

## Neal Shapiro: Tikkun Olam(ing) Via the Media

**T**ime magazine's current cover story highlighted the 100 most influential people of the year. If a similar list were generated in the Jewish world, Neal Shapiro (PresidentThirteen/WNET.org) would be near the top. Neal has held numerous power-brokering positions including NBC News President and Executive Producer of Dateline. He is currently the lead executive for Thirteen/WNET and WLIW21 as well as many national public affairs programs produced in NYC. He is thoughtful, articulate and committed to making a difference in the world. Here are excerpts from the newest Top Jew's full video interview, which can all be seen on Jinsider.com.

### Key Stats:

#### **Favorite Jewish food:**

Matzoh ball soup

#### **Favorite Jewish or Yiddish phrase:**

Oy vey

#### **Favorite ritual:** Passover Seder

**Motto:** "Never make the same mistake twice"

#### **Guilty pleasure:** Film noir movies

**Favorite movie:** Casablanca

**Favorite book:** The Great Gatsby

**Living hero:** Derek Jeter

#### **Hero of all time (living or dead):**

Abraham Lincoln

**Greatest comedian:** Jerry Seinfeld

**Favorite biblical hero:** David

#### **Unforgettable moment:**

Watching the Berlin Wall fall in front of my eyes

**Scariest moment:** Being detained by Syrian police

#### **Greatest accomplishment:**

I hope it is yet to come

**11th commandment:** Before making a decision, try to see things from all points of view

**Greatest regret:** Waiting too long to propose to my wife

### The Secret of Judaism:

I think it gives life a purpose. There's something about the values, which are wonderful, embracing, and inspiring. And if you live your whole life and it's just about you, I think that at the end of the day you'll find it's an empty life. [You have to] live your life thinking you have responsibilities to you and yourself, your family, and your community and your people and you – and I love the obligation that you need to do more than just living a great life and keeping your family fed. You need to make the world a little bit better place, and that's part of your obligation. There's an incredible satisfaction you get from that. There's an incredible sense of reward that can't be monetized but lifts your soul. That's a great thing that Judaism provides.



### Judaism & Journalism:

What I like about Judaism is it's about questions - that all questions are good. And I think it's one of the reasons why I became a journalist, because it embraces curiosity and it says that curiosity leads you to the truth. Well, what a great notion to live your life by, not just being Jewish but in everything. Because I always resisted the notion of, "Stop asking, you don't need to know that." Because when people tell you don't need to know that, I think, "Wait a minute there's something I do need to know." I do think we need to know how the world functions around us. I think we need to know what the government does in our name. I think we need to know how our tax dollars are being spent. I think we need to know what's happening around the world. I think we need to because it helps us think about how to live our life and what our obligations are to our fellow person.

### Favorite Narrative:

I've struggled with it a lot. Abraham and Isaac going up on the mountain and the notion of are you really going to kill your son and would you really do it and what's that about? In one sense it's a horrific story, especially being a parent you think, "Oh my God" and, "What's this about?" And then I've been fascinated with all the different interpretations of what this could really be about. Is it really about devotion or is actually a notion about fairness or is about common sense or is it about when you ultimately pull back from orders. It raises a lot of fundamental questions, which take you outside of just the narrow story you appreciate as a kid.

### Jewish Principles:

I think there are so many lessons. I think the notion of family is important, how it's central to the tradition and how it's central to your responsibility to each other. I think the notion of community is so great. The notion that we have to exist as a community and our history is born out [of the fact] that we need to support each other, especially in a hostile world. ... I always loved the notion, as a young man even, that it was not okay just to come to synagogue and say the prayers and then lead an unjust life. In fact, it was better to live a just life even if you didn't come to the synagogue all the time. I thought that was important. I love the idea, I think my mom used that notion, that about the best kind of giving is anonymous giving or that the important thing is to make strangers in your midst feel comfortable and your obligation to them, or the idea that when you give charity to people, how important is tzedaka? I mean the notion that you know at a young age that is part of your responsibility is to give back. All right? And when you first learn that, you know, when I give my kids allowance some part goes to your college, some parts for you to spend, and some part goes to tzedaka. And I love that at a young age they have to think about that, and that should be part of who they are.