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College students are known to be trendsetters. They are the next generation of adults, and their actions often precede the social order of the future. They reject the ideas of their parents, grandparents, and ancestors, and form new ideas of their own. Unlike the [revolution of the 1960s](http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1979/2/79.02.03.x.html), the one occurring on college campuses today is much less obvious. Students do not discuss it, but it is true: religion is becoming something of infinitesimally smaller importance in their lives. This change can be described as a "secular revolution", one in which religion gets tossed aside and becomes a small part of the students' identity. While this is occurring in groups of students from all religions and countries, this website focuses specifically on the rise of secularism in Jewish college students in the United States.

There is no clear answer as to why Jewish college students are losing their religion. Some argue that the problem is not specific to Jewish students; it is happening within all religious groups, such as [Christians](http://www.christianity.com/), [Muslims](http://www.religionfacts.com/islam), [Hindus](https://www.himalayanacademy.com/readlearn/basics/nine-beliefs), and more. Young people these days simply do not have time for religion- it takes too much effort to go to Temple every Friday, or Church every Sunday. Many students have also become disillusioned with religion, either because it has not helped them find solutions to their problems, or because it has become very controversial. For example, religious arguments have been used to explain why gay marriage and abortion should not be legal, even though most students agree that they *should* be legal. Religious extremism also gives religion a bad name, and students simply do not want to be associated with any of that. When it comes to Jewish students, however, some argue that [anti-Semitism](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anti-semitism) may be the root of the problem.

When most people hear the word "Judaism", they think of religion. In today's world, Judaism does not mean the same thing as it did in the past. In a [survey](http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/) conducted by the Pew Research Center, the majority of self-identified Jewish people articulated that Judaism represents a cultural and ancestral group rather than a religious group. They are aware of their heritage and traditions, but they do not often participate in them.

There are different subsets of the Jewish community as well. The most religious Jews belong to the [Orthodox](http://www.orthodox-jews.com/#axzz3Yp9IA3FC) community, followed by [Conservative Jews](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/conservatives.html), [Reform Jews](http://www.reformjudaism.org/practice/what-reform-judaism), and Jews who simply do not have any religion. These groups differ in how often they attend religious services, the amount of religious holidays they celebrate (and to what extent), and how central the role of the Jewish religion is in their lives. These groups are also fluid- just because someone is born into one group does not mean they can switch over into another group in their adult lives. Now, I would like to go further into depth as to the reasons why Jewish college students are becoming more secular.

Between studying for exams, getting involved in clubs, and taking on leadership positions, college students are becoming ever more busy. With almost no time on their hands, it is nearly impossible for them to find time to participate in their religion. While there are some students who make religion a priority, many do not. This is because many students do not feel connected to their religion, and do not have the urge to become more involved within their religious community. Jewish students will not go to [Hillel](http://www.hillel.org/) every Friday night to participate in [Shabbat](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/shabbat.html) when it is not important to them- rather, they will do something that they think is more worthwhile, such as studying or meeting with a friend. This ties in to another large reason that students do not make the effort to participate in their religion- it will not land them a [job upon graduation](http://www.newyorkfed.org/research/current_issues/ci20-1.pdf). What will land them a job, however, are the grades they make and the leadership positions they take.

The way that a Jewish child is raised can also have a significant impact on their level of religiosity when they go to college. As stated in the [video](http://youtu.be/x_F0OxwlT0s), if a child is raised more [Orthodox](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/Orthodox.html) or [Conservative](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/conservatives.html), then they are likely to place a higher value on their religion and make it a priority throughout the rest of their life. If a child is raised on the [Reform](http://www.reformjudaism.org/practice/what-reform-judaism) or [Non-Denominational](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/non-denominational-post-denominational/) side, then they are less likely to see religion as something of importance and more of a cultural background that they have.

There are two experiences that most Jewish children have growing up- attending [Hebrew School](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/how-to-choose-a-hebrew-school/4/), and having a [Bar/Bat Mitzvah](http://judaism.about.com/od/lifeevents/a/whatisabarmitzvah.htm) when they become 13 years of age. Children who attend Hebrew School are more educated about their religion, and are thus more likely to understand why it is important. If a child does not attend or drops out, they are less likely to know anything about their religion and will thus dismiss it for more secular pursuits later in life.

The completion of Hebrew School is usually marked by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, a "coming of age" celebration that occurs when the child turns 13. Some children have these celebrations even if they did not attend Hebrew School. Rather, their families hire a tutor to teach them their [Torah portion](http://www.bar-mitzva.com/kriote.asp) for the service. Although this still satisfies the requirement to become a B'nai Mitzvah, these children lack the formal education of their peers who attended Hebrew School.

As for the children who did attend Hebrew School, some of them may go on to attend Hebrew High School, and others will cease their Jewish education completely. There are also Jewish high schools such as [this one](http://www.heschel.org/) in New York City, where a traditional high school education is mixed with a Jewish education.

Religious learning can also happen outside the classroom- Jewish day camps such as [this one](http://www.miyjccsummercamp.org/#!camp-brochure/c1ki) in Long Island, New York combine the traditional summer camp experience with infusions of Jewish culture.

On a different note, as increasing amounts of young people become more in favor of [gay marriage](http://www.debate.org/gay-marriage/) and begin to view [homosexuality](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/homosexuality) as something that is natural, rather than a choice or a sin, they are shifting into a stance that differs from that of religion. Although the Jewish religion does not denounce homosexuality as openly as other [religions](https://carm.org/christianity-and-homosexuality) do, it is still not in favor of it, causing young Jews to lose faith in their religion. The younger generation tends to stick with their moral values over their religious values, and they will continue to support gay marriage and [gay rights](https://www.aclu.org/issues/lgbt-rights) regardless of what their religion says. [Orthodox Judaism](http://www.orthodox-jews.com/#axzz3YC2b9D00) is most likely to denounce homosexuality because it has a strict following of the [Bible](https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/Complete-Jewish-Bible-CJB/), while [Reform Judaism](http://www.reformjudaism.org/practice/what-reform-judaism), which does not follow the Bible as strictly, is less likely to convey as strong of a negative opinion on the subject. Regardless of what sect a young Jew belongs to, they are not likely to be in favor of their religion's standpoint on homosexuality, and will not look to Judaism as a moral guideline on the subject.

Jewish extremism also gives the Jewish religion a bad name. When one thinks of religious extremism, the [Middle East](http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/me.htm) usually comes to mind. When one thinks of the Middle East, [Arabs](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/arab) usually come to mind. [Israelis](http://embassies.gov.il/delhi/AboutIsrael/history/Pages/People%20of%20Israel.aspx) are viewed as the victims of religious [extremism](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/extremism), but at times, they are responsible for these attacks as well. The more these attacks occur, the more that the Jewish religion is given a bad name. Suddenly, walking around with a [yarmulke](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/yarmulke) may exude the same sense of alarm as walking around with a [turban](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/turban). Media coverage of Arabs and Jews varies completely, and it will take a long time before Jews are seen in the same light (if ever), but most young people feel that the safest thing to do is to not display their religion at all, for fear of association with extremism. Not all Muslims and Arabs believe in the same radical views as organizations such as [ISIS](http://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/religion-geopolitics/commentaries/backgrounder/what-isis) and [Al-Qaeda](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/734613/al-Qaeda), and not all Jews believe in the same radical views as the Jewish extremists. Unfortunately, they will be stereotyped by association, and in order to avoid that, they try to remain as secular as possible.

If you belong to any religious, cultural, or distinct group, it is inevitable that you will be the victim of stereotyping based on your belonging to this group. While stereotyping is not violent, it can ultimately [lead to violence](http://weebly-file/4/8/1/1/48118333/430_pyramid.jpg). Jewish people fall under certain stereotypes- there is that of the nagging Jewish mother, the Jewish-American Princess (JAP for short), and the nice Jewish boy. While not all of these stereotypes are seen as negative, they are still not representative of the Jewish population and are misleading. Some people may feel ashamed to be Jewish because of these stereotypes, and that is why they need to be broken down.

One place we see Jewish stereotypes is on television. Watch the hyperlinked video clips and you will see blatant examples of this. [Janice Litman](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QnQ3MWp6tI) from "Friends" (played by Maggie Wheeler) has a distinctly nasal voice and wears expensive looking clothing, portraying her as a JAP. [Fran Fine](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YadrmuebdGg) from "The Nanny" (played by Fran Drescher) also has these qualities. Finally, the entire cast of Bravo's "[Princesses: Long Island](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7MNELrImcQ)" perfectly portray this stereotype, embarrassing other members of the Jewish community.

Anti-Semitism is also a large problem on American college campuses, causing some Jewish students to feel unsafe. According to [Merriam-Webster](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anti-semitism), anti-Semitism can be defined as "hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious, ethnic, or racial group." Notice how this definition includes all definitions for Jewish people, even those that are not very religious. This means that regardless of how often a student goes to temple or wears a [yarmulke](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/yarmulke) around campus, if a perpetrator knows that a student is Jewish, they can be subject to any sort of anti-Semitic attack. While these types of attacks happen among Jews of all ages, they are extremely prevalent on college campuses in the United States. In this current school year alone, there have been multiple crimes targeting Jewish students. Some notable examples over time include incidents at universities like Emory and Cornell. This goes to show that even at some of the nation's most prestigious colleges and universities, these events still occur. A list of the 10 most anti-Semitic college campuses in the United States can be found [here](http://www.truthrevolt.org/commentary/10-worst-anti-semitic-campuses).

One example of anti-Semitism recently occurred at Emory University. During the early morning hours of Sunday, October 5, 2014, [swastikas](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Swastika.html) were spray-painted on the Alpha Epsilon Pi fraternity house there. The [fraternity](http://www.aepi.org/) is nationally Jewish, so it was clear that the attacker meant to intimidate the Jewish students living inside the house, as well as the rest of Emory's Jewish community. The crime was committed on the weekend of [Yom Kippur](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/holiday4.html), one of the most sacred Jewish holidays. A quote from the fraternity brothers provides an accurate summary of how they felt:

*"The prejudiced individuals who conducted this outrageous offense succeeded in the intentions of making us feel unwelcomed, ostracized, and unsafe in this ”home” we call Emory University. This egregious act has not only impacted our fraternity brothers but there is no doubt that it has also distressed and frightened the entire Emory community."*

Although the act was deplorable, the response from the Emory community, as well as from the national AEPi organization, was strong and united. Emory President [James Wagner](http://president.emory.edu/) and Dean of Campus Life [Ajay Nair](http://president.emory.edu/university_leadership/cabinet/anair.html) expressed how intolerable these acts were, and AEPi chapters from all over the United States provided an outpouring of support to their brothers at Emory. The FBI was put on the case, but no one has been found guilty yet.

Other examples can be seen at Cornell University. On Wednesday, November 19, 2014, a student there was standing alongside a group of fellow undergraduates, holding up signs and participating in demonstrations in support of Israel. All of a sudden, he was threatened by a woman, who said that she was going to slap him. This particular woman supported Palestine, so the two individuals were at opposing ends of the Israel-Palestine [argument](http://israelipalestinian.procon.org/).

That same day, another pro-Israeli student was splashed with water and had a sign torn from his hands. Not only does this incident reflect how some anti-Semitic attacks are violent, but it also shows how the assailants have denied the pro-Israeli students of their [First Amendment](http://constitution.findlaw.com/amendment1/annotation06.html#1) right to free speech.

To gather direct data, I created a survey and shared it via Facebook. There were 52 respondents in total. The results of my survey highlight many important things. Based on my sample size, about half of all Jewish college students believe that their religion is important, while the remainder are not so sure. Although only half of the respondents see religion as important, the majority of them participate in cultural milestones and experiences such as the bar/bat mitzvah and Jewish holidays. The answers to Question 4 align with my own experiences- that attending Hebrew School increases religiosity later in life, and not attending has an adverse effect. Question 5 also shows how the way someone is raised affects their religiosity- more than half of respondents said that their religious values align with their parents'. This means that if someone is raised to be more or less religious, they will turn out according to how they were raised and will likely raise their children the same way. Although anti-Semitism and Jewish extremism are very real, they do not seem to have the largest effect on religiosity- religious Jews will stay loyal to their religion, regardless of what is happening in the outside world. Question 10 says it all- the majority of respondents believe that the decline in religiosity of Jewish college students has more to do with them not feeling a connection to their religion (based on how they were raised), thus not seeing religion as a pursuit worth their time. While anti-Semitism remains a growing concern, it seems that the best way to increase religiosity among Jewish college students is to get them involved with and excited about their religion from a very young age. Otherwise, by the time they go off to college, they will be firm about staying secular.

I would now like to explain why this topic is both important and relevant to me. Well, for starters, I am Jewish, I attend college in the United States, and I consider myself to be secular. One of the major reasons I chose to research this topic is that it would allow me to explore my own life and examine the reasons as to why I am a secular Jewish college student.

From a very young age, I knew that I was Jewish. Every year, my family and I would celebrate the Jewish holidays together- [Passover](http://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/default_cdo/jewish/Passover.htm), [Rosh Hashanah](http://www.chabad.org/holidays/JewishNewYear/template_cdo/aid/4644/jewish/Rosh-Hashanah.htm), [Yom Kippur](http://www.chabad.org/holidays/JewishNewYear/template_cdo/aid/177886/jewish/What-is-Yom-Kippur.htm), and [Hanukkah](http://www.chabad.org/holidays/chanukah/article_cdo/aid/102911/jewish/What-Is-Hanukkah.htm). However, we never went to temple, except for one of my cousin's bar/bat mitzvah services. I found all of this to be very exciting, but I was not sure why we celebrated these things. Although my parents did not formally educate me on the Jewish religion, they decided to send me to Hebrew School at the age of 7.

I enjoyed it. I was surrounded by many of my peers, and I learned many things such as the Hebrew alphabet, how to spin a dreidel, and where my ancestors came from. However, once the fun activities ended, I could not stand to be there. I hated learning about my religion- the teachers were rude, I found the subject to be boring, and I hated the fact that I was required to keep [kosher](http://www.jewfaq.org/kashrut.htm).

By the age of 9, my parents realized that Hebrew School and I did not get along very well. So I decided to stop attending. Thus, my Jewish education ended before I graduated from the 4th grade. Almost ten years have passed since then, and I have forgotten a lot of the information I learned there.

By the time I was 12, my friends started to talk about their upcoming bar/bat mitzvahs- they had almost finished Hebrew School and were beginning to plan their coming of age ceremonies. At first, I did not want one- it was a religious ceremony, and I wanted nothing to do with that. Then, I realized that because I am still Jewish, and that celebration is a part of my culture, I should have one. So I did.

Rather than preparing for it with a formal Hebrew School education, I had a tutor teach me my Torah portion that I would be required to perform at the bar mitzvah service. While I was successfully able to do this, I look back six years later and realize that the whole thing was pointless- I understood its importance from a cultural standpoint, but not from a religious standpoint.

Overall, I believe that my secularism spawns from my childhood. Because I was never taught the importance of my religion from a young age, I never learned to appreciate it as I became older. Had my parents taught me more about Judaism, or had I completed Hebrew School, things may have been different. However, I still feel very connected to Judaism as a cultural group- I grew up in [Plainview, New York](http://www.city-data.com/city/Plainview-New-York.html), which has a large Jewish population. While some residents are [Orthodox](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/Orthodox.html), many of them are secular, like my family. Even though I am not religious, I know that I will want to raise my future family in a neighborhood that is culturally Jewish, because that is where I feel at home.

In conclusion, Jewish college students at American universities are losing their religion due to a variety of factors. There is not one factor that is more prevalent than the rest, but it appears that if a child is not raised religiously, they will not devote time and effort to their religion in college. Even if some children are raised religiously, they become so busy at school that it is sometimes impossible for them to set aside time for their religion. On a more negative note, anti-Semitic [incidents](http://www.truthrevolt.org/commentary/10-worst-anti-semitic-campuses) at even some of the most prestigious colleges and universities have been on the rise, and many Jewish students have been hiding their religion so they do not become a victim of one of these attacks. However, if parents want their children to be religious in college and later in life, then the best thing they can do is to make their children become religious from a very young age.