

NEW TEN COMMANDMENTS

What with the pogroms, the Inquisition, the Holocaust, the seemingly never-ending parade of antisemitism around the world. It is kind of a miracle that we are still here. So, wouldn't it be ironic, if, in the end, the Jewish people disappear, not because of war and hatred, but because of... well, plain old lack of interest? Oy... Imagine the Jewish guilt. Jewish wisdom done well can be vital to living a full and joyful life but sometimes our messaging is stale. It's time for a refresh... Starting with the New Ten Commandments.

I. HONOR THOSE WHO CHOOSE JUDAISM: We all know people who aren't Jewish but invite Judaism into their lives and the lives of their children, either by converting, or just welcoming a Jewish practice. Hug them, kiss them, and for God's sake, go out of your way to make them feel welcome! This might very well be the most important New Commandment. When someone chooses Judaism, we should be thrilled and grateful.



II. JEWISH GRANDCHILDREN: You want them, right? Then raise your children to be Jewish. Wishy-washy isn't going to get you there. Children don't get to decide religion; parents do. No matter who you marry, decide ahead of time that the kids will be brought up with a strong connection to their Jewish identity, even if that means lighting candles for Hanukkah and Diwali. If the thought of being invited to your grandchild's baptism troubles you, do something about it now.



III. BELIEF IN GOD IS NOT REQUIRED: Enough with Jews opting out because they "don't believe in God." You don't need to believe in God to be a good Jew. Meaningful Judaism can be about values, tradition, culture and community.



IV. GET TO ISRAEL: It's your responsibility to take your family to Israel unless you really can't afford it. A family who goes on a safari in Africa and ski trips to Vail but hasn't gone to Israel is missing out on a life-changing experience. Sending your kids to Israel on Birthright's dime, when you don't have to, is like going to the food pantry for a meal when you can afford to buy it. If you insist on Birthright, then at least give them a large donation to pay for your child's trip. By the way, Israel is not scary. What is scary is the thought of the Middle East without Israel.



V. END BORING SYNAGOGUE: We have attended and practically slept through so many Bar/Bat Mitzvah services wondering, not why we are losing so many Jews, but why we aren't losing more. C'mon, rabbis! We are counting on you, and many of you are failing us. Be creative, be humorous, and be spiritual. Did you hear about the evangelical church in Corpus Christi where they gave away cars, bikes and televisions to people just for coming to Easter services? Bet you rolled your eyes. We did, too — until we watched the service on YouTube. It was fun, invigorating, inspiring! No more eye rolling!



VI. GIVE PHILANTHROPY TO JEWISH CAUSES: There are millions of non-Jews giving money to Save the Whales and other causes. While a basic Jewish value is to improve the world, it would be nice if Jews could improve the Jewish world, too. More than 80% of Jewish philanthropy goes to non-Jewish causes, which is slowly but surely making Jewish philanthropic institutions disappear. We are the only ones who will support our own. By the way, we can teach this commandment early. Many children ask guests to donate to their chosen Bar/Bat Mitzvah project in lieu of gifts. Since this is a Jewish child celebrating a Jewish lifecycle event, we say choose a Jewish organization; raising money for the Red Cross or cutting their hair for Locks of Love is not exactly taking care of our own.



VII. DO YOUR JEWISH WITH OTHERS: Judaism is a communal religion and is difficult to do solo. That may be one reason why most Jewish prayers are written in the plural (Bless us with...). If you don't belong to a synagogue but march in twice a year expecting to enjoy it, you may feel like a disappointed outsider. If you don't have a Jewish community, try and find one. There are as many different communities as there are Jews, so we're pretty sure, you'll find one that you like. Judaism is like most things in this world, you get back what you put in!



VIII. SHABBAT: Friday night is family Shabbat, period. It doesn't matter if you cook a chicken or order in a pizza. But light the candles, make a blessing over wine and challah, bless your kids if you have them. If you don't have challah, make a blessing over a pretzel. Stay home and make at least part of your Friday evening special. Will your teenagers sometimes hate you for ruining their lives as you make them miss Friday-night dances, football games and sleepovers? Yes. Deal with it. We all have heard the statistics on how family dinner makes for healthier families. Many of our non-Jewish friends are envious that we have a built-in family night in our religion.



IX. SEND YOUR KIDS TO JEWISH SUMMER CAMP AND HEBREW SCHOOL: The best way to raise Jewish kids is within a community that they love and feel connected to, and there's nothing quite like Jewish camp and yes, Hebrew school, to help make that happen. Learning about rituals and history, and even some Hebrew, will help your kids feel like part of something bigger than themselves. Plus, Jewish camp is kind of a shortcut to making lifelong Jewish friends. We recently heard someone say that when you meet your camp friends, you're also meeting your bridegrooms and bridesmaids, and we really felt that. (There are camps for all interests and budgets. Start with jewishcamp.org. TBH, it's a win-win because while your kids are off having the time of their lives, you'll get some much-needed downtime.) As for Hebrew school, your kids probably won't love it as much as camp, but there are wonderful, modern educators who are thinking about relatable ways to teach Judaism and that will help. Seriously, give religious education another try. You might be pleasantly surprised, and your kids will thank you later.



X. END JEWBARRASSMENT: If we had a nickel for every person who sheepishly said they were a bad Jew, we'd have, well, a s*#t-ton of nickels. We Jews have a terrible way of one-upping each other's Jewish practices. Like, when someone says, "Your daughter's really not having a Bar/Bat Mitzvah?" Or "You eat shrimp?" Well, yeah, what if I do eat shrimp? Who elected the kosher police or anyone for that matter as the gatekeepers of the religion? No one! All of us deserve to practice our Judaism in the way that's most meaningful for us. JewBelong is on a mission to end JewBarrassment forever. Yeah, we're thinking big and it's not going to be easy. But if you join us, we're one step closer.

