

Gates Quest Vision

18 Jewish Things a Young Jew Should Know, Care About, and Be Able to Do by Age 18

Our conception of Jewish education goes beyond the mere acquisition of factual knowledge. Equally important, are tasks of understanding, evaluating, and relating to Jewish issues for the sake of the individual and the community. The essential elements of Judaism, such as those articulated in this framework, are open to a range of interpretations. Children need to be inducted into skills, values, attitudes, and practices that enable them to make meaning of contemporary Jewish life.

Our vision of Jewish education is to enable Jewish youth, and ultimately Jews of all ages, to understand and appreciate the core ideas, values, and practices of Judaism, so that these ideas, values, and practices may serve as resources in their lives as Jews, Americans, and human beings. They should be able to articulate the ways in which they belong to the Jewish civilization and community while recognizing that these points of connection will likely evolve, grow, and mature over time. We assume that the better equipped young Jews are along the lines the framework suggests, the more prepared they will be to become committed participants in adult Jewish life.

This framework builds on the premise that the purpose of Jewish education is both instruction (the deliberate, formalized process of handing over elements of the culture by educators to learners) and enculturation (initiation into a culture, including its attitudes, practices, and values, in addition to its knowledge and skills). For each of the 18 components of Judaism, there are five dimensions of development in the learner that can be planned for, implemented, and measured:

- **KNOWLEDGE:** *Understanding it*—familiarity with core ideas, facts, terms, and chronology that are central to the Jewish experience.
- **SKILLS:** *Ability to do it*—refers to the ability to make links and create patterns out of diverse ideas and to apply them to concrete actions.
- **VALUES:** *What it means for the collective (Jewry)*—are principles or ideals that have come to be understood as lynchpins to Jewish life throughout the ages.
- **ATTITUDES:** *What it means for the individual (Jew)*—refers to what implications these understandings and values have for me the individual. How does this aspect of Jewish life affect my life?
- **PRACTICES:** *Using or doing it*—refer to actions, behaviors, and deeds that are important to Jewish life and can be performed by youths at appropriate times.

- 1. Feel part of a chain of Jewish tradition, as both recipients and co-creators.**
- 2. Feel connected to Jews around the world.**
- 3. Have Jewish friends.**
- 4. Engage with Jewish role models and personalities.**
- 5. Participate in the *kehilla* (Jewish community).**
- 6. Regard Judaism as a relevant source of wisdom for their questions about life and its meaning.**
- 7. Appreciate *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) as a core Jewish value and perform acts of *G'milut Khasadim* (giving of loving-kindness).**
- 8. Care about and connect with Israel.**
- 9. Read and interpret sacred and historical texts and be able to discern Jewish core narratives (stories, sagas, events) and values within them.**
- 10. Recognize the role wrestling with God has played in Jewish life.**
- 11. Open themselves up to divinity through theology, prayer, study, or other spiritual practices.**
- 12. Understand the mutual influence of Jewish and broader culture on each other and contemporary Jews.**
- 13. Be able to identify critical issues facing American Jewry and be motivated to act on them.**
- 14. Understand the meanings and performance of Jewish mitzvot.**
- 15. Participate in various Jewish rituals, customs, holidays, and lifecycle events, and appreciate their history and meaning.**
- 16. Comprehend and utilize Hebrew words and other Jewish terminology.**
- 17. Partake in Jewish culinary traditions.**
- 18. Experience Jewish arts and culture.**

1. Feel part of a chain of Jewish tradition, as both recipients and co-creators.

Knowledge

Understand core religious, historical, and cultural traditions in Jewish life. What is Jewish tradition, and what comprises tradition: religiously? historically? culturally? How does (or doesn't) it last over time?

Skills

Be able to find and evaluate critically various interpretations of core Jewish traditions in religious, historical, and/or artistic sources, with an eye toward how Jews balance tradition and change.

Values

Tradition, in its many forms, helps inspire our personal ties and collective connections to Jewish life.

Attitudes

Feel empowered to reinterpret and re-fashion Jewish tradition for a better fit in contemporary times.

Practices

Articulate how Jewish traditions do (or do not) fit into your life in today's world, why, and in what ways they might in the future.

2. Feel connected to Jews around the world.

Knowledge

Understand the value of *K'lal Yisrael*— that all Jews are responsible for one another—and its relevance to Jewish peoplehood and community today. Cite historical examples of mutual Jewish responsibility on the local (e.g., local community structures) and global (e.g., connection of world Jewish communities) levels.

Skills

Be able to connect and communicate with Jews in other communities and other lands through common religious, ethnic, and/or cultural backgrounds, interests, discourses, and practices.

Values

Jews have a collective past (social history of a people and religion), present (diversity and pluralism across the Jewish world), and purpose (shared concerns, covenants, and commitments among Jews the world over).

Attitudes

Develop a sense of belonging to the Jewish peoplehood and civilization by appreciating shared history, religion, culture, language, and/or nation (Israel).

Practices

Embark on live or virtual visits to Jewish sites and engage in face-to-face or digital interactions with Jews unlike ourselves in other communities.

3. Have Jewish friends.

Knowledge

Recognize how peer connections among Jews foster Jewish community and commitments and influence important life decisions.

Skills

Be able to seek out in-person and/or digital Jewish social networks and find opportunities for connection to Jewish peers in structured programs or informal settings.

Values

Living a Jewish life is enhanced by being part of an inclusive Jewish community comprising of diverse Jewish associates who share values, concerns, and lifestyles that can be mutually reinforcing.

Attitudes

Be open to forming close relationships with Jewish peers. Social networks need not be exclusively Jewish, to be sure, but it is worthwhile to seek out relationships with fellow Jews.

Practices

Participate in formal or informal Jewish activities that introduce you to other Jews who share your interests.

4. Engage with Jewish role models and personalities.

Knowledge

Learn about historical and contemporary Jewish role models, including religious figures (such as rabbis, sages, scholars) and secular achievers (such as in business, science, government, culture) on the worldwide, national, and/or local levels.

Skills

Be able to articulate who and/or what types of Jewish personalities are your role models, and why.

Values

The rabbis in *Pirkei Avot* implore young learners to, first and foremost, “acquire for yourself a teacher,” reflecting a longstanding emphasis in Jewish culture on revering mentors and role models.

Attitudes

Be open to seeking out and calling on Jewish mentors and role models to help guide your young adult life in both Jewish and secular matters.

Practices

Ask your own role models or elders who their role models were and how these role models tangibly influenced your own role models.

5. Participate in the *kehilla* (Jewish community).

Knowledge

Understand the functioning of diverse Jewish communities in biblical Israel, pre-modern Spain, and 19th century Poland (as examples), and derive generalizations about the place of *kehilla* in Jewish life.

Skills

Apply understandings of the function of community in Jewish history to the workings of your local Jewish community today, considering similarities and differences.

Values

Kehilla is central to Jewish life and touches all aspects of collective and individual life.

Attitudes

Appreciate the various forms *kehilla* takes in daily life, from daily prayers to a social service agency, to a wedding ceremony, and much more, demonstrating that Jews are never alone at moments that matter.

Practices

Explore and participate in an experience of the *kehilla* in action, such as a social welfare organization, political rally, or community decision-making process.

6. Regard Judaism as a relevant source of wisdom for their questions about life and its meaning.

Knowledge

Understand that Judaism, at its core, addresses meaningful life questions, such as: Who am I? What are my beliefs? What are my values? What does “good” mean?

Skills

Be able to interpret classic biblical stories (e.g., Garden of Eden, Noah’s Ark, the Binding of Isaac) as expressions of life’s big existential questions, rather than merely as tales or sagas of an ancient people.

Values

Study, discussion, and deliberation about life’s big questions with wise teachers and peers in one’s family and community is an obligation on par with Jewish ritual and practice and central to living a Jewish life.

Attitudes

Realize that Judaism asks some of the same big existential, moral questions about values, beliefs, and behaviors as other faiths do—i.e., these are core human dilemmas— and that Judaism can provide relevant answers.

Practices

Identify traditional and contemporary Jewish responses to some of your own big questions about life, meaning, and values.

7. Appreciate *Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world) as a core Jewish value and perform acts of *G’milut Khasadim* (giving of loving- kindness).

Knowledge

Understand the biblical notion of the phrase *Tikkun Olam*, focusing especially on how the prophets understood repairing the world.

Skills

Be able to identify actions and ideas today that constitute the notion of repairing the world, including what constitutes “repair” and what constitutes the “world.”

Values

Judaism emphasizes the idea that the present world can be improved by our well-intentioned ideas and actions, and that humans are partners in making the world a better place.

Attitudes

Develop a positive disposition toward seeing *Tikkun Olam* as an imperative for both the Jewish and broader world.

Practices

Engage in the sustained activity of *G'milut Khasadim* that demonstrates your understanding and commitment to this core Jewish value.

8. Care about and connect with Israel.

Knowledge

Understand core ideas, events, and facts related to the place of Israel in Jewish tradition; the creation of the modern State of Israel and its achievements over time; and complications that have resulted from the existence of a Jewish state, vis-à-vis Jews and non-Jews alike.

Skills

Be able to articulate understandings and verifications as to why Israel is a core part of the Jewish experience.

Values

In Jewish life, “Israel” means a historical place, a religious site, a contemporary society, a modern state, an ongoing aspiration, and/ or an idea and dream fulfilled or unfulfilled. Relating to Israel in some way is important for Jewish identification.

Attitudes

Belief in Israel—like most aspects of Jewish belief— includes faith and questioning, pride and problems, and appreciation and critique.

Practices

Acquire enough knowledge about and experience with Israel (including visits to Israel) to be able to engage in thoughtful conversation concerning diverse (Jewish and non- Jewish) narratives about Israel.

9. Read and interpret sacred and historical texts and be able to discern Jewish core narratives (stories, sagas, events) and values within them.

Knowledge

Identify and understand some of the core master-narratives of Jewish life, including Exodus, Sinai, Torah, Zion, and Redemption.

Skills

Be able to articulate a basic understanding of these foundational narratives to uncover the values inherent in the narratives (e.g., freedom, justice, dignity) and to express a connection of those values to one's life today.

Values

These master-narratives are essential to understanding Judaism and Jewish life. Even if they each represent a form of Jewish truth, there is a range of interpretations among Jewish communities and individuals regarding each of these narratives.

Attitudes

These narratives— and the interpretation of these narratives— continually evolve, and you can participate in that process by applying the narrative to new contexts and/or adding your voice to it.

Practices

Seek out instances of these narratives in Jewish practice (e.g., Exodus during the Passover *seder*) and provide your own interpretation of how they resonate today.

10. Recognize the role wrestling with God has played in Jewish life.

Knowledge

Understand the all-knowing and all-powerful qualities ascribed to God in the Bible and diverse post-biblical efforts to build Judaism on different (or without) notions of God.

Skills

Be able to distinguish contemporary Jewish religious sub-groups (i.e., traditionalists, liberals, seculars) by their different conceptions of God.

Values

Jewish faith centers on the notion of divine or spiritual presence (e.g., *Neshamah*, the soul).

Attitudes

Exploring and reflecting on God’s complex relationship to human life is a longstanding and important aspect of being Jewish.

Practices

Treat the subject of God with sincerity, rigor, and humility, and treat diverse perspectives about God—Jewish, non- Jewish, atheist— with openness and respect.

11. Open themselves up to divinity through theology, prayer, study, or other spiritual practices.

Knowledge

Understand that the notion of *Avodah* (Jewish practice) was regarded as one of several gateways toward experience of the divine in biblical times and beyond.

Skills

Be able to recite and explicate the *Sh’ma*—Judaism’s central prayer—to understand the traditional connection of religious practice and God.

Values

An appreciation of the relationship of Jews to the divine enriches understanding of Jewish tradition (customs, rituals, practices) and provides entry points for engagement with spirituality.

Attitudes

By becoming aware of your place in the cosmos, including the encounter with that which is greater than yourself (e.g., natural wonders), you can learn to think and feel beyond your own immediate wants, needs, and interests, and toward an appreciation for something far greater, however, you choose to interpret it.

Practices

Participate in any or all the following experiences— mindful prayer, meditation, ritual, Jewish text study, acts of loving-kindness, social justice work—and contemplate their spiritual dimensions.

12. Understand the mutual influence of Jewish and broader culture on each other and contemporary Jews.

Knowledge

Understand mutually the values, rights, opportunities, and responsibilities of full participation in American citizenship/culture and Jewish community/culture.

Skills

Be able to discern elements of Jewish and general culture that clearly overlap (e.g., universal moral codes), that clearly diverge (e.g., religious beliefs), and that sometimes intersect in more complex ways (e.g., the direct influence of Jews on general culture, and vice versa).

Values

Although Judaism may be a unique religious, moral, and historical tradition, it did not arise in a vacuum; to the contrary, Judaism, Jewish life, and the Jewish people are inextricably bound to the larger context in which they emerged and continue to exist.

Attitudes

Look at contemporary American Jewish life in terms of contemporary life in America — not through an exclusively Jewish or an exclusively general political and cultural lens.

Practices

Embrace—in the spirit of Mordecai Kaplan—the celebration of American national holidays (e.g., Thanksgiving, Labor Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day) as expressions of American, Jewish, and universal values and symbols, and civic engagement.

13. Be able to identify critical issues facing American Jewry and be motivated to act on them.

Knowledge

Become familiar with some of the longstanding and still contemporary issues on the agenda of American Jewish life, including the various ways of being Jewish in America, assimilation, anti-Semitism, relationship with Israel, marriage, the voluntary Jewish community, Jewish education, LGBTQ, Jews of color, and relations with the broader American society.

Skills

Be able to discuss and cite evidence as to why these issues are of concern to the adult American Jewish community.

Values

American Jews are, at once, a part of and apart from the broader American society. American Jewry is committed to retaining its unique character while also becoming full-fledged members of the American community.

Attitudes

Appreciate the commonalities and diversities of American Jewish life and their implications for participation in the adult American Jewish community.

Practices

Choose and investigate items on the American Jewish communal agenda—or initiate new items of your own—that are of special importance to you and articulate a stance on these issues.

14. Understand the meanings and performance of Jewish *Mitzvot*.

Knowledge

Understand that there are various kinds of *Mitzvot* that traditionally have been categorized in various ways to help us make meaning of them (e.g., positive/ negative, ethical/ ritual, *L'makom (to God)*/ *L'khavero (to human beings)*). Some of the 613 *Mitzvot* described in the Torah are historical and can only be performed in a Temple (e.g., ritual sacrifice), while many others are easily applicable to present-day circumstances (e.g., ethical laws).

Skills

Be able to discern what types of *Mitzvot* are commandments (i.e., obligatory acts), which are good deeds (i.e., voluntary acts for anyone leading an ethical life), and which are rituals that sustain Jewish culture (i.e., Jewish customs).

Values

Mitzvot help us to frame actions as Jewish and help us to be more conscious of our behaviors.

Attitudes

Be eager to perform *Mitzvot* out of a sense of religious obligation, ethical principle, custom, and/or historical consciousness.

Practices

With the knowledge of the various kinds of *Mitzvot*, choose a new *Mitzvah* every week/month to focus on, practice, and reflect upon.

15. Participate in various Jewish rituals, customs, holidays, and lifecycle events, and appreciate their history and meaning.

Knowledge

Become familiar with the fundamental aspects (i.e., reasons for, basic practices of) of major Jewish holidays and lifecycle events and their associated rituals and customs.

Skills

Be able to recognize traditional Jewish ritual objects, symbols, and motifs, and what they stand for.

Values

Celebrations of rituals, customs, holidays, and lifestyle events are important expressions of Jewish connectedness and community and provide personal joy and fulfillment.

Attitudes

Be disposed toward embracing openly and respectfully the variety of ways that holidays and lifecycle events are celebrated by various Jews from varying backgrounds.

Practices

Participate in a parade of Jewish holidays and lifecycle events and reflect on what elements are both rich and authentic to your own Jewish life.

16. Comprehend and utilize Hebrew words and other Jewish terminology.

Knowledge

Develop basic Hebrew cultural literacy, a selected body of terms that have special resonance in Jewish life (e.g., *shalom*, *Shabbat*, *mitzvah*, *tzedakah*, *kaddish*, *kiddush*, *brit milah*).

Skills

Identify Hebrew letters and sound out Hebrew words.

Values

The Hebrew language is both a cultural transmitter and a means of social cohesion among Jews.

Attitudes

Appreciate the potential to connect to Israel and Jews the world over through historical/ national Jewish languages.

Practices

Utilize Hebrew terms in appropriate context (e.g., be able to recite key prayers, such as the *Sh'ma*, in Hebrew or transliteration).

17. Partake in Jewish culinary traditions.

Knowledge

Understand the basic laws and practices of *Kashrut* and the ways that *Kashrut* is interpreted in contemporary times (e.g., *eco-Kashrut*).

Skills

Be able to read a list of ingredients on a food package and recognize potentially non-kosher ingredients (e.g., lard, natural meat flavors).

Values

Participating in Jewish culinary traditions is a way to inspire and feed an appetite for things Jewish.

Attitudes

Seek out opportunities to partake in Jewish food rituals (e.g., participate in a Passover *Seder*, bake hamentashen for *Mishloach Manot*, eat falafel on the streets of Jerusalem).

Practices

Try out different recipes for one Jewish food item (e.g., *Charoset*, *Challah*) from around the world. See how they compare and what appeals to you most.

18. Experience Jewish arts and culture.

Knowledge

Gain broad exposure to the complex ways Jewish artists have explored their relationships to Judaism and Jewish life through various artistic and cultural media (e.g., literature, visual arts, crafts, music, dance, film, fashion).

Skills

Be able to interpret selected, age-appropriate works of Jewish art in light of their Jewish themes.

Values

Jewish artistic and cultural expressions reflect histories, values, assumptions, norms, and dilemmas that are particular to the Jewish experience, and cross many political, social, ethnic, and religious boundaries.

Attitudes

Develop an empathy, understanding, and connection to Jewish motifs in arts and culture.

Practices

Create or participate in an artistic and/or cultural form of Jewish expression.