



My journey



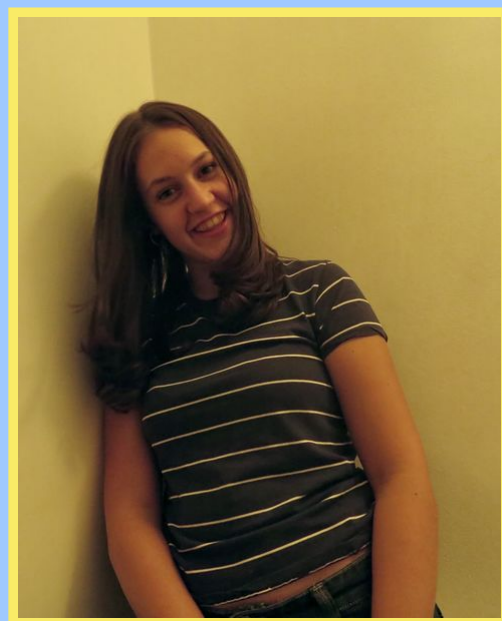
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Experiencing antisemitism firsthand taught me both the vulnerability and strength of belonging to a minority, and today I see my Judaism not as an obligation, but as a privilege, a community, and a lifelong source of values I want to pass on.



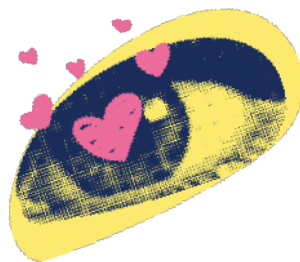
I grew up in the Diaspora identifying as a Jew in a liberal family.

My ancestors, however, were a bit different. My paternal great grandmother came from a small village and a close-knit Jewish community. She underwent the cataclysm of Auschwitz, but she kept her strong traditions. Her notebook containing her recipes provides us with Shabbat dinners to this day.

Every Friday, we go to my grandmother's apartment for Shabbat. We all have dinner together: my cousins, my sisters, my mom, dad, uncle and aunt sit around this incredibly small oval oakwood table, and we eat until we dive head into a food coma. During dinner, we discuss events of the week, every single member of my family tries to talk over the other, different stories, questions, disputes, achievements pile up on Friday nights.



When I was younger, me, my two smaller cousins and my sister killed time by playing boardgames, going outside on my grandma's balcony where she had all her plants, creating or discovering forts, but most of the time we all just laughed. I remember jumping on my grandmother's bed a lot and calling each other on inter-connected cord phones. When we grew out of that, we joined the adult conversation. My cousins used to cry when going home because they didn't want the night to end. This made me learn what Shabbat dinners are all about. These dinners happened because of my grandmother's strong desire to have them. And, as rumour has it, Jewish grandmas are insanely stubborn, so of course she effectuated the idea. I have the kind of grandma, whose first question about anyone new is whether they're Jewish or not. My grandmother always perplexed me with her recipes. I think the only thing that makes my grandma fully content is food, anything that has to do with food: cooking, knowing that we are full, or receiving a compliment that she made something delicious. These feed her soul. My grandma always relishes having company on Friday nights. I always loved parodizing her prayers. I still laugh sometimes. Her peculiar Yiddish accent and tone always makes me crack up.



To be completely honest, even though I celebrate Shabbat, I always felt like it was a chore to be “Jewish”. My bat mitzvah taught me that it simply carries more. Regarding my bat mitzvah: I knew I would disappoint my dad if I didn't have one, so to fulfill my dad's wishes, I agreed. That's when my perception started to merge. I had to go to the synagogue every week to study with a Rabbi in order to be prepared for my bat mitzvah. So I did, and I studied and I quickly started to relate to Judaism, which was weird because I've always thought of it as something that's so hard to learn and integrate into everyday life. Formerly, I felt that it was just not for me, I never had the patience and diligence. It astonished me how the Rabbi would always welcome me. He taught me with patience and passion. I liked how he wanted to learn from me too. I fell in love with the local community so much that I started attending Shabbat there occasionally. I discovered all the colorful fun parts of being Jewish and experienced how there are so many different ways to be one. I felt it could align with my needs, goals and it even gave me connections, I felt accepted.



I was taught that my religion carried wisdom, knowledge, honor and power. Then, the bubble I was surrounded by suddenly popped. I realized what it was like to experience antisemitism in Hungary. I started to attend a debate club in a pretty competitive state school, where one kid I admired suddenly started to joke around: “I'm only hating on Jews because of historical reasons” - I was astonished by how confidently this smart kid could announce such a dumb statement. He proceeded to draw a swastika on the chalkboard. The people around me knew it was inappropriate, but they might have not cared enough or just were scared of confrontation, so they laughed it off quietly. Sometimes, I still ask myself what I should have done.

The seemingly best option I could think of, was to ask him why he feels this way, and try to learn how to deal with this type of behavior for later. It would have probably confused him and my goal would have been to make him think. So why didn't I react this way or report to the school?

I feared discrimination and fitting in in a new context: here I felt new, young, inexperienced and external to the school. I was there to learn from *them* and it was a privilege that I managed to arrange this quality of education by itself. I felt like I would be alienating them by being disgraceful rather than grateful for being in the best high school in the country.

While I felt outraged, I also thought arguing made little sense, as I felt the boy was using this as a curse word, and was not open for real arguments.

So staying silent might have been the best option for that time: it allowed me to fit in and build strength in the group. I decided to address him later, when we already knew each other and built trust, and became peers.

I value my Jewish roots, and I hope to share my life with someone who appreciates and honors them, regardless of their own background. I think I will try to keep Shabbat with my family every week, but I won't force my kids to keep it with their family. I believe in keeping the tradition alive, after all that is where I'm from, what I believe is beautiful and important. I will try to show them the experience I had growing up, maybe even breathe new life into mine. My goal is to show all the "pros" of being Jewish. I don't want it to feel like a burden, but a privilege.

You do not have to believe in G-d, in order to have a Jewish identity. I am part of the Jewish community here in Hungary and I have gained numerous friends by taking part in Jewish camps and some extracurricular activities. I participate in a program called "Sahar" in my school where I learn to teach kids about Jewish traditions and overall education with games. Throughout the mentor program, we each get a pair of our own and a class we have to teach. We have to prepare for classes with lesson plans and later also deliver them. I love how it works because it is not a frontal teaching method but an interactive one, where all opinions matter. Kids use their values, creativity, efforts and teamwork to create something extraordinary. What usually surprises others, is that I learn from it too, a lot which can guide me later in my life: self-awareness, how to present, work with kids, and overall grab attention. I attend the synagogue occasionally and it's always a miscellaneous activity to take part in. I never really pray, I usually meet and talk to so many people at once that I don't have the time. I meet acquaintances, I stumble into different important conversations, and see my family. A bit overwhelming, but worth it.

I was born with my Judaism, a treasure I grew up believing I had to bear. It gave me knowledge above all else. A different way of thinking and the sheer knowledge that anywhere I end up going in the world, there is a place and a community for me to feel welcomed. My family, my education, my values - genetically I'm 94% tied to this lineage, it lives in the way I was raised, the way I look, even in the way I talk. Parts of me will always contain fragments of my heritage. I will never ever be embarrassed, ashamed or abashed because I'm a Jew.