

Things Life Has Taught Me About Judaism

Over the course of my life I often spoke about things I learned from Judaism about life. But I want to do something different - I want to share some things I have learned from life about Judaism. So here it goes.

Never ever be embarrassed about being a Jew. Our people has survived so long and contributed so much, that you should see being Jewish as an honour and a responsibility.

Some people look down on Jews: they always have. In which case, we have to walk tall, so that, to see our face, they are forced to look up.

Never compromise your principles because of others. Don't compromise on kashrut or any other Jewish practise because you happen to find yourself among non-Jews or non-religious Jews. Non-Jews respect Jews who respect Judaism. They are embarrassed by Jews who are embarrassed by Judaism.

Never look down on others. Never think that being Jewish means looking down on gentiles. It doesn't. Never think that being a religious Jew entitles you to look down on nonreligious Jews. It doesn't. The greatest Jew, Moses, was also, according to the Torah, "the humblest person on the face of the earth". Humility does not mean self-abasement. True humility is the ability to see good in others without worrying about yourself.

Never stop learning. I once met a woman who was 103 and yet who still seemed youthful. What, I asked her, was her secret? She replied, "Never be afraid to learn something new". Then I realised that learning is the true test of age. If you are willing to learn, you can be 103 and still young. If you aren't, you can be 23 and already old.

Never confuse righteousness with self-righteousness. They sound similar, but they are opposites. The righteous see the good in people; the self-righteous see the bad. The righteous make you feel bigger; the self-righteous make you feel small. The righteous praise; the self-righteous criticise. The righteous are generous; the self-righteous, grudging and judgmental. Once you know the difference, keep far from the self-righteous, who come in all forms, right and left, religious and secular. Win the respect of people you respect, and ignore the rest.

Whenever you do a mitzvah, stop and be mindful. Every mitzvah is there to teach us something, and it makes all the difference to pause and remember why. Mindless Judaism is not good for the soul.

When you davven, reflect carefully on the meaning of the words. Remember too that in davenning we are part of a four-thousand-year-old choral symphony, made up of the voices of all the Jews of all the countries in all the centuries who said these words. Some said these prayers in the midst of suffering; others as they faced exile and expulsion; some even said them in the concentration camps. They are words sanctified by tears, but now we are saying them in the midst of freedom. The prayers of our ancestors have come true for us. Therefore our prayers honour them as well as God, for without them we would not today be Jews, and without us carrying on their tradition, their hopes would have been in vain.

Don't worry if you can't keep up with the congregation. One word said from the heart is greater than a hundred said without understanding or attention.

Always be willing to share your Judaism. On Shabbat or the festivals, invite guests into your home. Once a week, learn with people who know less than you. The difference between material and

spiritual goods is this: with material things – like wealth or power – the more you share, the less you have. With spiritual things – like knowledge or friendship or celebration – the more you share, the more you have.

Never be impatient with the details of Jewish life. God lives in the details. Judaism is about the poetry of the ordinary, the things we would otherwise take for granted. Jewish law is the sacred choreography of everyday life.

God lives in the space we make for him. Every mitzvah we do, every prayer we say, every act of learning we undertake, is a way of making space for God.

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