Opening The Tent - Episode 3: Eliran Oz

introduction: You're listening to Opening The Tent: stories of Jewish belonging, an original podcast produced by the NYU Bronfman Center for Jewish Student Life. Eliran Oz is a senior in CAS studying politics and European and Mediterranean studies. Eliran also grew up in the Netherlands and believes his unique Jewish upbringing informs a lot of his perceptions on religiosity and family.

Eliran: Back in the Netherlands it, you know, we didn’t really have that big of a Jewish community, it was always a very like familial thing. We would do like Hanukkah together. My dad has this Hanukkah song that he sings about Mickey Mouse and it’s the funniest thing, but so even as a little kid, it was always like that kind of thing. My high school services were a very like nondenominational thing and it’s still kind of retained that aspect of, you know, we do the two prayers and then that was kind of it and we would like eat and talk and that’s kind of like where it ended. Coming here, there was much more of a shift of, like a setup of a framework that before didn’t really exist, because before it had been much of a thing of it just kind of happens. It’s family dinner, there really isn’t much more to it. But then, like, then there was much very more of a shift of practice and guidelines. Going back to my family, I mean I have a cousin who is very, very religious, but even on Shabbat with her, she still does one prayer and that’s it, even though she, like we all consider her very religious. It’s just a different kind of starting point, that when I came here, was just completely shifted.

interviewer: Eliran is concerned with understanding the grey area between religious practice and secular Judaism

Eliran: I think especially in like the Jewish community of today, there is this strong, dividing line, where it seems that you’re either religiously Jewish or you’re secularly Jewish, and I still kind of grapple with how much of it I really like agree with. A lot of people, with prayer, it is a thing of speaking with G-d. For me, the prayers are much more following in footsteps and upholding tradition, which then is funny because I end up doing more of the prayers because I just feel like I need to get through them because there is a way that these things are done, and that is how I interpret them, not in any way thinking ‘oh I need to say these prayers to like ask for G-d’s help’, but more I need to say these prayers because, yeah, people before me have said these
prayers and there is value in the words, in reading them and interpreting them in the here and now as opposed to using them as like a religious vehicle necessarily. For me, it has always been learning from the lessons of the past to influence the present and the future. For my whole family, it has been, you know, these stories are important and prayers are important and practices are important, not for the context that they were in, but for the context that we are in now. I think part of that is, you know, the history of my family, my grandparents and the Holocaust, that kind of thing. There are a lot of people that, through that experience, kind of dug deeper into their religious Judaism, which you hear a lot more about the, you know, the communities that continue, even in the camps. But for my grandparents and then for me, it became much more a thing of community, of shared heritage and shared experience bringing us together, and I think that influence has been a lot of me. I mean, here at Bronfman, for me it's always been, even as the head of a religious community, it was still, to me it was still more about relating the religion to now through tradition and through upholding, kind of, the values.

closing: Thanks for listening. This episode was produced by the b|hive story collective. Follow @bronfmancenter on Instagram for new episodes.