

FOUR THINGS YOUR CHILDREN SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BEING JEWISH TODAY

By: Debbie Gutfreund/Aish.com

With antisemitism rising and war reshaping the Jewish world, here's what your children need to know about being Jewish right now.

Pesach asks every generation to see itself as if it personally left Egypt. That charge has never felt more relevant than it does this year, as the war with Iran reshapes how Jews are seen, spoken about and targeted across the world.

Since the war began, global antisemitism has surged, and what we teach our children about being Jewish feels increasingly urgent.

Here are four things your children should know so they understand that Judaism is not an abstract ideal. It is their identity, their responsibility and their connection to a nation whose future depends on what the next generation stands up for today.

1. There are some things worth fighting for. Judaism is a religion that values and prioritizes peace. Peace lives in our prayers, and the Torah's ways are designed to create harmony within our families, our communities and the world.

But not everything is negotiable. There are times when we are forced to fight for our survival, and there are values that demand our commitment even when standing up for them is unpopular or uncomfortable. Those values include the protection of human life and dignity, the pursuit of justice, the preservation of Jewish continuity and the defense of truth. Throughout our history, the Jewish people

have had to stand up for what matters most — faith, community, values — under enormous pressure to stay silent. For you, today, that might mean speaking up against antisemitism, defending Israel's right to exist or refusing to hide your Jewish identity.

Ask yourself: What is worth standing up for in my life, and how do I do it in a way that's true to who I am?

2. You are a link in a precious chain.

Being Jewish is not just belonging to a religion. It is belonging to a nation with shared history, values and responsibility. You come from a long line of wisdom and courage stretching back thousands of years — ancestors who fought for their right to live as Jews, who chose continuity over convenience and passed that heritage to their children.

Your roots reach back to those who stood up for justice, for the ethics of monotheism, for the sanctity of time, for the dignity of every person and for the moral imperative to repair what is broken in this world. That strength and resilience lives in you.

But a chain is only as strong as its links. Greatness in Judaism is not defined by power or perfection. It is shaped by persistence, responsibility and the courage to act with integrity even when it's hard. Having ancestors who embodied that greatness makes you responsible for living in a way that honors what they built.

You are the next link. Given everything you've inherited, how will you live your life?

3. Showing up matters.

In Jewish life, meaning is built through steady presence, showing up again and again, even when it's ordinary or inconvenient. Your identity is shaped far more by what you do consistently than by what you believe in theory.

The Jewish people have survived not because of power or numbers but because each generation understood it had a role no one else could fill. You have that role too. There has never been, and never will be, another person with your exact character, perspective, voice and ability to contribute to the Jewish people. Showing up for Shabbat (the Sabbath) meals, holidays, community events, learning, volunteer opportunities, each one may seem small in isolation, but over time they show you that you are part of something real. You belong, and your presence impacts others.

Even when you don't feel inspired, show up anyway. Action creates meaning. You don't have to have everything figured out before you walk through the door.

4. Your questions matter.

Asking questions is not a challenge to Judaism. It's one of its most essential foundations. Jewish wisdom is built on debate, inquiry and the willingness to wrestle with hard questions rather than passively accept easy answers.



Your questions are welcomed and expected. At the Pesach Seder, children ask the Four Questions precisely to model that curiosity and engagement are central to what it means to be Jewish. Every person, regardless of age or background, has a voice and a perspective that matters.

Questions are where real ownership of ideas begins. Through your questions, you can start forming a Jewish identity that is genuinely yours. The Talmud is full of unresolved arguments and competing perspectives; Judaism has always valued complexity over easy answers.

The goal is not just to ask but to keep searching, keep challenging your assumptions and keep pushing toward a deeper understanding of yourself and the world.

In these turbulent times, our children need to know where they come from, who they are, what they stand for and why it matters. In a world full of uncertainty, they need to know that their presence, their voice and their choices count. If they know what is worth holding onto, they can not only navigate their own lives — they can help shape the future of the Jewish people.

SEEING THE SCHECHINAH

By: Amy Neustein, Ph.D.

I was tossed 15 feet by an unexpected gust of wind into the street with moving cars and sustained serious injuries requiring a joint replacement. I wrote a piece from the heart which I want to share with your readers. I just returned home after 25 days in the hospital and acute rehab combined. Below is the piece:

A Harrowing Wind Accident Lifted Me from the Sidewalk and Hurlled Me 15 feet into the Street in the Path of Oncoming Traffic ... and then I felt the Schechinah

By Amy Neustein, Ph.D.

I spent 25 days between Englewood Hospital and Kessler Rehab, having sustained multiple injuries and requiring emergency surgery for a shattered hip. I had a lot of bleeding and remained a hair's breath away from needing transfusions. I finally returned home a day after Pesach, shortly before Shabbat. Certainly, I was relieved to finally be home. But I want to talk about something far more important.

Hurlled unexpectedly by a gale force wind on Parker Avenue in Fort Lee, New Jersey where I live, I was thrust 15 feet from the sidewalk where I stood into the path of oncoming traffic. I tried to get up but my right leg didn't move. I later learned that from the impact of the fall the neck of the femur bone had snapped off leaving it totally disconnected from the acetabulum (the hip socket). And because the radial head of my

forearm had fractured too I couldn't use my right arm to signal to the motorists that I was in their way. Having rolled onto my non injured side because the pain on the right side was unbearable, my left arm was now beneath me and I couldn't raise it to alert the oncoming cars. At that moment I called out to Hashem for help, being very much aware that I stood between this world and the next, Olam HaZeh and Olam HaBa.

Lying in the street I felt the presence of the Schechinah with an overpowering force I have never felt before in my life. In fact it's ineffable—so hard to put into words. But I will try.

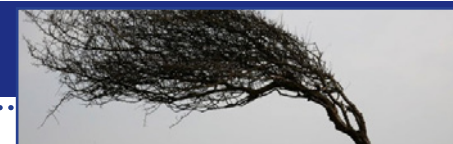
I felt an intense sense of intimacy with Hashem who I knew understood me better than anyone else. I said, "If you want to take me home now, you will spare me the pain of living ... and I won't object." I was referring to the plight visited upon me and other mothers in the Orthodox community and outside as that of a "childless mother." These are mothers who have lost custody and all visitation contact with their children because they tried in good faith to protect their children from sexual abuse. Yet, in spite of overwhelming evidence of sexual abuse the family courts ban the mothers from the lives of their children. And with time children often become virulently hostile to their mothers. They show no interest in reuniting with them; some have even publicly humiliated their mothers spewing intense hatred.

The psychology literature and professionals at Nefesh International have referred to this as "traumatic bonding." They explain that this is inevitable because children who are forcibly removed from their mothers by court order feel abandoned and betrayed by them. To cope, they identify with the abusive parent for otherwise they will be left alone in the world.

My burden was particularly heavy because after the loss of my daughter 40 years ago, I took it upon myself to use my training as a sociologist to help all mothers who had lost children as a result of cruel and draconian family court orders. I amassed thousands of case files and wrote two editions of "From Madness to Mutiny: Why Mothers Are Running from the Family Courts --and What Can Be Done about It."

But listening to all the stories over the years, and running a 24/7 suicide watch to prevent mothers from succumbing to despair, I felt a burden too heavy to carry. And at that moment in the path of imminent disaster I wanted to return to Hashem, because for me it would be a surcease of sorrow that had plagued me since 1986 when the light of my life went out.

Hashem however had other plans. He didn't want to take me for at that liminal moment between this world and the next a man came along offering to help. I asked him to call 911, and he obliged.



My heart was lighter, not because a passerby had come to the rescue. But because at that moment I felt the Schechinah. I knew that concerned rabbis and mental health professionals would prioritize the reunification of estranged children with their mothers and stop the cruel removal of young children from their mothers in retaliation for their good faith reports of sexual abuse corroborated by school teachers, psychologists, and others. I knew that this would be done, whether by government grants or private fundraising. But it would be done. And I also knew at that moment when I felt the Schechinah that all those who would partake in this effort would be following the Talmud, for it says in Sanhedrin (97b-98a) that when the community is righteous, Moshiach will come. Reuniting children with their mothers in the observant community will serve as a beacon of light for the rest of the country because non-Jewish children are likewise falling prey to a warped family court system that systematically places children in the custody of the abusive parent. We don't know why this is happening so frequently and so regularly. But we will stop it. As observant Jews we will lead the way for all children of all faiths. My encounter with the Schechinah as I lay in the street injured and immobile has changed my life forever. My burden has been lifted because I know I will soon have the help of the community. Together we will hasten the coming of the Moshiach.

Amy Neustein, Ph.D., is author/editor of 16 academic books. Her most recent book is "From Madness to Mutiny, 2nd edition" (Oxford University Press, 2026).