

Empowering Students to make “Smart Choices”

By Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

With tens-of-thousands of Jews searching for answers in other religions, it's not surprising that I received a call from Amy, a college coed who was confused by religious remarks made by her dorm supervisor. I explained the importance of using critical thinking to get a second opinion and gave her some skills that enabled her to make an informed decision and cope with peer-pressure. A few weeks later Amy called to thank me and said, “I shared your advice and helped another student who was involved in some risky behavior that he was exposed to on the internet.”

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Research by renowned New York University sociologist Richard Arum shows that students are sorely lacking the critical thinking skills needed to make important life decisions and deal with major issues including peer pressure, anti-Israel propaganda, and religious harassment.

Jews for Judaism is committed to innovation and to addressing the current threats to Jewish survival. As



A group of public school students participate at a Smart Choices critical thinking presentation.

part of Jews for Judaism's strategic planning process, we examined our educational program model. We determined that if we could maintain our core mission of being a Jewish response to cults and fundamentalist proselytizing - and also empower Jewish youth to apply critical thinking skills to real world situations - we would be able to make an even larger impact on the Jewish community.

This was the genesis for the development of our **Smart Choices** Critical Thinking initiative. Our vision is to bridge critical thinking from the classroom to the real world, empowering students with an analytical framework to apply critical

thinking skills across the range of difficult choices they confront every day. Established on a foundation of Jewish wisdom, our 5 step program will empower students, increase leadership skills and develop Jewish awareness and pride.

“The teens and I felt the approach was different, engaging, and very relevant.”

Our new approach earned us praise from the Los Angeles Jewish Federation which recently awarded Jews for Judaism a \$20,000 Jewish Future Education and Engagement grant to adapt our Smart Choices Project for Jewish experiential

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EDITORIAL

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LIFELINE is a free publication of
JEWS FOR JUDAISM International, Inc.

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Help was Unexpected for One Student

By Debbie Cann, Age 17*

When I heard we were having a guest speaker at my temple on "defending your faith" my initial thought was "I shouldn't go to this. Most Jews don't understand what it's like to be surrounded by Christians 24/7. This guy doesn't know what it's like." But au contraire!

I was quite wrong. You definitely knew what you were talking about and I've been looking for advice like that for a while and Jews for Judaism is perfect. After hearing you I did some exploration on your website and came across the article by the ex-evangelical pastor-turned-Jewish.

"Being surrounded by Christians... I have encountered many conflicts with pastors"

Being surrounded by Christians in my house most of the time, I have encountered many conflicts with pastors. My mom became a born-again Christian and has tried to convert me since I was 13. She even sent me to a private Christian school. It has not been a barrel of laughs. My now estranged father is a secular Jewish Israeli; I have two older sisters and a younger brother.

One of my most recent and upsetting experiences happened about a month ago. My little brother is really involved in my mom's church and a small group of boys comes over once a week.

This particular time one of the youth pastors – a bona fide fundamentalist – started talking to me about religion.

I actually like to talk about religion because I think it's really interesting, but this guy was rude and out of control. He kept interrupting me and would not stop.

We talked until almost midnight, and what was really upsetting was that my mom didn't help me out or ask the guy to leave. I know I should have said something like, "That's enough, go home now, I have a lot of homework," but I had never been so attacked in my own home before, not even by my mom, so my mind sort of froze.

I think I have been holding down the fort here pretty well but I honestly feel much more prepared because of your talk. My personal mission at home is to help my little brother not become so extreme. I got him to willingly watch the "Jesus Camp" documentary on your website with me, and he was healthily disturbed by it. I think he has a good head on his shoulders.

"I honestly feel much more prepared because of your talk."

Thanks again. Keep up the good work. And I'd love to become more involved with Jews for Judaism in the future! ■

*Name changed to protect privacy

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Atonement in One Minute

What Does the Bible Really Say?

Missionaries claim that Jews can no longer obtain atonement because the ancient Jewish Temple was destroyed and animal blood sacrifices can no longer be offered. For proof, they invoke Leviticus 17:11, claiming that it says “There is no remission of sin without the shedding of blood.” In fact, this quote does not exist in the Jewish Bible.

The best response is to recognize that missionaries are only presenting their one-sided viewpoint that is based on a misunderstanding of Torah. Now let’s examine the true biblical relationship between atonement and blood sacrifice more thoroughly.

First, not all sins required blood

sacrifices. The fourth chapter of Leviticus clarifies that only *unintentional* sins required sacrifices and sacrifices are ineffective if they are not accompanied by sincere remorse and repentance.

The key elements to atonement have always been remorse and repentance.

The key elements to atonement have always been remorse and repentance. Additionally, the prophet Hosea in chapter 14 instructed Jews to offer their prayers in lieu of sacrifices.

Finally, Leviticus 17:11 is misrepresented by missionaries

based on the New Testament passage in Hebrews 9:22 which says, “One may **almost** say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” Ironically, the inclusion of the word “almost” actually supports the Jewish view that only unintentional sins required a sacrifice.

The prophet Malachi sums up the biblical view of atonement in chapter 3 verse 7, “Return to Me, and I will return to you.” In other words, there is no need for an intermediary; God is accessible whenever we turn directly to Him.

A more thorough exposé of this topic is available on our website at www.j4j.me/atonement. ■

A Gala Evening to Remember



At Jews for Judaism’s recent Gala and Auction, 225 friends and supporters turned out to honor Judy and Bob Millman as Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz presented

them with the Aleph Club Award. Rabbi Zalman Kravitz presented Batya and Jack Cate with our Young Leadership Award. Additionally, Orna Saour-Makabi was

presented the Be-True Student Award. The Gala raised funds to support Jews for Judaism’s counseling and innovative education services. *Photos by Joe Shalmoni*

Smart Choices Empowers Students

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education settings. The Smart Choices educational programs have already been piloted at Jewish youth groups including recent presentations by Rabbi Zalman Kravitz at the USY Regional Convention and for the BBYO Regional Teen Board.

Melissa Hertwig, BBYO Regional Director, commented, “Our group really enjoyed the presentation. The teens and I felt the approach was different, engaging, and very relevant. They were very surprised to uncover all the outside forces that steer our selection/choice making process... We are thrilled to be working with Jews for Judaism.”

We are currently soliciting support to reach our long term goal of using the latest technologies to create a cutting-edge curriculum, a “Time Out To Think” App, and an annual TED style symposium for students and educators. We are launching with four partnering Jewish schools that will actively work with us to develop and implement the curriculum in modules that address the specific needs of their students. Within three years Smart Choices will be made available to schools nationwide. ■

New Live Webinars Series Spreads Our Message Worldwide



To enable a larger audience to participate in our educational programs we have launched a monthly live webinar series. The live streaming webinar has been positively received by participants in New York, California, Texas, Florida and Israel.

Additionally, a recorded version of the webinar remains online for viewing by the thousands of individuals who visit our website and Facebook page.

Topics covered so far include “The Power of Persuasion” and “Missionary Impossible.”

Upcoming Webinar Details

Title: “A Rabbi Cross-Examines Christianity”

Date: Tuesday, July 23, 2013

Time: 6pm PST

More information: Phone: 310-556-3344; Email: la@JewsforJudaism.org

Programs that Inspire and Enlighten

In addition to counseling, an essential component of JEWS FOR JUDAISM’s mission is presenting inspiring educational programs. During the past year our six international centers provided 25,000 client services including 12,500 participants in our educational programs, and our websites received more than 1.9 million hits.

Our most popular lectures include:

The Power of Persuasion - *What Do Cults, Telemarketers & Terrorists Have in Common?*

Missionary Impossible - *The Jewish Response to Missionaries*

Kabbalah and The Red String - *Cult or Consciousness?*

Evangelicals and Israel - *Trojan Horse or Knight in Shining Armor?*

Is Religion Killing Judaism? - *The Search for Happiness and Spirituality*

JEWS FOR JUDAISM Counter-Missionary Survival Seminar

To schedule a presentation
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