IMUS CONFESS SOMETHING
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz
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The other day I was sitting in the juice bar at my gym, avoiding a workout when I overheard the group at the next table me telling rabbi jokes. There weren't any I hadn't heard before, and also none that I could repeat on the bima. In fact in the genre of Rabbi jokes these were of the more off color variety. But confess I laughed quietly to myself a few times; they were pretty funny, even if a bit R rated. The man telling the jokes was doing it with such conviction and an impeccable Bronx Jewish inflection, he was almost funnier than the jokes.

A few minutes later, either he ran out of material or the conversation just shifted and the group began talking about Easter. It was then that the guy with the Bronx Jewish inflection, started to talk about Easter Sunday mass at his church and how much he was looking forward to it. He described how his congregation was more traditional than others and how his priest did such a beautiful job with all the sacraments.

Now I was the one with the Bronx Jewish inflection, as I muttered to myself, but just loud enough to be heard at the next table, OY VAY!

The funny thing about humor is that humor is always at someone else's expense. When that other person is part of your same ethnic, religious, cultural, social or gender group you can go pretty far with a joke. Take Jackie Mason or Larry David for example, we give them a lot of rope, because in the end we know, they too are members of the tribe, and if you can't laugh at yourself… well you know the rest.

But put the same material in the hands of a gentile, and listen to them make jokes about Jews and money or Jewish women and

household chores and I have the ADL on speed dial. Make jokes about Israel or tell a holocaust joke and you'll come to know why so many Jews are lawyers. I don't like other people making fun of my people.

See I just did it, as a Jew I perpetuated a stereotype about my own people to make a joke, I know I am not alone, we do this all the time.

This brings me to Don Imus and his hurtful and derogatory remarks this past week. I don't listen to Imus. But a lot of people did and among them, I would guess there is a group that found what he said funny. I don't excuse he for what he said. He's a grown man, nearly 70 years old and he is responsible for what comes out of his mouth. But in the same way I don't excuse him, I also don't excuse those who laughed along with him, the audience. Imus wouldn't have said what he said if he didn't think he would get a laugh.

Why did he think he would get a laugh? Because in the African American community language like Imus used on his radio show is everywhere. It's in rap music, movies, standup comedy, music videos, on HBO, Showtime. Last year a song titled, "IT'S HARD OUT HERE FOR A PIMP" won an Oscar. Imus didn't make up the horrible phrases that he used, he learned them from the black community, his sin was that he repeated it.

That does not make it right, just the contrary it makes it more wrong. Jews making fun of Jews and blacks making fun of blacks, we just perpetuate our own stereotypes, we give implicit permission that it is ok to think that way, talk that way as long as you are that way.

We of all people know how a stereotype and innuendo repeated often enough can justify the most heinous of crimes, perpetuate the

longest of hatreds. Our challenge is not the Don Imus' of the world, our challenge is us!

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