

Judaism's 10 Best Ideas: A Brief Guide for Seekers, by Rabbi Arthur Green

Chap. 1: *Simchah* - Joy: Happiness as a Religious Precept

Are you surprised to find this among Rabbi Green's ten best ideas? If you were choosing the ten best ideas, would you include this, and make it the first one?

Chap. 2: *Tzelem Elohim* - Creation in God's Image: What Are We Doing Here?

Is it important, or even necessary, to believe in the literal truth of the creation story in order to find value in the concept of "*Tzelem Elohim*"?

Chap. 3: *Halakhab* – Walking the Path: A Community of Doers

Rabbi Green distinguishes "*halakhab*" and "law." The former means a way of life [literally, "walking"] that we follow out of personal commitment. The requirements of law, in contrast, must be followed to avoid punishment. Is this distinction new to you? Do you find the distinction meaningful? What does it mean to you?

Chap. 4: *Tikkun Olam* – Repairing the World: Being God's Partner

The Reform movement considers *Tikkun Olam* to be a central value in Judaism. Do you think the Conservative movement assigns less importance to *Tikkun Olam* than the Reform movement? If so, what is your evidence for this opinion and what do you think may be the cause or causes of this difference in values?

Chap. 5: *Shabbat* – Getting Off the Treadmill: The Secret of *Shabbat*

What was your experience of Shabbat as a child? Has it changed over time? If so, how and why? Do you find helpful the "Ten Pathways toward a New Shabbat" [see over]? Which of these, if any, are part of your regular Shabbat practice? Which of them, if any, that you don't do now would you like to try?

Chap. 6: *Teshuvah* – Returning: Faith in Human Change

"Judaism believes in the possibility of wiping the slate clean and starting over." "We are born to be God-seekers. The soul quests after God in the same way that trees grow in the direction of sunlight, pulled by an inner force that tells them to reach toward what they need." Do you agree with either or both or neither of these statements?

Chap. 7: *Torah* – The People and the Book: Text and Interpretation

The text is the text, but the meaning of the text and its application to our lives remain open to interpretation by all who engage with the text. A certain bumper sticker says, "God said it. I believe it. That settles it." That is not a Jewish idea. Ours might say, "God said it. I believe it. Now let's talk about what it means."

Chap. 8: *Talmud Torah* – "Teach Them to Your Children": The Role of Education

"The single precept of Judaism to which Jews feel the greatest commitment is this: 'You shall teach them diligently to your children.' [Deut. 6:7]" Do you agree? How has that manifested in your life and in the life of your family or young people you know?

Chap. 9: *L'Hayyim* – To Life!: Accepting Death, Affirming Life

"Judaism's strength and inner wisdom have everything to do with the treasuring of life." "Human life is considered sacred; saving a single life is like saving the entire world." Yet Judaism does also include a concept of the afterlife. What do you think about that concept?

Chap. 10: *Ehad* – Hear O Israel: There Is Only One

We are all one because we all come from the same place. This is the great source of the moral imperative to treat all creatures decently. That's why monotheism matters. Agree?

Ten Pathways toward a New Shabbat

Adapted from Judaism's 10 Best Ideas by Rabbi Arthur Green

Five To Do

- ONE: Do stay at home. Spend quality time with family and real friends.
- TWO: Do celebrate with others: at the table, in the synagogue, or with anyone close to you who can best share with you in appreciating God's world.
- THREE: Do study or read something that will edify, challenge, or make you grow.
- FOUR: Do be alone. Take some time for yourself. Check in with yourself. Review your week. Ask yourself where you are in life.
- FIVE: Do mark the beginning and end of this sacred time. Light candles and recite Kiddush on Friday night. Light a candle again and recite Havdalah on Saturday night.

Five Not To Do

- SIX: Don't do anything you have to do for your work life. This includes obligatory reading, or homework for kids (even without any writing), or preparing to go back to the workplace.
- SEVEN: Don't spend money. Separate completely from the commercial culture around us. No calls to the broker, no following up on ads, no paying bills. It can all wait.
- EIGHT: Don't use the computer. Turn off the smart phone and laptop and tablet. Declare your freedom from these new masters of our minds and our time. Live and breathe for a day without checking messages. Find the time for face-to-face conversations with people around you, without Facebook.
- NINE: Don't travel. Avoid particularly commercial places like airports, hotel check-ins, and similar depersonalizing commercial encounters.
- TEN: Don't rely on commercial or canned video entertainment, including the TV as well as the computer screen. Discover what there is to do in life when you are not being entertained.