

NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE ON YOUR JEWISH JOURNEY, JEWBELONG

By Archie Gottesman
COFOUNDER, JEWBELONG



HERE ARE SOME THINGS I'VE QUIT: INTERMITTENT FASTING, GAME OF THRONES, HOT YOGA, AND STATISTICS 101.

It's actually kind of refreshing. Instead of feeling guilty when I abandon a book that's only a quarter finished or stop at season two of *Game of Thrones* (I know, I know), I feel a sense of relief. Quitting can mean taking ownership of my life, like a way to Marie Kondo the nonessentials that don't spark joy.

The one thing I've never even been tempted to quit is Judaism, which is why it's so baffling to me when other people do. By quitting, I don't mean calling a dead stop to a practice or converting to another religion; I mean letting their Jewish practice slide away until it doesn't mean anything anymore.

Enter JewBelong, an organization I cofounded to help Jews connect to their Judaism with warmth and wit, no matter where they are on their Jewish journey.

We cast a huge marketing net to reach all the DJs (Disconnected Jews) who are lost, missing, or entirely off the Jewish radar, connecting with them in ways that surprise them. For instance, there was JewBelong's infamous kugel ad, a cheeky ad campaign that played on the possible confusion between kugel and a similar-sounding lower-body exercise.

JewBelong's voice is friendly and irreverent, and we do our best to explain Jewish customs and rituals in simple terms. Most of all, we want to create a space where

people can find answers to questions they were afraid to ask. As we say on our homepage:

Think of us as the friendly, kinda funny kid from your geometry class who explained in simple language and without judgment only what you needed to know for the test. We provide straightforward explanations, readings and rituals to help warm your heart. We promise never to JewBarrass you because we've been there.

When our readers hear the term *JewBarrassment* (that anxious feeling you get when you don't know something Jewish but you think you should) for the first time – which happens a lot because we made the word up – they're ecstatic, and we hear things like, "I've been JewBarrassed for years. I just never knew there was a word for it!" or "You mean I wasn't the only one who didn't understand what was going on at that bar mitzvah?!"

More often than not, JewBelong newcomers decide to dip a toe into the Jewish water using our free educational and DIY holiday and life cycle resources, but some people are looking for more. Because JewBelong is all online and Judaism is a communal religion best done face to face, one of the offerings that we are most proud of is JELP (Jewish Yelp), a section dedicated to providing an introduction to other fantastic Jewish organizations – including PJ Library, of course!

When JewBelong can be a friendly pipeline to those who want more Jewishness in their lives, that's wonderful. When people love our resources and don't want anything else, that's great too. The bottom line is that once someone clicks on a JewBelong ad or visits the website, they've made the leap from DJ to CJ (Connected Jew).

Although it might be tempting at times, the Jewish community shouldn't be angry at or dismissive of those DJs who are drifting. Yes, they can be frustratingly hard to please, but it's up to us who feel Jewish connection to inspire DJs to come back. When DJs hear about the practical values of this complicated but fantastic religion in language that they relate to, they love it instead of leave it. The good news is that Judaism is already full of wisdom and joy. We just need to learn to sell – yes, sell – the benefits in a way that is crystal clear and brings the joy back to the forefront.

JewBelong recently launched a new campaign to address antisemitism called "JewBelong or Jew BeGone." Find details about the campaign on jewbelong.com or look for their digital ads across Manhattan.