

You're not doing it wrong!

I've had several interactions in the past few months with people who are worried that they are relating to Judaism "wrong." Someone told me that she'd love to come to synagogue more but feels hypocritical because she doesn't believe in God. I recently taught a four-session drop-in class on the Shabbat liturgy. Students frequently asked about how to relate to prayer language that they found unmoving. They confide that they enjoyed the music, or the sense of community, or even the sounds of ancient Hebrew words, but the translations just left them cold. They wanted to understand how to "better" relate to the prayers."

To all of them, to all of you, I say: you're not doing it wrong! Judaism is fundamentally non-credal; the point of Jewish community and Jewish experience is to show up and do it. There is not a right way that you are supposed to believe about the experience. Regarding prayer, for example, if the translation of the words gets your head spinning, it's legitimate to relate to the prayers as an opportunity to be transported by music, or to connect with your ancestors, or to get pulled out of your head just by being around other people. (Of course, if you do find it spiritually meaningful to deal with the words themselves, by all means, go for it!)

A vibrant Jewish community is made up of people who show up for all kinds of reasons, with all kinds of understandings about what we are doing here. As for prayer, so too for everything that we do. Whether you volunteer here or attend an event because you believe in the cause, because you want to meet people, or because you just want to get out of the house, the important thing is to come. It's like the old joke whether the kid challenges the parent: "Why do you go to synagogue? Do you even believe in God? You just spend the whole time talking to Rosenberg!" And the parent responds, "Well, Rosenberg goes to synagogue to talk to God. I go to talk to Rosenberg." And those are equally excellent reasons to come.