

Love to be Jewish

Where does Jewish pride begin?

BY CHANDREA SEREBRO



PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS, TEACHERS, RABBIS, FRIENDS – WE ALL pray that our children will grow up with a love of Judaism and Hashem, and a positive association with being Jewish. And added to all the bumps and humps we have to navigate along the way, this is no small task. So where do we start? We asked a few people for some practical advice...

RABBI RYAN GOLDSTEIN AS ...a parent...

As a parent of boys under barmitzvah, I realised just how my boys look up to me and admire me. They think that whatever I do is the best thing ever – whatever I deem important, they want to be part of too. I happen to loathe sports and any strenuous activity, and I mostly enjoy

technology. No surprise that all of my kids love the things I love. For a parent to raise their kids to love being Jewish, they must really love being Jewish themselves. When parents prioritise good middos, parsha sheets and Torah homework, the kids will naturally pick up the importance of these things and will make it central to their lives.

... a teacher...

Teaching Grade 10s and 11s (ages 16-17) has taught me that at this age, kids do not tolerate anything that is false. They are perceptive, and won't just do things because others do them. They ask questions and challenge those who confuse them. As their teacher, I find the most powerful way to get to them is by being completely honest with them on the issues that they are dealing with, and completely fair with them in all interactions, and try to instil a love of Judaism in them this way. This age of teenage-hood is one where their balance of justice and fairness is very sensitive.

They want to see law and order, and things must make sense to them, otherwise they deem it a waste of time. Parents and teachers who deal with this age must familiarise themselves with the teenage culture, but not go down to that level.

...a community rabbi...

People want to be inspired – we all enjoy learning and doing things that resonate with us. If I sense my kehilla doesn't want to hear about oxen falling into pits, or how to open a nappy on Shabbos, I must be aware of their needs and keep them interested with Torah subjects that speak to them on the level they are at. When Moshe was on Mount Sinai and his People were worshipping a golden calf, Hashem said: "Lech Reid – Go down" (from your lofty level and meet the people where they stand). Regardless of age or station in life, the common thread for loving being Jewish is finding that it gives you fulfilment. That it makes every day one where you have no problem getting out of bed, because you appreciate what you have to do and accomplish, and you want to do it well.

SAUL ADLER, DIRECTOR OF DIJE (DIVISION OF INFORMAL JEWISH EDUCATION)

Positive role models, positive Jewish experiences and positive home values: These are the three key elements in raising our children to be proud Jews.

Children need to see observant Jewish young adults who are integrated citizens of the world as well as happy, passionate and proud members of the Jewish people, to be able to see that there is indeed a place for them to have both in this world, to realise that Judaism and 'worldliness' are not exclusive and are indeed one and the same.

The DIJE only selects madrichim who fit the above high criteria (no easy task), who will, G-d willing, influence the lives of the participants of any DIJE programme positively.

There are some children today who have very few positive Jewish experiences, except perhaps their barmitzvahs or batmitzvahs, which themselves can be rather scary milestones of Jewish faith. We need to expose them to as

many positive Jewish experiences as possible, where we can instil in them a positive association of Judaism – as dynamic, relevant, happy and even fun, as well as full of colour and meaning.

The DIJE offers a plethora of such experiences in the form of classroom programmes, break-time programmes, tefilla workshops, chaggim celebrations, yomei iyun (days of fun exploration of

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Jewish topics), Shabbatonim, and encounters, to achieve this aim.

Children value what their parents value – if parents want their children to see Judaism as having value, then they need to engage with it on a meaningful level themselves. The commonality of all three of the above is 'positivity'. Positivity breeds pride!

DANIEL WINER, HEAD OF JIPSY (JEWISH INFORMAL PROGRAMMES FOR STUDENTS AND YOUTH)



I believe strongly in education, as it is my small way of contributing to the Jewish people, by bringing religion and Zionism into student's lives. The Rambam gives us a fascinating insight into the nature of human beings. He says it is the way of man for his thoughts and actions to be influenced by his friends, society. G-d created us in such a way that we are forever being influenced by our

surroundings, and I believe that educators, teachers and parents can use this fundamental understanding of the nature of man to instil into children a burning pride and love of Torah and mitzvot. In order to instil Torah values and a love for Judaism into children, we have to set up a Torah environment,

an environment where we ourselves demonstrate our love and commitment to Judaism.

Here are some practical ideas of how to set up the right atmosphere:

- Trips to Israel – I strongly believe the best place where we can expose our children to this is in Israel. There is no better spiritual centre where one can go and connect to Judaism. So I encourage family trips to Israel and letting our children experience Israel at every opportunity possible.
- We should show children and students how much we ourselves love and adore Judaism. Show your children how much you love being a Jew and keeping the mitzvot.
- Another strong belief of mine is the importance of having a home with lots of Torah books. One should teach children the importance of their relationship with Hashem at a very young age, through davening and speaking to Hashem.

Through these things, may we all merit to set up the right environment where we will ensure strong Torah values in the younger generation. >

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MELANIE DICK, GRADE R TEACHER, KING DAVID LINKSFIELD

From a teacher's perspective, it is very rewarding to watch the spiritual growth of kids in Grade R. We are required to teach the children the laws and customs of Chaggim and Shabbat, but one also hopes that the children develop an appreciation for a deeper understanding of what it

means to be Jewish or why they should feel proud to be Jewish. From a personal point of view, I like to share some ideas with the children in my class of things that have inspired me. For example: I recently attended an evening called "Night of Light", where we made vessels for light using clay. We learnt about the 'specialness' of bringing light into our lives through lighting of Shabbat candles. I then brought the idea back to the classroom and every child made their own set of candlesticks to take home to light with their mothers. Another example is baking challah at school. I talk about how we can pray to Hashem to ask for things when we mix the dough and we sing songs while doing it, so it's a fun experience. Children learn from role models, and so my aim is not merely to teach the facts, but live them as well. Hopefully this way each child can develop their own love for Judaism and be proud of who they are.

RONIT CHAYA JANET, ROOTS BATMITZVAH PROGRAMME DIRECTOR

As a parent, I am fully aware that there are no easy answers to these questions. Raising children to be proud of their Yiddishkeit is a daily, if not hourly, challenge.

As the director of the Roots Batmitzvah Programme, I have aimed to provide the opportunities for the batmitzvah girls to be exposed and enlightened by the beauty of Judaism – with the hope of enriching their Jewish identity during this milestone year. This is done in a multi-pronged way. We are very proud of the dynamic and exciting batmitzvah teachers who not only share their wealth of knowledge, but more significantly, educate them by example as to what it means to be a proud Jewish woman.

Our programme and syllabus are filled

with multi-modal tools so as to educate these young ladies using more than one of their senses and reaching them in their own unique way.

Our larger informal programmes unite bnot mitzvah from multiple backgrounds to create a very special opportunity for achdut (unity), which is so seldom experienced. Here, at the Amazing Batmitzvah Race and at the Helping Hands Chesed morning, for example, they see that being a Jewish woman confounds the stereotypes that we mentally create. These programmes bring together girls from different backgrounds, schools, levels of religious observance and socio-economic environments so as to broaden their minds as to what it means to be Jewish and proud.

These events also enrich the girls by educating in a fun and exciting way. For example, the Amazing Batmitzvah Race

ROMY SPILKIN, MOTHER

My son Matt loves the yiddishkeit that he feels brought in with Shabbat, and asks if we will be saying the brocha for Kiddish *every night!* Together with his cousin Adam, he sings along to the Shabbat songs, the two of them wearing their kippot and naughty faces... and loving it!



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– MELANIE DICK

teaches the bnot mitzvah all about the woman's three mitzvot in the form of a race similar to that of the television show, while at the same time revealing the importance of chesed – as we donate 25kg of challah dough to the Soweto Epilepsy Society.

Similarly, with the Helping Hands Chesed morning, we invite all girls of batmitzvah age, not specifically ones involved in a formal batmitzvah programme, to spend the morning learning about and doing acts of chesed. Together we pack 250 food parcels erev Rosh Hashanah for the recipients of the Chevrah Kadisha, learning about the power within each of them to make a great difference to so many. Through these and many other positive learning experiences, the batmitzvah girls will hopefully feel connected to their community and their religion in a real, fun and practical way.

WHY DO OUR KIDS LOVE BEING JEWISH? WE ASKED SOME GRADE RS...

What I love about being Jewish is believing in Hashem. *(Amy Kowalsky)*

I love going to shul. *(Savannah Abkin)*

I enjoy having Shabbat. *(Dean Surmany)*

I listen to my mom and I like to help my friends. *(Daniel Kruger)*

I love Shabbat. *(Mira Lipman)*

I feel proud when I light Shabbat candles with my mom. *(Jordyn Hackner)*

I love Shabbat and praying to Hashem to thank him for lovely things and for making me alive. *(Jemma Karan)*

I like having a family and friends. I like being Jewish because non-Jewish people don't have challah and lots of meat. *(Daniel Munitz)*

I love being Jewish because I like to go to shul with my mom and dad. *(Gina Pearlman)*

I love being Jewish because I don't spend money on Saturdays. *(Megan Tobias)*

I love to put tzedakah in the moneybox. *(Jenna Klitzner)*

I like being Jewish because I have lots of money and I have soul. *(Jordan Lang)*

We are Hashem's chosen people. We have lots of Bible stories about our religion. We eat kosher animals. *(Samuel Hertz)*



I love being Jewish because Hashem created a beautiful world for us and I like singing Zmirot. I try to daven by myself in children service and at school. *(Jacob Gordon)*

I love pouring and drinking the wine on Shabbat and I like to do mitzvahs. *(Danielle Allan)*

I love my heart and that's why I love being Jewish. *(Riley Sluzki)*

I love being Jewish because we are Hashem's babies. *(Chad Etkind)*

I like being Jewish because I come to school to learn about Chaggim and then I get clever. *(Chloe Slotar)*

I love being Jewish because we have angels to protect us. *(Jay Sher)*

I like to have Shabbat and to go to shul. *(Kayla Mandel)*

I like all the Chaggim. *(Jesse Shur)*

RABBI RA'ANAN, DEAN OF YESHIVA COLLEGE GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL

Even though I'm an educator at Yeshiva College, this is a lesson I learnt as a teen, and my experiences in education have only reinforced what I learnt when I was much younger.

I became more committed to Torah observance as a teen, growing up in a thriving, decent-sized Jewish community in Durban, where being "frum" wasn't a common phenomenon. I found my role models within the Bnei Akiva Youth Movement. A memory that greatly influenced me was the personal experience

of one of my "madrichim" who did national service in the South African army. He put on tefillin every day and his fellow soldiers mocked him. He opened up a Tanach and translated the verse about tefillin into Afrikaans. Not only did they stop mocking him, but when a new group of soldiers arrived and started laughing, his "friends" promptly "sorted out" the new recruits. I looked up to this "madrich" because he was someone I could relate to, someone I could look up to; he was passionate about what he did, enjoyed doing it... and did it with pride!

This inspired me to put on Tefillin

proudly wherever I may be (not that I look for such opportunities!), whether Fiumicino International Airport not far from the Vatican, at a petrol station in Poland, not far from Auschwitz, at an early morning stopover by the Howick Falls not far from Durban, or while serving with non-observant soldiers in the IDF.

The lesson I learnt back then continues to guide my educational philosophy. The best way to raise our kids to be proud Jews is to set an example personally or through other relevant role models, with passion, joy and pride! **IL**