

Chapter 7

“Hebrew School Was Worthless and Boring”

Raise your hand if your Jewish education was lousy. If this includes you, then you are joining the majority of people who spoke with me.

I heard from most people that their formal Jewish education consisted of bar/bat mitzvah or confirmation preparation. This meant mostly trying to learn to read Hebrew and chant some prayers — skills that were often not learned at all or poorly learned and quickly forgotten.

The contents of the previous chapters of this book — namely, defining Judaism and looking into Jewish ethics, spirituality, and peoplehood — are the subjects people told me they wished they had learned when they were in religious school.

Though millions and millions of dollars have been spent to educate Jews, and the intentions of most Jewish educators have been wonderful, it seems that most Jewish schools are at best an expensive social program for Jewish youth and at worst little more than inefficient bar/bat mitzvah factories. This chapter examines the issue of the failings and potential of Jewish education.

Dan

Dan says he has lived two different lives. He is a big, imposing, but very gentle figure. Meeting him today in his loose-fitting cotton pants and short-sleeved shirt, it is hard to imagine him wearing a white shirt and tie, leading a completely different lifestyle. He describes that lifestyle as his relatively

conventional first life. Immediately after college he got a well-paying job as an electrical engineer. He married a woman who, like him, “was born Jewish but that’s about it.” They met in college, married at the age of 22, and bought a small home in the suburbs. Five years later they were divorced. They had no children and the marriage ended civilly. Dan and his ex are still friendly with each other.

Dan says his second life probably began shortly after he graduated from college. He discovered that he did not enjoy engineering in the corporate world and began to reevaluate many parts of his life. In the process, he and his wife began drifting apart. “We seemed to have very different values. She knew more or less what direction she wanted her life to take. I thought I did too when we met and while I was in school. But I found I was doing a lot of searching and that I was unsure. At first, my wife was supportive, but eventually it became clear that we wanted different things for our lives.”

His searching led him on a journey that included exploring Eastern religions, backpacking through Asia, an unplanned nine-month stay as a volunteer on a kibbutz in Israel (which he loved), and going back to school, where he got a degree in elementary education.

Today, at 35, Dan has found contentment as a sixth-grade teacher. He does not have a significant other, though he dates a lot — Jews and non-Jews. He would like to remarry and have children when the right person comes along. He thinks the right person will probably “but not for sure” be Jewish, because in all of his searching he has found Judaism to be the “system I’m most attracted to, and I would like my children to know Judaism.”

He would not have felt that way based on what he learned about Judaism growing up, however. “I don’t want my kids to learn about Judaism the way I was taught.” He considers his attraction to Judaism a part of his new second life. Based on his experiences, he feels Jewish education needs a lot of help, “probably a complete overhaul!”

Dan: Hebrew school was the biggest bore. I didn't learn anything. To me, that's sad; it shouldn't have been like that. I mean, the things I've learned about Judaism as an adult have been fascinating and valuable to me. Why didn't anyone ever teach me any of that when I was in religious school?

Gil: Well, I know one reason why I didn't learn much. My friends and I thought of Hebrew school as social time. On top of that, we were complete devils... once during class I remember we threw furniture out of a second-story window. What a riot. It was like a riot. And for the most part, we knew that many of our parents really didn't care that much — mine did, of course.

Dan: We were not quite that awful, but to say the least, my friends and I were not model students either. Of course, we were forced to go to religious school, so you can imagine what kind of motivated students we were. Still, I think we would have behaved a lot better if the material had been more interesting and the teachers weren't so terrible.

Gil: In retrospect, some of my teachers were okay. I think a big problem was the curriculum. Like the emphasis on Hebrew. Trying to teach Hebrew in just a few hours a week was hopeless. I'm not sure why they even tried.

"I wish I had been taught why I was having a bar mitzvah, not just how to have one."

Dan: I believe trying to teach a few words of conversation and how to read a foreign alphabet is of marginal value. To me, that is not a method of teaching that will produce retainable and valuable knowledge.

Gil: It's especially futile when the kids know that they are stuck in Hebrew school while all of their friends are home playing or in Little League.

Dan: That competition for time is always going to exist. So, given the precious few hours we have to teach most kids, if it were up to me, I'd be teaching more about the values and spirit behind the law versus the letter of the law. Like for my bar mitzvah, I learned how to perform and chant — sort of, that is — but I didn't understand why I was even having a bar mitzvah. I wish I had been taught why I was having a bar mitzvah, not just how to have one.

Gil: I agree with you. In my opinion, far too much time is spent teaching how Jews do things as opposed to why we do things. Skills training versus values training. I think that too often the values training is missing completely. Now if you combine the two, you have a memorable and powerful learning experience.

Dan: That is the way I like to teach. Unfortunately, when I was in religious school that is not how I was taught. I learned a lot of “hows” that to a kid seemed dumb or outdated — frankly, even as an adult, some of the “hows” seem that way to me. But also as an adult, I've learned many wonderful “whys” of Judaism are behind most of the “hows.”

Gil: For example?

Dan: Well, one example would be the Sabbath — not that I observe the Sabbath. Still, as a kid I learned that there seem to be a zillion laws and prohibitions about the Sabbath — you know: don't ride, don't work, don't write, don't touch money. When I was younger, no one ever told me that protecting the environment is one of the reasons behind these laws.

“If kids are going to really learn and accept their Judaism... they need credible explanations. ...they [also] need to be taught some realistic ideas about God and spirituality.”

Gil: I didn't learn that until I was an adult either. For that matter, as an adult, I've learned that Judaism is very concerned with the environment. In fact, I recently found that there is a national organization that publishes all kinds of great material about Judaism and the environment.

Dan: I spend a lot of time in my public school classes teaching my kids about the environment—they eat it up. Jewish kids would probably think it's cool that Judaism cares about it, too. But more than being "cool," it would be important for them to know that about Judaism.

Gil: I think so. I think that not only would they find it interesting, they would find it appealing and relevant and a reason to be proud to be Jewish. As opposed to what you and I were taught: the prohibitions of the Sabbath. I think most kids—and adults—dismiss that as old-fashioned craziness.

Dan: We don't give kids enough credit—they're pretty smart. I believe kids can not only handle explanations, they need explanations—the "whys"—they seem to crave that. If the explanation makes sense, they'll buy it. If my explanation is weak, or worse, if they are just told with no explanation that "that's just the way things are done," they just reject my idea. They may not say so, but I can tell they are thinking, as you put it, that what I'm telling them is "craziness, but we gotta do it, 'cause the teacher says so."

Gil: I agree, kids are smart little critters. I watch in amazement how they manipulate adults, especially their parents.

Dan: They can be very critical thinkers as well. From an educational point of view, if kids are going to really learn and accept their Judaism, I'm with you, they need credible explanations. I also think they need to be taught some realistic ideas about God and spirituality.

Gil: Maybe a kid in nursery school can only handle an image of an old man with a gray beard as God. But I think older kids—and probably the younger ones as well—deserve and can handle much more

than that. I've seen books that do a wonderful job of talking to kids about spirituality and God.

Dan: I've also seen some great kids' books that were simple, yet even I found them stimulating. This is also what Jewish education should be emphasizing. But I've got to tell you, as a teacher, it's not realistic to expect a school to accomplish a lot unless the parents are on board.

Gil: I don't think that will happen with Jewish education unless Jewish parents are more excited about wanting Judaism for their kids and reinforcing that in their homes and lives. I believe that children need memories of good Jewish experiences for Judaism to stick. Much of that has to come from their parents.

Dan: How do you do that? It seems most Jewish parents had fairly lean Jewish upbringings and crummy Jewish educations themselves. How do you get them excited and motivated to create good Jewish memories for their kids after that?

Gil: It's not easy. It may not be possible for everyone. Still, I think it is possible. If people are willing and open, they can find much in Judaism to get excited about. From what people have told me, major life events are when they seem most open and willing to examine or reexamine their Judaism — like the birth or bar or bat mitzvah of a child, the death or illness of a parent, or a trip to Israel as an adult.

Dan: In my case, it was a career change and a divorce. It took a lot of searching — and Judaism was not one of the places I originally searched. But eventually I did conclude that Judaism had much to offer me and is worth perpetuating. That's why I say, when I have my own kids some day, I want them to know Judaism.

Gil: I reached a similar conclusion, not just because I think Judaism had something for me, but also because I think Jews and Judaism have given the world so much. I think we have made the world a more civilized place.

Dan: Don't you think that's a little overstated?

Gil: I admit that it sounds grandiose. But here is how I came to that conclusion: Most of Jewish history is filled with stories of our neighbors hating and hurting us in terrible ways. Combine that with the fact that we're a tiny sliver of the humanity that has inhabited earth. In spite of those two facts, we have given the world incredible achievements in almost all walks of life.

Dan: How about sports?

Gil: I did say “almost.” Actually there are good examples in sports, but if you want, skip that one, look at music, literature, law, journalism, the physical and social sciences, medicine, psychology, technology. I could go on and on. Even Mark Twain noted our contributions.

Dan: The Mark Twain as in *Huckleberry Finn*?

Gil: The same one. I read an essay of his written in the late 1800s where he said that our numbers are so tiny that we're like stardust in the Milky Way. In spite of our tiny numbers, he marveled that Jews have made huge, disproportionate contributions to the world in every realm — and as he put it, we did all this with our hands tied behind our backs. I read recently that Jews are about $\frac{1}{3}$ of 1 percent of the world's population, but we're the holders of 18 percent of all Nobel prizes ever awarded. I find that mind-boggling.

Dan: That is mind-boggling, especially if I step away and try to objectively observe what has happened to Jews over the centuries. Logically I would predict that at worst we would be gone by now, at best we would be a bitter, downtrodden people. Really, it is amazing that we have become the opposite — an optimistic people that has contributed and achieved so much. If more Jews thought

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about that, that alone could be a reason to become more excited about Judaism.

Gil: I'd say it's a reason to be proud. But there is so much more to Judaism. I heard once that Judaism is like a diamond. Every time you shine a light on it, different facets will reflect back at you.

Dan: That's good. But still, I get back to the question: How do you get Jews interested in shining a light on the diamond in the first place?

Gil: I think they would be interested if more time was spent giving Jews answers to the question: Why should I be Jewish? And those answers should use terms and concepts that people today can relate to.

Dan: Like what?

Gil: Like talking about Judaism as a rich way of life that you can enter through what I call Jewish E.S.P.: Jewish ethics, Jewish spirituality, and Jewish peoplehood.

Dan: I've never heard Judaism described or defined in those terms before.

Gil: They may be new terms, but the ideas are quite old.

Dan: What do you mean?

Gil: Traditionally, the three components of Judaism — ethics, spirituality, and peoplehood — have always been emphasized as sacred. But for generations our rabbis and texts have used three different words: Torah, God, and Israel.

“Traditionally, the three components of Judaism — ethics, spirituality, and peoplehood — have been emphasized as sacred. But for generations our rabbis and texts have used three different words: Torah, God, and Israel.”

Dan: I can relate better to your words.

Gil: Me, too, that's why I use them — but they are really the same thing. Part of teaching Jews today should be using the words of today.

Dan: In education, that's fairly obvious — at least it is in secular education. After all, we no longer teach English using the language of Shakespeare or Chaucer. Yet we do still teach about the work of these authors.

Gil: If we use language that people will understand, we can still teach about great works. But if people can't relate to the language, the great work doesn't seem so great.

Dan: All children's books and teaching are examples of that. For that matter, all effective education is. You take challenging material and make it understandable, relevant, and personal. It seems like common sense, but it also just seems to be missing in Jewish education.

Gil: It shouldn't be, though. To use your words, I've found very understandable, relevant, and personal answers to the question: Why be Jewish?

Dan: How do you answer?

Gil: I've come up with different answers. In philosophical terms, I like Judaism's belief in the great potential of people to do and be good. More personally, I tell myself and my kids that Judaism makes me proud, it makes me think, it makes me feel connected, it gives me guidance to

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be a better person, and when I'm lost or lonely, it gives me roots and comfort. And it always gives me family and extended family. All in all, it helps give my life meaning. As my kids have gotten older, I've also told them that I don't know if it's the best system in the world, but I think it's an incredibly good and intelligent system, and I feel lucky to call it mine. I want it to belong to my kids too.

Dan: I don't feel I've studied Judaism enough to be able to say all that. But I will say, whenever I've looked into something Jewish, I've found a tremendous amount of careful thought and wisdom.

Gil: *That is what I've concluded, and I say that based on asking one heck of a lot of questions about Judaism in recent years: hard ones, simple ones, angry ones, dumb ones, rebellious ones. In the process, I've also learned that asking questions is very Jewish.*

Dan: That's another thing I've found that, as a teacher, I especially like — Judaism has great respect for questions and critical thinking.

Gil: *That's true. I've always admired that traditional Jewish study is with a partner, to encourage questions and critique. Personally, I love to ask questions and I ask anyone. I asked you questions. I've asked relatives, friends, teachers, authors, rabbis. I've been amazed — most people are more than willing to answer and share their opinions. I think offering opinions must be Jewish too. Anyway, I've also found a lot of answers and even more questions in books.*

Dan: I don't mind asking questions, but when it comes to reading, I'm buried. I always have a pile of things waiting for me that I'm behind on. I barely seem to get through the daily newspaper.

Gil: *I could probably save you a lot of time and work by sending you the names of a few of the places where I've found some of the best answers — written concisely in plain English. If you're interested, you can take a look at whatever you have time for.*

Dan: I'd appreciate that.

Key Points to Hold Onto

Chapter 7: “Hebrew School Was Worthless and Boring”

- Trying to teach the Hebrew language in a few hours a week is not likely to succeed.
- We should spend a lot more time teaching “Why be Jewish” versus “How to be Jewish.” For example, children should learn “why” they are having a bar/bat mitzvah, not just “how” to chant or perform for their bar/bat mitzvah.
- Children should be shown that Judaism is relevant and valuable — for example, the wonderful Jewish values about the environment.
- Children should be taught about Jewish spirituality in meaningful ways.
- For Jewish education to work, parents must be supportive and reinforce Judaism at home and in life.
- Adults and children should be shown that Judaism is multifaceted, rich, and has made huge contributions to the world.
- This richness has three places you can enter: Ethics, Spirituality, and Peoplehood. These are modern words that Jews today may have an easier time relating to than the traditional words: Torah, God, and Israel.
- Questioning is a key to learning more about Judaism. To question is very Jewish.

Afterthoughts

Many people told me that they could relate to the topics discussed in this chapter. (Not only that, on two separate occasions, single women asked me if Dan was “available” — no joke!) The need for quality Jewish education (and men) is obvious.

As the chapter mentioned, Jewish education has problems with curriculum, some teachers, and too much emphasis on teaching how to be Jewish versus why be Jewish. Those problems are hard for most of us to impact immediately and change — though we should try. We need to be talking to principals, teachers, and boards and demanding quality.

There is a problem that we can have an impact on immediately: us. I believe that one of the serious problems facing Jewish education is parental support or lack thereof. Far too many parents do not push their kids to acquire Jewish knowledge. After all, we never saw any value in it, and in the final analysis, to get into a good college, your grades from Hebrew school are of no consequence. When I was in Hebrew school — and I have heard this remains the case today — parents allowed their kids to behave in ways that they would never tolerate in secular school. Plus, many parents feel that going to a second school after school robs their children of valuable extracurricular opportunities.

One parent told me a story of his kid telling him he hated “Talmud Torture” (as opposed to the correct name for the school: Talmud Torah) and wanted to quit. His response was, “I hated Talmud Torture, too, and when I told my father, he said he hated it, too, but he had to go. I had to go, and so do you.” Even without being this explicit, kids can tell how their parents feel, and consequently, the chances of acquiring much in religious school are low.

This scenario reminds me of a lesson about how parents should transmit Judaism to their children that I heard from Dr. Ron Wolfson from the University

of Judaism. He said he was on an airplane and gave some thought to the instructions routinely given by the flight attendant that “in the event of sudden cabin decompression, an oxygen mask will fall out of the panel in front of you... blah, blah, blah.” The part that got his attention was: “If you are traveling with young children, place your mask on first before attending to your child.”

At first blush, this instruction is counterintuitive. We always tend to our children first — especially in cases of emergency. Of course we all understand why in this case we must put our mask on first. If we were to pass out, there would be no hope for either ourselves or our children. Plus, we must model for our children that placing a mask on your face is not scary — in fact, it’s a must.

The same is true for showing our children that we see value in Judaism. If we don’t breathe Judaism, then neither will our kids. What we model at home and in our conversations in front of our kids is critical. When people told me of their fond memories of learning about Judaism, most revolved around family traditions, routines, and customs that they cherished. I should add that several people also appreciated that their parents had sent them to Jewish summer camps, where they had positive Jewish educational experiences.

If we want our children to perpetuate Judaism — and many people told me that they did want that — then we must personally take the steps necessary to show our kids how. It might mean learning with our kids. (By the by, for several years I took piano lessons together with my son. It was fun and most rewarding to study together. To prepare for his bar mitzvah, I hired a teacher and we spent several months studying his bar mitzvah Torah portion together in English. That was even more rewarding!) We need to say and do things that show our kids that we value Judaism as much as we value math, literature, science — piano — and the other sources of knowledge we feel our children should have to lead good and productive lives.

Again, I want to say that the steps, if any, that you care to take are a personal decision. If you are interested, some suggestions are listed on the next couple of pages.

Questions From This Chapter You May Wish to Ponder

- How would you like your children's or grandchildren's Jewish education to be different from yours?
- What would you need to do to make sure it was different?
- What knowledge do you believe is most important for children to learn for them to lead a life that is both good and productive?

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Dear Dan:

Thanks for speaking with me the other day. I appreciated hearing your point of view. As I promised you, I went to my computer, files, and bookshelves to find some things for you to look at that I thought you would like.

I found so many quality options that I had a hard time deciding what to choose. There's lots more where this came from, but here are a few highlights that I found inviting.

Again, this is by no means a complete list; still, this is a pretty good start. You can also find this material and much more on my website, **www.BeingJewish.org** (click on links). I have found these materials and organizations to be engaging, inspiring, and thought-provoking. I hope you do too.

Talk to you soon,



Gil

P.S. FYI, I included 2 good quotes (one written by a non-Jew, by the way) that I thought added some insight to our "Why be Jewish?" discussion. They're a little on the lofty side, still, I liked them — see what you think.

Super Short Bibliography of Good Jewish Places to Explore

Books

To Life, by Harold Kushner, published by Little and Brown

A very readable, sensible, and enjoyable explanation of Judaism, by the author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. This book is especially good for anyone who had a bad Hebrew school experience.

The Nine Questions People Ask About Judaism, by Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, published by Touchstone, Simon & Schuster

A skeptic's guide to Judaism that answers questions such as: Why do we need organized religion? How does Judaism differ from Christianity, Marxism, Communism, and Humanism? and seven more tough questions.

Celebrate! The Complete Jewish Holidays Handbook, by Lesli Koppelman Ross, published by Jason Aronson

A nondenominational reference guide that has enough information in it to keep you going forever. This book explains many of the "hows" as well as the "whys" behind Jewish celebrations and traditions. Great for families — offers further reading options for kids and adults.

Jewish Literacy, by Joseph Telushkin, published by Morrow

346 brief entries on the essentials of Judaism, organized by subject. This plain English and entertaining book is a tremendous source of knowledge. Looking up one entry, it's easy to get caught up reading entry after entry — it's like eating Frito Lay potato chips — bet you can't read just one!

It's a Mitzvah! Step by Step to Jewish Living, by Bradley Artson, published by Behrman House

If you think the Jewish code of behavior is outdated, this book will change your mind. It offers hundreds of modern, meaningful, and practical ways to practice Judaism — from protecting the environment to helping the homeless. It covers traditional ritual practices as well. As a bonus, it is filled with wonderful photos.

For a helpful catalog of Jewish books, send \$5.00 and request *How to Build Your Home Jewish Library* from:

Jewish Book Council
15 East 26th St.
New York, NY 10010
Web: <http://www.jewishbookscouncil.org>

Internet

There are thousands of Jewish "places to visit" on the internet. One way to start is to go to the Jewish search engine: www.maven.co.il

The first place I invite you to explore is the website based on this book:

www.BeingJewish.org

As a result of my work on this book and the thousands of emails I have received since it was first published, I know that many people are searching for ways to find more meaning and relevance in Judaism. Through my website, I hope to help, by providing friendly and inviting articles, ideas and resources. Also posted here is a column I write called Jewish Email of the Week, that is a public response to an anonymous email sent to me. Everything on my site is designed to allow you to easily access the three components of the Jewish Way of Life covered in this book: Ethics, Spirituality, and Peoplehood. Please come visit!

While you can discover countless Jewish websites on your own, I will recommend six of them:

www.ujc.org/ir_home.html

If you are looking for Jewish community and Jewish organizations, this site has a huge number of resources. You can search geographically or by interest. Contacts can be found here for everything from circumcisions to Jewish Federations to youth groups and many things in between. This site is a wonderful place to help you connect.

www.myjewishlearning.com

Want to learn more about Judaism or find some "how to" information? You're in luck! A lot of resources have gone into this site to provide you with information (and even courses) on a myriad of Jewish topics. Major categories include holidays, lifecycle, text, ideas and belief, culture, daily life, practice, and history. This site offers something for everyone whether, you're insecure about your level of Jewish knowledge or want to add to your knowledge base — and you can do your learning from the comfort of home!

www.jewishfamily.com

This is a great Jewish online magazine you may want to check out called Jewish Family Life. It has articles about parenting, answers to children's questions about Judaism (like "Can I visit Santa at the Mall?") interviews with famous Jews, areas about food, travel, etc. You can also interact with the magazine and other readers through your computer.

www.convert.org

If you know somebody who is interested in converting to Judaism — or you simply want to learn more about Judaism — this welcoming site is a great place to start. Here you will find information about the differences between Judaism and Christianity, dealing with sensitive relationship issues, the names of over 70 rabbis of all denominations who perform conversions, and much more.

www.interfaithfamily.com

Well known today is the phenomenon of Jews marrying non-Jews. This website candidly addresses the challenges faced by intermarried families and their extended families (like in-laws and grandparents). The site offers a Jewish perspective while respecting the faith of others. Look here for resources and links covering many topics like religious holidays, lifecycle events, outreach programming, and more.

www.Jewish.com

This general Jewish site has a wide range of Jewish information covering many aspects of Judaism. Some of the topics you can pursue here are holiday information, ask a rabbi, recipes, book reviews, Jewish news, and more. They post many columns I have written in response to questions readers have emailed to me. To find these columns, enter “Gil Mann” in their search feature. They also have a Jewish store as a part of their site so you can find a Jewish gift for yourself or others.

Magazines

The Jerusalem Report

Every 2 weeks this wonderful magazine comes out, and I can't wait to read it. Offering a clear and inviting format similar to *Time* or *Newsweek*, they cover the Jewish world like no one else—especially when it comes to news about Israel. You can count on their news, photographs, reviews, and columnists to provide valuable and thought-provoking insights into the Jewish world. To subscribe, contact:

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Moment

If you want to delve deeper into modern Jewish subjects, this high-quality magazine is for you. In a serious but easy to read format, they examine such issues as "Is Hollywood Too Jewish?" "Right and Left Positions on The Middle East Peace Process," "Bridging the Gap Between American and Israeli Jews," and many others. They also have regular features like reviews, columns, and articles about Jewish Holidays. To subscribe contact:

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Video and Multimedia

The Jewish Video Catalog from Ergo Media, Inc.

Ergo has come up with an impressive assortment of Jewish videos. They also offer Judaica on CD-ROM for your computer. The variety of topics covers the gamut from history to cooking to drama. Many of their offerings are award winners. Regardless of your interests, you are bound to find something in their catalog that catches your attention. For a free catalog, contact them at:

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Web: <http://www.jewishvideo.com>

Kids' Stuff

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Sisu Entertainment
18 West 27th St., 10th Floor
New York, NY 10001
Contact: 1-800-223-7978
Web: <http://www.sisuent.com>

Also, *The Jewish Video Catalog* listed above has videos for kids.

Kids' Books

In God's Name, by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, published by Jewish Lights

This beautiful little book is a nice way to introduce a child to the idea of God. For that matter, adults could use the book for the same purpose. The story it tells is simple, yet profound.

The Five Books of Moses for Young People, by Esta Cassway, published by Jason Aronson

If you want to introduce elementary school children to the Jewish master stories of the Bible, this is the book for you. This author has a way of speaking to children. Even though the book refers to God as a He, I think most adults and children would really appreciate this effort to make the Bible understandable and captivating.

Organizations

You may wish to contact one or more of the following, depending on your interests:

Environment:

Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life: Caring for the environment is what these people are about. They can show you a rich Jewish tradition in environmentalism that will make you proud and help make this a safer, cleaner planet.

443 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10016
Phone: 212-684-6950
Web: <http://www.coejl.org>

Feeding the Hungry:

Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger: These folks set out to capture three percent of what Jews spend on food at parties, bar/bat mitzvahs, Passover seders, and so on, and distribute the money to the hungry. Today they are considered one of the leading hunger-fighting organizations in the world. This is another organization that will make you proud to be Jewish. Reach them at:

Mazon
1990 South Bundy Drive, Suite 260
Los Angeles, CA 90025-5232
Phone: 310-442-0020
Web: <http://www.mazon.org>

Health:

National Center for Jewish Healing: If you are hurting, know someone who is ill, or are in the medical profession — do yourself a favor and call these people. They can show you that Judaism is an incredibly therapeutic and compassionate tradition.

National Center for Jewish Healing
850 7th Avenue, Suite 1201
New York, NY 10019
Phone: 212-399-2320

Jewish Ritual/Hebrew:

National Jewish Outreach Program: Want to learn to read Hebrew in just 7½ hours, or want a crash course in the basics of traditional Judaism or celebrating a traditional Sabbath? These folks offer such courses all over the country — call or write them at:

NJOP
989 6th Avenue, 10th Floor
New York, NY 10018
Phone: 1-800-44HEBREW
Web: <http://www.njop.org>

Spirituality:

National Havurah Committee: If you want to meet people in your area who are interested in exploring Jewish spirituality in small group settings, this committee is for you. They are a central address for havurahs all over the country. You can contact them at:

National Havurah Committee
7135 Germantown Avenue — Second Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19119-1824
Phone: 215-248-1335
Web: <http://www.havurah.org>

A History of the Jews

by Paul Johnson

Excerpted from the introduction to *A History of the Jews*:

Is history merely a series of events whose sum is meaningless? Is there no fundamental moral difference between the history of the human race and the history, say, of ants? Or is there a providential plan of which we are, however humbly, the agents? No people has ever insisted more firmly than the Jews that history has a purpose and humanity a destiny. At a very early stage in their collective existence they believed they had detected a divine scheme for the human race, of which their own society was to be a pilot. They worked out their role in immense detail. They clung to it with heroic persistence in the face of savage suffering. Many of them believe it still. Others transmuted it into Promethean endeavors to raise our condition by purely human means. The Jewish vision became the prototype for many similar grand designs for humanity, the perennial attempt to give human life the dignity of a purpose.

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"...We are people of memory and prayer. We are people of words and hope. We have neither established empires nor built castles and palaces. We have only placed words on top of each other. We have fashioned ideas; we have built memorials. We have dreamed towers of yearnings — of Jerusalem rebuilt, of Jerusalem united, of a peace that will be swiftly and speedily established in our days."

Israeli President Ezer Weizman
Speech to the German legislature
January 16, 1996