Erev Rosh Hashanah 2024
Rabbi Megan Brumer

If you walk into my parents' house, it is hard to miss that we are Jewish. In addition to the *mezuzah* on the door, there is Judaica on every wall and in every glass storage cabinet. There is a collection of *dreidels* on the table in the walkway and a rug on the wall that says *L'dor V'dor*, from generation to generation.

I am sure it didn't help that my sisters and I went to a Jewish day school and in addition to all the individual art projects we brought home, my mom would try to buy our class's art projects at the school auction.

Last year, when I was organizing my apartment after moving, I needed to find a place for all my Judaica. I have my *Shabbat* and *Havdalah* set I got from camp, my *hanukkiah* that I "borrowed" from my mom, as well as my *Seder* plate which I also took from home. There were also Shabbat candles, Hanukkah candles, and Havdalah candles. When I was organizing, I couldn't figure out where to put it all, so I made a "Jewish" drawer that now holds my Jewish ritual objects, other than the hanukkiah that's displayed on my shelf.

A few years ago when I attended an iCenter conference, I learned about overt versus covert education. When you think of education, you probably think of overt education, visible and out there. However, there is also a lot of covert education going on in a school room; think about the posters on a wall and the way one sets up a classroom.

In a Jewish home, most education I find is covert education. You have your display of Judaica, or a mezuzah on your door, but people don't actively talk about them. They aren't used as conversation starters or as ways to teach a child or grandchild about Jewish rituals or history.

When you sit down for family dinner, what can people see around you? When you look around, what are you teaching?

Jewish objects can lead to a connection to Judaism. As we say at summer camp, everything is a Jewish teachable moment.

I bet somewhere in your house, there is a closet full of Judaica. I know not everyone has a large home—I have a small apartment with only one little shelf—but I want us to think about what would happen if we took out the Judaica we've stashed away. Took them out of the kitchen drawer and the dining room cabinet. Hiding them away removes the opportunity to teach friends and family about the objects or tell stories about them.

I know many of our ritual objects are seasonal and there is no need to have a hanukkiah displayed in February, or a seder plate out in October, but just like your mother's china that is passed down from generation to generation, ritual objects also have histories. Some objects you might have received from family members, and some you bought yourself. Some you might have bought while on a trip,

and some in a store down the street. You might be thinking of eventually passing down some of these objects to your children and grandchildren.

Sometimes we don't want to display something because it is not our style, or it doesn't make sense in the space. We think of our Judaism as only coming out at certain times of the year, but we are Jewish 24/7 and it's wonderful to show it.

This past year in the aftermath of October 7 and the rise of antisemitism, some people are afraid to be outwardly Jewish in public. I will admit, for the first few weeks after October 7 I was ready to tuck my Jewish star necklace into a shirt. I couldn't hide my ring, so I took it off. However, I then realized that I am proud of my Judaism, proud to be Jewish, and a few weeks later I put it back on. Side note: I never tucked in my star.

An article on *Kveller*'s website asked parents how they were handling Jewish fear and pride. Many parents said they told their children to hide their Jewish stars or not tell people that they were Jewish. Some even took their mezuzah off their door. At the same time, others wanted to be visibly Jewish, wearing their Judaica with pride, taking them out of boxes where they were stored away. Others put up Hanukkah decorations or wore their Stand with Israel T-shirt to school pickup.[1]

After October 7, many people wore their Jewish star with *kavanah*, with intention. It was a way that they could connect to Judaism and connect to the millions of people around the world who were feeling the same way they were. *HeyAlma*, another Jewish website, asked their community what Jewish rituals they were practicing after October 7, and one respondent answered that they were wearing a Jewish-star necklace for the first time in 20 years.[2]

On social media, there is an Instagram account called @whyiwearmystar that gives firsthand accounts of why people decide to wear their Jewish star. They revived the account after October 7. Here is what some people wrote:[3]

Emily in New York City wrote: "I wear my star because I want the world to know how much I love being Jewish. My star constantly reminds me of who I am and where I come from. Fear won't govern me. I will never hide who I am."

Nathaneal from Denver wrote: "I wear mine as the great-grandson and grandson of Shoah survivors. They tried to denigrate us by having us wear it. The Magen David is our strength. It is with pride I wear it."

Another person in New York City wrote: "I started wearing my Jewish star after October 7 because I wanted everyone to know I was Jewish and brave, even if I didn't feel brave."

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[1] https://www.kveller.com/how-parents-are-handling-jewish-fear-and-pride/
[2] https://www.heyalma.com/if-youre-turning-to-new-jewish-rituals-right-now-youre-not-alone/
[3] https://www.instagram.com/whyiwearmystar/

Throughout Jewish history and in our stories, our ancestors have been forced to hide their Jewish identity in order to survive. We think about the Jews in Europe during the forced conversion periods or Jews during the Holocaust. We know that many people had to hide themselves during the Holocaust. Children were sent to non-Jewish families and told never to mention that they were Jewish. Even my grandfather and his parents had to hide under a farmhouse in the countryside for nine months to survive the Holocaust in Ukraine. There might be people in your family or in your circles who had to hide, too.

Then there is the story of Esther. When Esther went to King Achashverosh's pageant, her uncle Mordecai told her to hide her Judaism or she wouldn't be chosen as queen. Esther did as he suggested and was chosen. When Haman planned to kill all the Jews, she bravely went to the king and told him that she was Jewish and Haman had a plan to kill her and her family. Because King Achashverosh loved her so dearly, Esther flipped the murder decree on its head, saved the Jewish people, and Haman and his followers were killed.

Let's be proud of our Judaism in the face of hate and negativity, even when we are afraid. We are a people who have survived time and time again.

We don't need to hide our Judaism, we can be outwardly Jewish and proud of our religion.

My guess is that you have Jewish ritual objects in your home. This year, to show your Jewish pride, display your stories. They jog our memory, they remind us of wonderful times. They also remind us of people