and I am under Arab shackles?
It will be just as easy for me to leave the plenty of Spain just as it will be most precious for me to see the dust and ashes left from the demolished temple.
As is my habit, I will finish this article with an ancient Jewish blessing bestowed on every child upon his birth:

Live long and prosper!

Hebrew version below

Libi Bamizrach

לבי במצריך ואני באסף מדרום
איך אסכתך אני א那里לת אלי כי אניidorב?
איך אוכל מת שונים ואסף, עזרו
איך אוכל מת שונים ואסף, עזרו?
יהל במצריך ואני באסף מדרום, כלם
יוכי במצריך ואני באסף מדרום, כלם!
American way of life more than big trucks, fast food

By Christoph Schreiner  
What is the “American way of life”?  
Most Germans refer to it as the typical lifestyle of the American people. Driving big cars and eating fast food are just two of the most common stereotypes, but I always knew that there was more that distinguishes the American from the German people.

On my road trip to Dallas this Christmas break I was able to find out more about the “American way of life” as we call it in Germany.

My girlfriend and I decided to travel like Americans would, and instead of flying into Dallas, as 95 percent of the Germans would usually do since it is more than 600 miles (965km) to Dallas, we rented a car and drove all the way down on Interstate 35.

At the first stop for gas I was confronted with a big part of the American culture: I was filling my car eye-to-eye with the rims of a big pick-up truck.

While my heart was filled with joy because the display showed only $18 for filling my car with gas, instead of over 50€ ($70) in Germany, I knew why people could afford to drive these huge pick up trucks over here.

Driving down I-35 was awesome; I could feel this sense of freedom that people always talk about when they’re asked about “the American way of life”. But if you would ask me what the most striking characteristic about Americans and their culture is, I would say it is their openness and kindness. No matter if I was talking to the lady at the front desk in a hotel, the employee at the car rental or the waitress in a restaurant, they were all so easy to talk to and eager to learn more about me and my life in Germany.

So for me there’s more to the American way of life than the choice of thousands of fast food restaurants or an ice machine on every corner of your hotel.

It’s the people that make a difference.