

Losing My Religion

Recent report indicates fewer Jewish Americans identify with their religion, still connect to culture

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Every Sunday from first grade to 10th grade, junior Courtney Glait attended her Jewish Sunday school, and every Wednesday from third grade until sixth grade, she went to Hebrew school. These were just two of the many activities Glait participated in to keep in touch with her religion and culture. She also participated in a Klezmer band at her synagogue, was in the choir at her Sunday school, read the haftarah at Yom Kippur and attended service during the major holidays.

"I know that most people who say they're Jewish as a religion don't even go to the services every week because people are just getting so busy and becoming more concerned with other stuff," Glait said. "I guess a lot of people just don't want to make the religious commitment to Judaism because it involves a lot of other activities."

In a report conducted by the Pew Research Religion & Public Life Project, Glait proves an exception to a recent trend in Jewish Americans. According to the Oct. 1, 2013 report, an increasing number of Jewish Americans, when asked what religion they are, say they don't have a religion, but at the same time call themselves Jewish. Today, less than 2 percent of Jewish adults in the United States say they are Jewish by religion.

Religion is more about culture

The study also shows that the Jewish Americans who call themselves Jewish but do not practice the religion do so because they feel that being Jewish is more about the culture and ancestry than it is about religion.

Glait said she understands why many Jewish Americans think Judaism

is more about culture and ancestry than religion, but she does not understand how a person can call himself Jewish but affiliate himself with no religion.

"A lot about being Jewish is just tradition, so you're just following the traditions of the Jewish people that lasted for who knows how long. It's just the sense of participating in service," Glait said. "You're in a community, and everyone is very welcoming to everyone. I just don't understand what someone means when they call themselves Jewish, but also

say they don't have a religion. Judaism is a religion, so it's kind of contradictory."

On the other hand, junior Divya Udayan said she uses Hinduism as a way to connect to God. If someone were to ask her what religion she is, she would say "technically Hindu." Udayan says she's found over the past years that it isn't her religion that defines her, and instead, she just simply believes in God.

Public Reflection

The recent shift in Jewish self-identification reflects wider changes in the U.S. public as a whole

20% of Americans identify themselves as having no religion

22% of Jewish adults in America identify themselves as having no religion

32% of both U.S. adults and Jewish Millennials (ages 18-29) have no religious affiliation

PEWRESEARCH.ORG / SOURCE
SCOTT LIU / GRAPHIC



RELIGIOUS

READING: Junior Courtney Glait reads the Torah. Glait said she personally does not understand how someone can identify as a Jew without following Judaism.