

Thank you for having me.

Proud to be a Jew, when I think about the formation of my Jewish identity, I have to say that my first thoughts about being a Jew were not so much Proud to be a Jew, but defending being a Jew and explaining being a Jew. Telling classmates that we don't believe in Jesus and that I don't have Santa or Christmas and Hanukkah really does that make a good substitute.

My parents taught me that it was important to be a Jew but I sensed that our Jewishness was somehow linked us to potential catastrophic harm. This fear, I imagine was passed down from my grandparents who fled pogroms about one hundred years ago.

Fortunately, my mother's cautionary tone came with a reassurance that there was nothing to fear because we were Americans and this as the anecdote to any fear.. The sanctuary created by this country's constitutional protections was taught to me as a companion theme to my identity of being a Jew.

Now think about all of this mishogas, even before we learned about an Aleph or Bet or even apples dipped in honey.

Being Jewish was not the lesson taught to me as much as staying Jewish. There was an implied, "in your face" attitude that I should not assimilate to the dominant religious culture despite the potential disadvantages my Jewishness brought.

My parents weren't eloquent at explaining our rituals. It was always nice seeing my mother light the Friday night candles, which were immediately placed in the kitchen sink without any blessing. However, it was a ritual, which she, without much religious training or would do without fail.

We did other rituals such as attend high holiday services, learn Hebrew and got Bar Mitzvahed. These rituals which were beneficial were not much explained. When thinking for a reason why we did the Jewish things we did, I think about Anne Bancroft, playing Harvey Fierstein's mother in Torch Song Trilogy as she explained her plans after her husband's death: she said, I am going to Florida, that is what we do, We go to Florida. So, it was what we did. Those rituals.

I am still exploring the drive I felt that my children must be Jewish, What else could they be? I felt deep inside of me. That is what just what we do.

Fortunately, starting in my early adult hood, I was able to start gleaning some central principles of Judaism and incorporate them into my life. Help others even when it becomes difficult. Appreciate one's good fortune and give back in return..

What I most struggle with now, is considering that our basic tenants are far from unique, all major religions tells us to do basically the same things live one's life center around the golden rule. Strive for civility, love yourself and act lovingly toward others needing help. For me this is the meaning of believing in God. My apologies to God, for getting a mention so late in this speech. Why Judaism and not another major player, I guess because this is what we do.

Finally I will talk about two synagogues have been part of my journey as a Jew, Etz Chaim of South Florida and KI Elkins Park.

It was a great comfort, thrill somewhat of a homecoming when i discovered Etz Chaim in North Miami Beach in the Spring of 1994. I said to myself, wow a gay synagogue. My religious education really came in handy at that point as I became active in the synagogue leadership. And the greatest benefit of all came in the summer of 1996, when I met my love, partner and husband at an international conference of gay synagogues right here in Montgomery County.

KI, has been our religious home, where our children Daniel and Andrew were religiously educated and bar mitzvah and where Marc and I were legally married, just over one year ago.

Even if I may struggle with the whys of being a Jew, and can't imagine being anything else. And that is enough for now.

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