MYTH #4

SPIRITUALITY
Is Just Yoga & Unicorns
ARE JEWISH MILLENNIALS RELIGIOUSLY ENGAGED?
“7 MYTHS ABOUT JEWISH MILLENNIALS”

MYTH #4

SPIRITUALITY
Is Just Yoga & Unicorns

Jews for Jesus recently partnered with Barna Group on a groundbreaking study of Jewish Millennials and their spiritual identity. This series summarizes the top seven findings from the data discovered in Barna’s research, alongside eye-catching infographics and pullout quotes. The following excerpt from Barna’s full report unpacks Myth #4, the nonreligious Millennial who thinks spirituality is just about yoga and unicorns.
They don’t just want to inherit their faith; they want to own it.

Millennials of all stripes feel strongly that their religion is a personal choice, and young American Jews are no different. But that doesn’t mean they don’t care about religion or spirituality. They don’t just want to inherit their faith; they want to own it. As such, their interest in faith and spirituality and the value they place on religious faith have dramatically risen when compared to other generations.

It could be argued that choice is perhaps the most sacred value of Millennials, the cornerstone of their character and pursuits. In Jewish Millennial spirituality, this element of curation remains a theme, particularly for young Jews raised by only one Jewish parent, for whom there are fewer religious through lines. Overall, and in keeping with older generations, a majority of young Jews view faith as an individual pursuit.
Given Millennials’ general open-mindedness to spiritual exploration and mistrust of institutions, Barna generally finds that, as a whole, this generation exhibits a waffling commitment to behaviors that are akin to religious practices, such as prayer/meditation and attending religious ceremonies other than for a holiday or special events such as a wedding. But among Jewish Millennials, Barna found evidence that they stand in contrast to their generational peers.

Today, Millennial attendance at Judaic religious services remains fairly steady. A plurality of all American Jews only attend synagogue, shul or temple for holiday services or special events (31%), which is also true specifically of Gen-Xers (29%), Boomers (42%) and Elders (39%). Many Jewish Millennials, on the other hand, attend a religious service weekly (23%) or at least once a month (21%, compared to 13% Gen-Xers, 3% Boomers, 7% Elders). A professed interest in matters of spirituality also prompts regular religious gatherings; 18 percent of those who claim such an interest attend weekly, compared to just 1 percent among those who are less curious about faith and spirituality.

**MILLENIALS: IN WHAT WAYS CAN ONE BE A JEW BY CHOICE?**

- **70%** Keeping Jewish customs & traditions
- **65%** Keeping religious practice
- **50%** Being a part of the Jewish community
- **32%** Finding commonality with other Jews
More so than any generation, the top belief Millennials hold about God is that “God loves people” (51%). They see God as revelatory through both relationships (28%) and religious teaching (22%). At the same time, while more than one-third of Millennials (38%) believe that “God desires a personal relationship with us,” one-fifth (20%) believe that “God is unknowable.” Ultimately, they are the generation with the most outliers who did not select any of the provided stances on God.
I DON’T LIKE TO IDENTIFY MYSELF AS A RELIGIOUS PERSON—I’M MORE SPIRITUAL.

JEWSH MILLENNIALS & SPIRITUALITY

As Millennial spirituality evolves in America, 56 percent consider themselves to be at least somewhat of a spiritual person and, more than any other generation, they meditate or pray at least once a day (38%). Both Christian (38%) and Jewish Millennials (40%) are more likely than average to definitely consider themselves to be spiritual. Though Jewish Millennials have a slight edge in the percentage that identifies as spiritual, Christian Millennials lead in reporting a regular prayer practice (52% pray at least once a day).

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF TO BE A “SPIRITUAL” PERSON?

ALL MILLENNIALS

CHRISTIAN MILLENNIALS

JEWSH MILLENNIALS

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SPIRITUALITY BY GENERATION

The importance of religious faith to Jewish Millennials (92% “very” + “somewhat” important) and, on a broader level, their interest in matters of faith and spirituality are rising compared to other generations. Part of this may be because some Millennials are still in the developmental and discovery period of their lives and therefore are naturally curious and interested in faith and spirituality as a general process of adulthood. However, for Jewish Millennials, this interest translates into a rare self-identifier, as they are also much more likely than other generations to consider themselves as “spiritual” (77% “somewhat” + “definitely”).

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF TO BE A “SPIRITUAL” PERSON?

“I DON’T LIKE TO IDENTIFY MYSELF AS A RELIGIOUS PERSON—I’M MORE SPIRITUAL.”

“MILLENNIAL JEWS ARE REDEFINING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A ‘RELIGIOUS JEW.’”
DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF TO BE A RELIGIOUS JEW?

Millennials are re-defining what it means to be a “religious Jew.”

“I LIKE THE MORAL AND VALUE.”
“I’M MORAL, BUT I’M NOT SPIRITUAL.”

MILLENNIALS (18~31)

- Yes: 80%
- No: 15%
- Not Sure: 5%

GEN-XERS (32~50)

- Yes: 64%
- No: 36%

BOOMERS (51~69)

- Yes: 60%
- No: 30%
- Not Sure: 10%

ELDERS (70+)

- Yes: 28%
- No: 68%
- Not Sure: 4%

TOTAL

- Yes: 51%
- No: 63%
- Not Sure: 6%
BELIEF ABOUT THE AFTERLIFE

Young Jews’ uncertainty about the specifics of spirituality surfaces again in their widespread opinions about what happens after death, especially compared to other generations. Many young Jews feel the afterlife depends on their own decisions; almost one-third of Millennials believe that entrance to Gan Eden or heaven is determined by their actions during life, such as being a good person (17%) or obeying the Torah (15%). An additional 17 percent trust they’ll go to heaven because of a loving God who does not allow people to perish. Unlike other generations, Millennials are hesitant to say that nothing happens after death (9%), preferring instead to admit that they think about the afterlife without arriving at any conclusions (21%).
I have thought about this before and I don’t know

I will go to Gan Eden/heaven because I am basically a good person

I will go to Gan Eden/heaven because God loves all people and will not let them perish

I will go to Gan Eden/heaven because I have tried to obey the Torah and I am regarded as righteous

I will be reincarnated into a new body

Nothing happens

I will wait in purgatory until it is determined where I will be for all eternity

Other

I have never thought about this before and I don’t know

MILLENIALS

GEN-XERS

BOOMERS

ELDERS
FORMAL, BUT NOT UNIFORM

Jewish Millennials are fairly ceremonial in their approach to faith. They feel a need to embody and signal their religious affiliation through consistent attendance of religious services and observance of sacred rituals and traditions. To them, religion is a personal statement, but one worked out in community.

At the same time, young Jews remain open to other belief systems, including “newer” interpretations of Judaism, religions beyond Judaism itself or less institutional manifestations of their spiritual leanings. As one Barna focus group attendee expressed, “I just treat others with respect and all of that good stuff. That’s good religion to me.” Among Millennials, and particularly those raised by intermarried couples, there are fewer gatekeepers and guidelines for Jewish religious endeavors.

This content was adapted from the 2017 Barna report Jewish Millennials: The Beliefs and Behaviors Shaping Young Jews in America. To gain further insights, the full piece is available for purchase at j4j.co/barnastudy.

To see the other 6 myths about Jewish Millennials, go to j4j.co/barna7myths.

Jews for Jesus is dedicated to helping people make an informed decision about who the real Jesus is. To find out more about the real Jesus or just to ask us anything you’d like, contact jfj@jewsforjesus.org or visit us at jewsforjesus.org.