

Jewish Moms Seek Kosher Family Relationships

On the eve of Yom Kippur, which begins sundown Friday, west metro families balance tradition with contemporary lives.

By [Todd Svano](#) for *Minnetonka Patch*, an affiliate of *The Huffington Post*

There are three kinds of Jews, according to Ethan Meirovitz: "Religious Jews, cultural Jews, and gastrointestinal Jews—Jews who just love the meals."

"I'm all three," said Meirovitz, a precocious 13-year-old at the [Heilicher Minneapolis Jewish Day School](#). "And so are many Jewish moms."



The honey-sweet wishes of the Rosh Hashanah new year, celebrated by Jewish families last week, gave way to this week's [Yom Kippur](#)—10 Days of Awe and fasting. It's the last chance to relinquish sin and mend relationships during a season of self-examination that ends as Yom Kippur commences, sundown Friday, as the Day of Atonement.

While synagogues direct Jewish worshippers in holy confession, Jewish mothers interviewed recently in the west metro area raised their own humble Yom Kippur question: "Am I sufficiently honoring my heritage, and effectively passing onto my kids what is most sacred?"

Laura Smith of Minnetonka remembers her grandmother keeping eight different sets of beautiful silver dinnerware in a china cabinet, fully lined in green felt from floor to ceiling, with separate milk and meat dishes for Sabbaths and holidays.

"It was grand and it set the tone for how special the holidays were," she said. Smith and other parents seeking to "make memories" for their children have a sinking feeling something has been lost.

"I was saddened to think that our family does not have any 'rituals' that we follow annually," she said. "We thoroughly enjoy the Jewish holidays, but I don't feel that we have enough to share."

Yet one day recently, something new happened with her 11-year-old daughter, Lily. She found her grandmother's silver bowl, tarnished with age, in a cabinet. Smith explained what the purpose of the bowl, and Lily asked if she and her mother could clean it.

"I planned to polish only the bowl, but two hours later we were having a great time together," said Smith.



Sandy Sondell of Wayzata and her family go to the conservative [Adath Jeshurun](#) Congregation in Minnetonka, where some families continue religiously separating foods. She openly wrestles with the fact that after seven years of keeping kosher in her marriage, that practice ended.

"Initially, it was hard for me, said Sondell. "In college and for all my life I've kept kosher. That was just part of being Jewish."

Sondell pulled out her prayer book to share the alphabetized inventory of sins she and others at Adath will confess on Saturday: "We abuse, we betray, we are cruel, we destroy, we embitter, we falsify . . ."

Yet she believes God's judgment will be more about her attitude and intention, to be a faithful mother and Jewish woman, than about impossible attempts at perfection.

"My husband asked why we kept kosher, mostly because he wanted cheese on his tacos," she said. "I explained I don't think that it's something God would be displeased about. Rules about eating are more for my sense of belonging and my sense of knowing and thinking about what it means to be Jewish."

The orthodox, of course, disagree. Holiness is absolute in the family of Janie Buchbinder of [Darchei Noam Synagogue](#) in St. Louis Park. Meticulously attending to the Torah's 613 commands, they will leave their lights on through the night Friday, as they do each Sabbath, so they don't have to "work" or lift a finger to adjust them, and so nothing interrupts their devotion.

Darchei Noam worshippers see keeping kosher as a matter of unquestioned obedience. "What kind of year you're going to have is written in the Book of Life on Rosh Hashanah and sealed on Yom Kippur," said Buchbinder. "We are continually asking forgiveness. When the gates close on Saturday, you will hear crying and wailing in our synagogue."

But at home, all three mothers say prayers with their children, light candles and make weekly challah—the classic braided Sabbath bread.

"My goal for my kids is that they appreciate every day what they have, who they are, and how they got here," said Sondell.

That's better caught than taught, the mothers implied, and in no better way than in the kitchen with their Jewish relatives for the high holidays.

"We got together four times to cook as an extended family for the holidays," said Sondell. "Once to make the soup, once to make kreplach (a meat inside dough) to drop into the soup, once to make (ground) Gefilte fish, and another time to make (potato turnover) knishes."

It may not be confession in the synagogue, but the family bonding sure seems holy, especially when you incur the wrath of the bubbies (grandmas) for how you rolled the dough, laughed Sondell. "After that, the kids play Wii," she said. "But at least they're with us."