

POINTS TO REVIEW/ KNOW BEFORE YOU START:

To re-cap, this is about religion, NOT:

- Philosophical beliefs
- Spiritual beliefs
- MEDICAL OBJECTIONS

THAT MEANS NEVER USE THE ABOVE TERMS IN YOUR LETTER

- Keep in mind that this does not have to be a work of literary art. These are your thoughts and beliefs; they can ramble and be presented in a conversational tone. Try, though, to spell everything correctly and stick to correct grammar and punctuation. It adds credibility.
- You know the law does not require you to be a member of an organized religion, or any religion at all. While this is helpful, it is not required.
- **USE YOUR OWN WORDS.** This handbook has phrasing suggestions; modify as you see fit.
- You know that the law allows for personal religious belief. **USE THAT EXACT PHRASE IN YOUR LETTER.** A personal religious belief means this: You are allowed to have a personal translation of the word of your God that connects to refusing vaccines. In other words, if a religious principle (that you truly believe in) translates (in your own understanding of the word of God) to refusing immunizations, then your belief fits with the definition of a legal waiver. More details/ examples on that in the following sections.
- If you are able to acquire a letter from a cleric attesting to your personal sincerity and/ or your devotion to your faith and include it with your own letter- **DO IT**. If you can get several letters, that is even better. It is helpful to include a history of how this person knows you and your family. A one-page letter is fine. The Commissioner of Education recommends a letter from a religious authority in his guidelines.
- Most religions do not have an official stance on immunization. That permits the parents even more room for interpretive freedom. The broad nature of the law enables parents to honestly and easily fit with law. But always remember, your claim must always circle back to a religious belief.
- Joining a phony church is a **REALLY BAD IDEA**.

WORDS/ PHRASES THAT ARE HELPFUL TO INCLUDE:

- Sacred
- Holy
- Worship
- Blessed
- Conviction
- Faith
- Religious Mandate
- Translation of the word of my God
- Unique understanding of the language of God

- Personal understanding of God's message to me
- Religious call

Getting Started and Structure to Follow

The below are recommended components to include in your letter along with a structure that offers the opportunity to include everything you need. Not all will be applicable to all parents, i.e., 'Why I immunized in the past.' The order presented flows well; transitional sentences and thoughts are suggested in this section to create a logical flow from one thought to the next. Ideally, you want to make it easy to read, follow, understand and approve:

- Introduction & Purpose
- Request for Confidentiality
- Personal History/ Background
- Description of your Current Belief System
- How your Personal Religious Interpretation Connects to Immunizations
- Clarification of your Opposition to all Immunizations
- Attitude(s) towards Modern Medicine and Medical Intervention
- Why I immunized in the past
- Emphasis on Personal Interpretation Component
- Offer Contact Info/ Follow-up documentation as necessary

First, include the proper form of a letter; your name, address on the top. Below that, include the name and address of those to whom the letter will be sent. **INCLUDE THE DATE.**

Addressing it to a specific person could help to ensure (but not guarantee) the confidentiality of the letter and application. If you do not have an individual name, simply write 'To whom it may concern.'

When you write this letter, take it section by section and brainstorm each separately. It may be overwhelming to write the letter all at once. So break it down over several days.

Below are explanations of the section and examples of paragraph introductions to give you an idea of the type of information you can, and should, offer. Elaborate and expound on the theme of the paragraph as you feel appropriate.

Above all, use your own words.

Introduction and Purpose

The below explains to the reader includes your intentions as well as what the law allows you to do.

Dear Mrs. Smith,

I am writing to formally and respectfully apply for a religious exemption to immunizations.

I base my request on religious grounds. We are adhering to the Public Health Law 2165. (PHL 2165 is for NY- put in whatever law is in the state that your child attends college in) PHL 2165 states:

This section shall not apply to a person who holds genuine and sincere religious beliefs which are contrary to the practices herein required, and no certificate shall be required as a prerequisite to such person being admitted or received into or attending an institution.

I hold sincere and genuine religious beliefs that forbid us from immunizing.

We are including the appropriate information from (STATE) regarding Religious Waivers to Immunizations with this application and will do our best to adhere to them.

We are notarizing this application and letter. Therefore, we are swearing all of the contents of this letter are 100% true.

(STATE) law allows a parent to refuse immunization based on a personal religious belief. (STATE) law has great respect and deference for the myriad religions that are practiced in her borders and as such, allows for the individuals unique word from God as it concerns this issue.

I understand that we do not have to be a member of an organized religion, or a member of any religion at all. I also understand that refusing immunizations does not have to be a tenet, or directive, of a particular religion that I may follow. I also understand that I do not have to submit a letter from a religious figure.

Request for Confidentiality

Ask that the letter remain confidential for good reason- first and foremost so your letter and application doesn't get read by many eyes. The ideal situation is that the school nurse reads it (only) and tucks it away in the file- accepted, of course. Generally speaking, the fewer people charged with making the decision, the better.

Additionally, there are legitimate social consequences to consider that are specified in the examples below:

'We ask that this application be kept 100% confidential as it contains thoughts and sentiments not shared in casual conversation....'

'The content of this letter is of an extremely personal nature...'

'The only reason we share this with you is because the law dictates that we do...'

'We would rather not have other parents and children be aware that we applied for this exemption as we do not want other parents and children to know that Johnny is not immunized. We fear a lack of understanding for our selves and our children...'

'We ask that this be shared on an as-needed basis only; that is, only those charged with approving the application should read our words.'

Personal History

You need to tell your stories in so far as religion is concerned. Offering personal background/ history is important. No two life stories are alike. Ergo, your letter will be unique rather than plucked off the internet and 'approximately' honest. Since the credibility of your letter rests largely on how you express your individual personal religious belief(s), this section that defines your life's journey is essential in placing your unique signature on your description of these religious beliefs.

If you have past experiences that were life-changing and caused you to connect or re-connect with your God, include them. This section will also explain the path you took in your journey to refuse vaccines.

This section will set the stage and natural progression for the rest of your letter. Tell the reader who you are relative to your belief in God.

Suggestions of points to cover:

- **How were you raised? Were your parents devout Catholics? Conservative or Orthodox Jews? A combination of both? Were your parents strict or open-minded?**
- **Did you complete sacraments? Bar Mitzvah? Were you an altar boy?**
- **Did you acquire a formal (or informal) religious education in any way? Where and for how long? What did you learn or take away from the experience/ exposure?**
- **Have you selectively chosen aspects of a particular faith with which you were raised? What are they?**
- **Do you practice your faith exactly as your parents showed you? If not, when did you start to veer from what your parents told you and develop your own personal belief? What faith calls to you now?**
- **If your parents did not offer you any religious exposure, how did you formulate the idea you have of your higher power? Did something specific trigger an understanding of, and connection to, God?**

- If God did not have a presence in your home, maybe you discovered your God later in life. Why? What happened? What made you re-think?
- Did you experience a traumatic event that caused you to turn to God and examine the essence of your faith and what it means to you?
- Did you have no exposure to religion at all when you were young? And now, as an adult, you believe myriad religious principles that make up who you are and what you do? What are they?
- Did you, or someone you love, have a brush with death/ grave disease? Was your strength and fortitude tested in some extraordinary way that caused you to reach out to your God and ultimately thank Him for his mercy or power? What was it?
- Was there a specific point in your life when you felt God's power? Write about it.
- Did you find yourself disagreeing with some aspects of the faith you were raised with? At what point did you choose your own path to God?

Elaborate on your background. Include turning points in your life that caused you to examine your relationship with God.

Keep in mind, this is about RELIGION. So the development of your connection to God has to be the central theme of your personal history. The information you offer must circle back to your personal relationship with God. This will create a foundation for the rest of your letter.

There is no reason to include traumatic events that have to do with vaccine injury. While that may be true, the reader may infer that you have medical objections to immunizations. If you mention or highlight these events, you may cast doubt on the genuinely religious nature of your request to refuse immunizations. Stay focused.

While you are legally permitted to have a medical objection to immunizations and a religious objection at the same time, it is best to leave medical commentary for the medical community. If the school has a witch hunt planned, don't buy the kindling.

Stick to your central objection- immunization opposes YOUR personal interpretation of a religious belief(s) that you hold sacred. You believe that if you were to participate in immunization, you would be prevented from worshipping your God in the way that you see fit. If you were to immunize you would not be practicing your First Amendment Freedom of Religion.

Introducing your personal history/ background:

'In order to understand our religious perspective and how we have come to the decision to turn our backs on immunizations for our children now and forever, we would like to offer a history of who we are- how we were raised, our life's journey, how we came to be together and where we are now in the development of our religious beings. This will help

the reader of these thoughts understand our unique and personal perspective on the idea and concept of God....'

We will offer our personal background(s) so you can more completely understand where we have been and where we are at, regarding God and our religious development...'

Example #1

'I was raised a member of the Catholic community. My parents were traditional, but not strict. Sometimes we attended church services of other Christian faiths, sometimes non-denominational, when we were away from home. My siblings and I came to believe this was natural as the essence of God is not understood by just one form of institutionalized religion, or an institutionalized religion at all.

*So we were raised to embrace other ideas of God and accept them. Ceremony and ritual aside, **our** family's God was loving, healing, all-powerful, accepting and forgiving. We were nurtured in an environment that encouraged love for humankind and a personal relationship with God. Our thoughts of God were open-ended and formed as part of our natural maturation process.*

Example #2:

'I was raised in a home with two faiths: Jewish and Catholic. I and my siblings were encouraged to explore both and decide, for ourselves, what facets of these faiths fit our minds and spirits. My Mom divorced when I was young and the concept of faith and God were not as much of a priority for her. As a result, I had to think about what God and my faith(s) meant to me on my own.

My parents encouraged a personal relationship with God and encouraged religious introspection. They gave me an early and general foundation and encouraged me to find my own language with which to speak to God and carry out his word and live my beliefs.

My husband, on the other hand, was raised in a strict Catholic home. He was an altar boy and received all his sacraments and attended Church regularly. His Catholic faith is one of the foundations of who he is and what he does. We are happily married and as such, I have embraced his beliefs and have made great efforts to bring them into my heart and my life. I appreciate him deeply. And because of this deep love and respect I have for him, I have looked more deeply into the faith that he holds so precious to him.

Example #3

I was born into a faith-filled home of two devout Catholics and still adhere to strict Catholicism. I participate in all the ceremony and ritual of the Catholic community and have support all the stance the church takes in society. To me, my Catholic faith is not just a religion that I was raised with- it is how I live my life. I will impart these beliefs

and this lifestyle to my children

I received all my sacraments in God's house, attend church on Sundays, holidays and days when I need support from my Lord. I consider all these ceremonies and rituals as vital to my personal standing as a member of the Catholic community and each of them as important to remaining true to my faith and my God.

Example #4

I was brought up as a Christians. Some Christian principles remain with us; those of generosity and tolerance towards others, the goal of peace and contentment as well as a union with God which remains a perpetual goal.

As I grew and matured, I began to see that I did not truly understand why I adhered to the form of Christianity my parents introduced me to. I felt that I was always looking for something beyond the church, past the hymns and more than the prayers recited. I needed more than the words that others wrote which I was supposed to think and feel. I bought into it partially, but not 100%. Shouldn't religion be an integral part of life? I felt that as soon as I put down the Bible or walked out of church, I left the thoughts and feelings a little bit behind; I had other thoughts and feelings that were all my own that were not directly spoken of in the church. Shouldn't it all be one and the same? 'Half-baked' regarding religion did not sit well with me; I found I needed more to explain what I felt and thought. And what my relationship to God needed to be.

The above are examples. Think through your own family's history and your own history with God. Offer unique detail. Use your own words. Tell your story.

Description of your Current Belief System

At the completion of your personal history, describe the set of beliefs that you have settled into now. Many people form their own ideas about God as a result of life experiences. We often take only what personally resonates with us from our faith. Explain how your background factored into your relationship with God that you have right now.

Are you strictly of one faith or do you have components from several that you embrace? For example, Buddhism and the word of Jesus are not that far apart and many people embrace a 'blended belief'. This is completely legal. Have you left your Church and now attend a non-denominational parish? Do you connect with God when you find yourself in a quiet and natural setting?

Since a comprehensive belief system typically develops over time and every day, explain that each day you add to or enhance your belief system. Once you paint your own personal picture, you can transition to the next step in your letter; a description of how your unique belief system connects to refusing vaccines.

Maybe Jesus and the Bible had a presence in your home but you didn't necessarily go to church every Sunday. Your parents were liberal with their interpretation. As a result, so are you.

So you may feel that forgiveness from God can be found in other venues besides His house, the Church. And maybe you are OK with gay marriage and birth control. Think through where you stand and describe it.

Below are examples of paragraphs that establish your Description of Current Belief System:

Example #1

I support the essence of Jesus. But unlike the Catholic Church, we support the use of birth control. We do not think it is a religion's right to judge the love one human has for another and their right to wed. We believe forgiveness can be found from God without the ceremony and ritual of the Catholic Church. I do not think that the rigid rules and structure of the Catholic Church builds a bond between God and self. I believe this bond can be created and reinforced through commitment, prayer and following the word of God as the living being sees fit. Therefore, we believe in the personal interpretation of the word of our God.

We have not tossed aside our Christian roots; we just think there is more to the picture. We believe that Jesus Christ, in his love and forgiveness for all, would also question the structure of institutionalized religion; this is exactly what Catholicism has become.

We see that we do not have to adhere to the form of Christianity my parents introduced me to. We can look for something beyond the church building, past the hymns and more than the prayers recited. We believe religion needs be an integral part of life, not just a few hours on a Sunday. We needed to make religion an integral part of life. We can't simply put down the Bible and disconnect. Belief in God needs, for us, to be more than that. We also believe that there is evidence that Jesus Christ did not necessarily want his teachings to become an institutionalized type of religion, which is exactly what, at least, Catholicism has done.

We have chosen to live by the Christian principles that we feel define the essence of the faith and the word of Jesus Christ and the Bible. We have also invited other complimentary aspects of other religions, including Buddhism, into our lives to complete our set of beliefs. We live by a blended set of beliefs and this suits us.

The principles of generosity, tolerance towards others, inner peace and contentment as well as a devoted union with God remain a perpetual goal for us. We achieve this peace by trusting in God's words and following it. Followers of Jesus look for this inner peace and well as followers of Buddhism.

Example #2

*I relied on the word of God, taken from the Bible, to get me through the trials of my life that I have faced. (Completion of **Personal History**)*

I now consult with the Bible for strength and affirmation of the word of God. I turn to the Bible for many of life's major decisions, including all the facets of how to raise my kids. Decisions regarding their health are a huge part of mothering my children; the procedure of immunizations is part of those important health decisions I face.

I believe in the Bible, but I believe that the Bible is a framework for modern-day life. There is no way that the Bible could address every issue in today's world. It was composed far too long ago to anticipate today's world. I believe that God wants His children to rely on the personal language He forms with each of us. I know because of my strong and unique bond with God, he talks to me in way that is clear and must be followed.

While there is no scripture in the Bible that states, verbatim, no to vaccinate, I understand through my translation of the word of my God, that immunizations is contrary to my sincere and genuine religious belief.

Example #3

We are members of the Jewish community. This bond of community exists as a part of our history and faith. I practice the Jewish faith according to my own personal interpretation of what it means to me. I base my beliefs, at least in part, on the Torah and my understanding of its message to me. I am raising my children according to my individual translation of the Jewish faith and the Torah

I follow the teachings of the Torah that have the most impact and meaning to me and personal interpretation of what Judaism and the Divine Law of Judaism means to me. Divine Law does not change, in spite of scientific or medical advancements made by mankind. This is a principle of ancient Judaism. Ancient Judaic teachings do not expressly address every aspect of modern life. Rather, I see these teaching as principles, something of an outline, that is subject to individual application as society evolves and time and life go on. Many elements of modern life were introduced after Torah and the Jewish faith allows individual translation by each member of the community.

I consider myself a Conservative Jew. I uphold the traditions, custom and principles in a way that I see fit. My home is kosher and we observe and celebrate the Jewish holidays in our way. As a Conservative, I believe that God's law needs to be interpreted to fit modern circumstances. I take my faith and the associated rituals where I need to go. As no two kosher homes are exactly the same, no two interpretations of the Torah are the same.

My home is the heart of my Jewish faith. This is where our rituals are followed, books on my faith are read and kosher meals are enjoyed in the fashion that I choose. The decision to heal my child with prayer and my own judgment for remedies will take place in my

home. I keep my home clean and absent of those elements which I consider contradictory of the Jewish faith; immunizations are one of them.

How Your Beliefs Connect to Refusing Immunizations

This is the part that most people have difficulty with and it is important to keep in mind your personal relationship with God. This section will include more suggestions on how to transition from what you believe to how it connects to vaccines.

Let's take Example #1 from Personal History: "I was raised a Catholic but my parents were not strict."

Maybe you feel that some of the general principles of Christianity define the faith more so than ceremony and ritual. And these general principles can be found in Biblical passages that have meaning to us as individuals.

Below are some ideas that the Bible conveys and how they can lead to refusing immunizations:

*"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and **He shall direct thy paths**." Proverbs 3:5,6*

"Show me the path where I should go, O Lord, show me the right road for me to walk." Psalms 25:4

"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye." Psalms 32:8

This illustrates that we must place our faith and trust in God and listen to His word. Therefore, whatever we feel his directive is to us, we must follow. This is important as various scripture can deliver a message to us and according to the above, we must heed it as it is the word of God.

"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Luke (16:13)

In the above, man is the servant to God. If man trusts God, man cannot hedge his bets, so to speak, and engage in immunization. That would be like saying, "Just in case the healing powers of God don't work and my trust in Him doesn't pan out, I'll cover myself with immunizations." A religious belief is all or nothing- at least according to my personal interpretation.

Exodus 15:26 states: "If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His Commandments and keep all His statutes, I will none

of the diseases on you which I brought on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you."

This line of scripture supports the healing power of the Lord, as long as we listen and obey His word.

"Every word of God is pure: He is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him."
[Proverbs 30:5]

This could translate to refusing vaccines in this way: First, His word is pure. That means His word is honest and true. The next sentence states that He is a shield for us, as long as we trust Him. This means, to me, that as long as I trust Him, he will shield me. Disease is an example of a harm He will shield me from. Therefore, I do not need vaccines. To trust in the creations of man rather than the pure word of God is to turn my back on Him and tarnish my relationship with God. I cannot do that. Trust in God is an all-or-nothing proposal.

"In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth." [Genesis 1:1]

"God created us in his own image." [Genesis 1:27]

I believe that life, the Earth, and Heaven are God's creations and He is omnipotent. I believe that God created us in His likeness. As indicated by the above, we are mirror images of our God. Therefore, what we do unto our own bodies we do unto God. I believe in the Bible, and God's law and His Commandments. It is by way of the flawless word of God that I carry out my relationship with Him. My Lord's law has instructed me that I am a servant to Him here on earth only to live an exemplary and undefiled life so that I will obtain everlasting life with God after my time is over. Because of the above, we must do what we feel is God's word. This is a conviction and a mandate.

"So that your faith might not rest on human wisdom but on the power of God." (1 Corinthians, 2:5)

This line supports faith in God (and his healing power) rather than mankind.

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own. That God is in you. That he is our healer." Corinthians 6:19

The above affirms the concept that our bodies are a temple of God, created in His image, and subject to His powers that lie within us. God is our healer.

As such, we do not believe that immunizations can heal; that is the job of faith and God. We feel that if we trust in the immunization process, rather than the healing

powers of God, we disconnect from our faith. Trust in God is 100%; one cannot call themselves faithful to God without a 100% commitment of trust and faith.

In Matthew 9:12, Jesus said: *“Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do.”* Jesus again repeated the same in Mark 2:17. *“When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick.”*

Immunizing one’s children would contradict the above as we need to take a healthy child (a well child) to the doctor for immunizations. The Bible states that a visit to a doctor should only occur if the child is sick. This scripture is antithetical to the immunization process.

The below affirms the healing power of God:

In James 5:14-15, the Apostle James warned: “is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint [him] with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person.”

One can also have religious objections to immunizations based on the fact that some immunizations are created using a culture from aborted fetal tissue. The Vatican teaches in *Donum Vitae* (I, 4: 1987) that “The corpses of human embryos and fetuses, whether they have been deliberately aborted or not, must be respected just as the remains of other human beings.” Many believe that using vaccines produced from aborted fetuses shows a profound disrespect for the remains of these children. Using vaccines that exploit these deaths for profit violates the teachings of the Church. Many believe that immunizing supports abortion and consequently violates conscience. Conscience is a strong force in Christianity.

The Catholic Church teaches that Moral Conscience is sacred to Catholic tenets and must be obeyed as described in the Catechism and numerous encyclicals, especially by the Fourth Lateran Council, "The Divine Law is the supreme rule of actions; our thoughts, desires, words, acts, all that man is, is subject to the domain of the law of God; and this law is the rule of our conduct by means of our conscience. Hence it is never lawful to go against our conscience; as the Fourth Lateran council says, 'Quidquid fit contra conscientiam, aedificat ad gehennam.'" ["Whatever is done in opposition to conscience is conducive to damnation."]

Over and above, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, attested by Papal Authority as the standard teaching norm for the Catholic faith further instructs on the responsibility to stick to your conscience, “Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice ever calling him to love and to do what is good to avoid evil, sounds in his heart the right moment. For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God.. his conscience is man’s most secret core and sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths. (CCC 1776)

When he listens to his conscience, the prudent man can hear God speaking.” (CCC 1777)

Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as to personally make moral decisions. He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters.”
(CCC 1782)

The idea of following conscience is powerful in that to disobey conscience is equivalent to damnation. Disobeying conscience is a sin. One cannot willingly sin against God. The mandate to follow the word of god is stronger than a vaccine mandate.

However, not all immunizations are created using aborted fetal tissue. That means this cannot be your sole objection as it does not cover all immunizations. Offered in combination with other religious principles, it presents strong support. But these beliefs should be a component of a much larger, more comprehensive set of beliefs.

The sanctity and purity of the blood is strong theme in the Bible. As such, we can assert that immunizations corrupts the purity of the sacred and precious blood:

I received my sacraments as a step to becoming part of the Catholic community. As I received the body and blood of Christ from the priest, the solemn event of my Holy Communion affirmed in my heart the sanctity of the blood and body. This ceremony is the symbolization of the purity of blood and I believe this act and what it symbolizes to be a foundational component of the Catholic Church. This important and solemn ceremony, started in childhood and practiced regularly is enough to establish my view, various scripture affirms the precious nature of pure blood:

For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.
(Leviticus 17:11)

An abundance of scripture exists to preserve the sanctity of the blood. Go to bible.com to find the thoughts and sentiments that best suit your true beliefs.

To many, the pursuit of Jesus Christ is synonymous with the pursuit of inner peace and contentment. The immunization process may cause stress and a feeling of anxiety. This directly contradicts the pursuit of a perfect union of peace with Jesus. We, as followers of Jesus Christ, are on a quest for inner peace, not internal strife. As such we cannot deliberately act in such a way to create anxiety and a feeling of discontent as inviting this feeling would disconnect us from our God.

Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen. (Romans 15:33)

The theme of peace is pervasive in the Bible. Prayers are ended and begun with a wish for peace. Again, explore bible.com for more than express your thoughts.

Beliefs derived from the Torah

You may derive your beliefs from the Torah and Judaism.

I follow the teachings of the Torah that have the most impact and meaning to me. I adhere to a personal interpretation of what Judaism and Divine Law of Judaism means to me. Divine Law does not change, in spite of medical or scientific advances made by mankind. This is a principle of Ancient Judaism. Ancient Judaic teachings do not expressly address every aspect of modern life. Rather, I see these teachings as an outline, that is subject to individual application as society evolves and life goes on. Modern life proceeds Torah. The Jewish faith allows for individual translation by each member of the community. Clearly, it is up to the individual worshipper to process the message(s) and act accordingly.

The first commandment of Jewish law is, "What does G-d expect from us?" We commit ourselves to answer that question with our own well-thought out answer. These answers are evident in all our actions, thoughts and decisions.

Torah prohibits we welcome foreign material into the body and this is precisely what vaccines are. I believe that it is a contradiction to fight a poison or disease that can or does enter the body with vaccination, which is disease. We believe this contradicts the teachings of the Jewish religion that mandates we keep our bodies and blood unpolluted and without contamination.

I consider these injections to represent defilement of the body, blood and soul and the trust we have in the healing powers of God. I believe that a body addresses disease by a good mental spirit and prayer and maintaining the purity and cleanliness of both. I do not believe that the poisons and disease of vaccines are allies in the fight against disease. I believe that our faith is our strongest support system when the body is in crisis. I believe in the healing power of prayer.

The Jewish religion dictates that man should not mix the blood of man and that of animals. It is well known that some vaccines are prepared using the tissue culture from animals. This directly contradicts the teachings of my faith as I see it.

The Book of Genesis states that G-d created man in His image. It is my belief that G-d knew what He was doing and the body of many needs no 'fixing' by mankind. I see vaccines as 'fixing' I cannot improve on G-d's creation. Numerous religious scripture tell us we need to trust in G-d and His creation.

G-d specifically commands that every male should be circumcised. This I take to mean should be the singular non-reactive 'medical' act we make upon the body in the name of G-d.

I was educated in the Jewish faith. The experience lasted from Kindergarten through 8th grade. I also had a Bat Mitzvah as an important step to welcome me into the Jewish faith and community. At this incredibly important celebration, I was given the tools to engage

the tradition of the Jewish culture as my own. Prayer to me is not just mechanical memorization, it making those words my own. My faith encourages this.

There is no tenet in the Jewish religion that prohibits vaccinations and rabbinic leaders are not in complete agreement on how the religion should address the issue of immunization. The vast majority of Jewish leaders defer to the parents, wherever their personal opinions and values rest. Ancient rabbinical leaders also point out that each Jew has a unique 'song to sing'; this is mine.

Communication with God can take endless forms. The phrase, 'na-asheh v'nishman' translates to 'we will do and we will listen'. As part of the Jewish community, you may translate this phrase to mean that you must do what G-d commands. And G-d, through His word, has communicated that immunizations are in opposition to his word. This could define the practice of your faith that you call your own.

You may invite aspects of other faiths into your belief system:

While I always will carry my Christian roots and a deep belief in Jesus and the Father, I look to other religious principles to live a life in support of the essence of my understanding of Christ. I find that Eastern faiths, (specifically Buddhism) call out to me as right for the way I live and worship.

Buddhism teaches, among other things, that solutions to problems and obstacles lie within our own bodies and minds- our selves- not outside of our selves.

We believe a disease is a problem or an obstacle that must be resolved or overcome. The solution to this problem is a cure, or a successful resolution, to the disease, condition or physical crisis. The cure lies within our own bodies, our judgment or our family, The solution is not an immunization from an outside source. Immunization lies outside of the self. Clearly and absolutely, immunizations do not fit with the Buddhist religion and our personal translation of it.

Buddha asked all his followers/ adherents to his 'way', not to take his word blindly as true, but rather to test the teachings in their own way and life. In this way, each person decides for themselves and takes responsibility for their own actions and understanding of how to address their challenge in life. This translates to a true embracing of the religion and the Buddhist way to live. Because of our faith, we assume full responsibility for our actions regarding our child

If we were faced with a disease that an immunization could address, we would tap on the strength of the body to resolve it. We would, first and foremost, nurture the strengths we know exist within the body of our child and ourselves to reach resolution.. We would meditate, we would pray.

Buddhism is less of a 'fixed package' of beliefs which is to be accepted in its entirety. Buddhism is more of a teaching which each person learns and uses in their own way. After all, to us, what is the good of a faith that lasts only an hour or two per week? Shouldn't a religion, a true faith, be a set of ideas that fit with your life and your own moral compass every day? Shouldn't a religion be a way you live and support so thoroughly that you live this way anyway? I find answers I need in Buddhism.

The Buddhist faith also teaches purity of the mind in order to eliminate, hate, greed and ignorance. We believe the purity of the mind cannot be achieved without purity of the body and for this reason we forgo immunizations. We recognize, through the interpretation of our Buddhism beliefs, that immunizations make the body impure.

We practice a lifestyle that minimizes material encumbrance; this is also one of the goals of Buddhism. We aspire to replace any feeling of hate, greed and ignorance with feelings of supreme happiness and enlightenment.

Possible transitional paragraph from 'Current Belief System' to 'How your Beliefs Connect to Refusing Immunizations'

When my first child entered the world, I consulted with the Bible and members of the clergy to clarify my perspective on the gift that God gave me. I also meditated, prayed and attended several religious retreats. With so many decisions regarding this most precious gift before me, I needed direction that only God can offer.

I read scripture with fresh eyes and a specific purpose- "What would Jesus do?" - I asked myself. I found many 'new' messages within the text that I cherish, including that which lead me to refuse vaccines. Without the life-changing event of parenthood, I could not previously see messages that were always before me through the word of God. I see them now and understand them through the music of the Bible. These words offered strong and direction in the child-rearing decision of immunizations that I had to heed.

Attitudes Toward Modern Medicine and Medical Intervention

The Commissioner of Education suggests that parents include the above in their letter. Parents are also commonly questioned about these topics in interviews.

Question: Do you believe in medical intervention for your child? Which ones? Why or why not?

It is impossible to know all the medical interventions as most of us are not health professionals. It is also impossible to know what may happen to a child's body in the future. Therefore, it is impossible to comment on topics for which one has no knowledge. It is also impossible to speculate on the hypothetical as one cannot predict the future.

That said, I see a clear difference between helping a body in crisis and addressing a healthy body with medical help or intervention. (Refer to past explanations) Generally speaking, if a child's body were in crisis, we would consider all the options and discuss what to do with our trusted pediatrician. We would also consult with the Bible, pray to their God for help and guidance, consult with clergy and rely on the healing power of God to aid our child.

For an example, a child breaks his arm. The advice of a health professional would be appropriate as this child's body is in crisis. That example is very different from immunizations in that, with immunization, a parent seeks to address this body with medical care when it is not in crisis.

As for medicines or antibiotics, each health problem would have to be taken one at a time. I am not sure if I would use blood transfusions because I have not been faced with that decision. If I were faced with that decision, I would review the facts, weigh the benefits and risks, look to the (Bible, Torah, God) for guidance and come to a decision.

A reasonable response to this question is this: whatever God sends my way, I will seek His help for solutions and guidance. And my decisions will adhere to my personal belief in God.

Though I turn my back on immunization, I do not turn my back on all 'modern' medicine and its practices and philosophies. When my child and I were sick in the hospital after I gave birth, I accepted help. Our bodies were in crisis. There is a significant difference between a body in crisis needing help and a body that is healthy accepting a procedure. I believe God would accept the former, He would not accept the latter.

Example #2

The Buddhist religion recognizes humanity as a family of 'one'. We believe in the 'one' and the inherent connectedness of all living beings. For this reason, we believe that a doctor charged with healing could be involved in the administration of medical care, i.e., broken bones or an, injured body. We cannot imagine the hypothetical but we would consider, very carefully and in keeping with our faith, the administration of certain medical procedures, medicines or surgery.

Why I immunized in the past (ideas from several examples can be combined, if appropriate.)

Example #1

It is part of my nature to live in a way that adheres to the 'rules' and to follow guidelines set by trained experts. For me, and in most instances, this is comfortable and feels right. For this reason, I have had my child vaccinated in the past. As I have raised my child and evolved and developed as a religious being, I see that many things of value in life do not

necessarily make sense as mankind sees it. Sometimes, and this is one of those ‘times’, we need to follow our inner voice, our instinct and the conversations with our higher power. These conversations with God can take endless forms. In God’s word, *’na-asheh v’nishman’* - ‘we will do and we will listen’ (***note: this is Yiddish***). Turning my back on vaccines has reached me in His word. This, to me, defines Faith and defines mine.

It is a difficult step to take in society, not to vaccinate. Current medical wisdom tells us that if I do not engage in this procedure for my child (ren), there is a health risk. It is difficult for a part of me to carry out what I knew to be right for me and my child and reflective of my bond with God. Through prayer, consulting with self, God and family members, I have found the strength to carry out what God’s word means to me, even if it means opposing a more mainstream school of thought. My relationship with God, my child and my conscience are uniquely mine, and any child of mine will be raised to be a part of the holy and sacred union and interpretation.

Example #2

I immunized my child from certain diseases when he was very young. During this time, a church friend told me that she had religious objections to immunizations. So she filed a religious waiver to refuse immunizations for her children. She was conflicted; she feared the diseases her child may have to face. But she felt she needed to answer what she felt was a call from God. She feared going against the word of God much more than the diseases. I completely identified with what she meant.

This was an unusual conversation and it stayed with me. It piqued my interest enough where I sought out the word of God through scripture. I re-read the Bible with a specific focus on the question, “What did she read that guided her away from immunizations?” This caused me to review the Bible and Catholic doctrines anew. I needed to determine whether or not aspects of immunizations conflicted with my interpretation of the word of God. I concluded that they did.

Catholicism does not, per se, prohibit immunization. That, in my view, would be impossible as the Bible was written so long ago it cannot take into account modern-day medical procedures. But the Bible is a framework for today, if we allow it to be. The devout and attentive reader must understand through their heart what it says to them. Because only when one does, will they truly understand the message that God tries to send and the direction that one must take or suffer failure and sin to carry the faith.

Example #3

My religious belief that opposes immunization has been with me far longer than the date on this letter. But I did not heed these beliefs, this call from God, for a long time. It is for this reason that I have immunized my children in the past. I now feel that act represents a disobedience to God that needs to be forgiven. I should have known, as every time that I participated in the act, it created anxiety and discord. This is antithetical to the inner peace and contentment that I seek through Jesus Christ. Once the internal strife became to

overwhelming, I looked to the Bible for clarification and I found the root cause of my disharmony and discord. It is because it is against the word of my God.

Example #4

The medical establishment as well as most friends and family apply pressure and guilt to others in society to participate in the immunization process. Modern society tells us that we can hurt ourselves and other people if we do not accept this procedure into our children's bodies. Catholics carry around a hefty dose of guilt in the first place; it is not difficult for society to 'guilt' someone who has been brought up a Catholic into an act with which they are uncomfortable. Society tells us we jeopardize babies, old people and everyone in between, if we do not immunize. Without a medical background or specific scientific knowledge, it is difficult to comment on the truth to that assertion. But the point is moot because I am certain of this; God has communicated to me that to address the healthy bodies of my children with the procedure of immunization would be a sin against my conscience.

Example #5

The immunization process has always created a feeling of anxiety and discord for me. However, I buried these feelings deep inside of me because there is so much pressure in society to immunize; from family, friends and medical professionals. I let all this pressure hide the instinctual feeling I had that immunization was simply contradictory of my bond with God.

I pursue peace and contentment through my bond with Jesus Christ, not discord and anxiety. When the feeling of discord grew too great, I turned to the Bible for specific direction and guidance. I found it through scripture that called to me to turn my back on immunizations, now and forever.

Emphasis on Personal Interpretation Component

Just in case I didn't make it crystal clear, you need to affirm the fact that New York State Law allows you to have a personal religious belief that prohibits immunization. This is the most important aspect of the law that enables virtually endless beliefs to fit squarely with the law.

Example #1

The above is an explanation of my personal religious beliefs. I hope I have described them sufficiently. Again, these thoughts are the unique message I receive from my God. I don't ask that you, or anyone else, agree with these thoughts and personal translations. But under New York law, I respectfully request that they be honored as truthful and legally permissible. Based on what I have shared, I ask this waiver be approved.

Again, expound on these thoughts and use your own words.

Offer Contact Info/ Follow-up documentation as necessary

See how it works?

FAQs

Does one waiver cover all my kids?

Maybe, maybe not. If all of your kids go to the same school or say, the same district, then yes, one waiver should cover all your kids. To cover your bases, indicate on your letter that you request that this waiver cover all your children and name each of them.

However, if you have several children going to different schools with different Boards, then you could receive a denial in one and an approval in another. Sounds crazy? It is.

I am enrolling my child in a daycare. Do they have the same laws?

Yes, all schools (public and private) and day care are subject to the same law Public Health Law 2164. But the interpretation of the religious and medical exemption laws can vary greatly. Some private schools don't think they have to follow it. Catholic or Hebrew schools sometimes think they are the ultimate authority on all things religious; I've read denial letters that abused the law so badly it's like the cleric did not even bother to look it up or consult with an attorney.

To whom do I submit the letter?

The Commissioner of Education Guidelines recommends the building Principal handle applications. But schools can designate the responsibility to anyone they wish. Start with the lowest level of school employee (like the nurse) and go from there.

When do I give this application and letter to them?

Give them the application when they ask for it. If you are registering your child for school for the first time, hand in all the paperwork except for the vaccine records. They will figure it out and ask you for the records. Tell them you are filing a religious waiver to refuse vaccines. Let them tell you when they need it. Keep all correspondence the school sends you.

Do my husband and I have to share the same beliefs?

Only one parent has to have a genuine and sincere belief that is contrary to immunization. It helps if both of you agree and are able to present a united front. But it is not legally necessary.

I live in NYC. What can I expect?

New York City seems to be creating its own interpretation of the law. In November 2012, the New York City Department of Health sent schools this letter. This 'First Warning Letter' appears to be the reason that NYC schools are leaning on parents and playing fast and loose with the law.

Parents who hand in acceptable letters are being called in for interviews. The interviewers all have different approaches. I know this because I have gone on several (legally taped them all) and can't believe my ears. Parents who have vaccinated in the past and have stopped vaccinating are coming under severe scrutiny. Legally permissible letters that even mention medical objections are being rejected. Parents of autistic children seem to be coming under particular focus and persecution. If you live in NYC and wish to refuse vaccinations, you, above all other NY residents, should be contacting your lawmakers to encourage them to change the law. NYC is quickly becoming a city that regularly practices religious persecution and ignores the law.

I would like to selectively vaccinate. What do I do?

I give guidance for genuine religious waivers. If you pick and choose your vaccines, you can't truly have a genuine religious objection to immunizations. So this is not the site for you.

But again, if the law were to change, parents would have the freedom to choose, refuse, or somewhere in between. If you want to selectively vaccinate, CHANGE THE LAW

What if my waiver gets denied?

The law has been interpreted such that officials cannot reject you without a face-to-face interview. (But they might anyway.) If they call you in for an interview, or you request one, do not go without an attorney or advocate- and/ or a video camera.

I will send you a list of questions that you may be asked and answers you can offer as long as they are true. I do not include it in the e-book as I need to see a bona fide rejection letter before I provide these questions and answers to you, but they are free of charge. New York City uses a set list of six questions. I have answers that have passed the 'test'. As long as they are true, use them.

TAPE THE INTERVIEW. You are legally permitted to do so, with or without the other part(ies) knowledge. You are a party to that conversation so you are free to tape it in any way you wish. Additionally, you can do whatever you want with the video- i.e. youtube or send it to the media. Your rights are protected, 100%. You cannot get sued or arrested. Cool, right?

If you get denied after the interview, you can appeal to the Commissioner of Education via a Section 310 appeal. You have 30 days to do it and most parents lose. Go to the Office of Counsel part of the NYSED website for more info on that torturous process. In

my opinion, it's a waste of time. The vast majority of parents lose their appeal. I did and if I walked you through the reasons he upheld the denial, your brain would short-circuit.

You can bypass the Commissioner and go straight to Supreme Court, the lowest level of the courts in New York State. E-mail me for attorneys you can use.

Sound ugly and expensive? It is. Change the law.

Have I missed an important question? Let me know at ritapalma@mykidsmychoice.com

If you read this and still don't feel comfortable writing a letter on your own, I'll write it for you. I charge \$225 per letter (including phone consult and follow-up). The \$25 you already spent can be credited towards the fee for a letter. Fees for other services (sincerity interviews) are determined on an as-needed basis.

~LEGISLATOR VISITS ARE NO CHARGE~

Does it bother you that you must make this effort? Shouldn't a parent be able to simply say, "It's against my religious/ philosophical/ moral/ spiritual beliefs"-and that's it? What happened to 'land of the free'?

If you are nodding, that's good. Click here to CHANGE THE LAW.

Disclaimer: I am not a lawyer and none of the preceding should be construed as legal advice.