

Make the Call

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Years ago I heard a story about the remarkable Ben Hecht, creator of the screwball comedy, writer extraordinaire, acrobat, violinist and passionate defender of Jews in WWII and Israel. When the State was founded, Hecht found himself in the office of a Jewish mogul raising money for Israel.

The mogul waved him away. "Listen Hecht," he insisted in the fashion of some early Hollywood figures, "I don't consider myself Jewish."

Hecht answered immediately. "Fair enough. Here's the deal. You pick up the phone and call ten non-Jewish friends and ask them, 'Am I Jewish?' If just one of them says no, I'll leave your office."

The mogul wrote a check.

Sadly, in Jewish history it has often been the non-Jewish world that has reminded the Jew of his own identity. Far more beautiful is to affirm who we are without the approval or censure of others. When one is heir to such a rich, long and world shaping tradition, why hide? Better than being reminded by the world is to remind ourselves.