



IAJGS Code of Conduct/Ethics

Preamble

It can be argued that the study of genealogy itself, if not an “ethical” activity as such, is a mitzvah in accordance with the Torah principle of teaching knowledge of the people, their tribes, and “remembering the days of old.” All human endeavors are capable of corruption and it is therefore appropriate to institute mechanisms to safeguard against behavior that is inimical to the common good. The IAJGS has felt it should take the lead in setting standards of ethical behavior as applied to the world of Jewish genealogy. The intent of this document is to set out guidelines for such standards. It is also offered as a code of “good practices” which may inform readers. Finally, it includes an updated version (in more modern English) of the late Rabbi Malcolm Stern’s “Ten Commandments in Genealogy,” which remains as relevant today as when they were penned years ago.

Code of Conduct

1. Information acquired should be factual and presented in a clear, well-organized manner. Appropriately qualified genealogical conclusions should be based on the weight of the evidence provided, with full and accurately-cited sources. Where doubt exists as to the accuracy of a purported pedigree, the questionability and limitations of the data should be expressed.
2. Genealogists should strive to meet the five elements of the Genealogical Proof Standard:
 - a. reasonably exhaustive research;
 - b. complete, accurate citations to the source(s) of each information item;
 - c. tests—through processes of analysis and correlation—of all sources, information items, and evidence;
 - d. resolution of conflicts among evidence items; and
 - e. a soundly reasoned, coherently written conclusion.
3. All original sources should be stated to allow other enquirers the opportunity of verification of the data. Research results and opinions should be fully and accurately referenced and should not knowingly be misquoted or misrepresented.

4. The examination of all documentation should be undertaken with sensitivity for the preservation of the source used. Records in the public domain should be replaced, after examination and any annotation required, in the condition and order that they were found. They should never be retained or handled carelessly.
5. Researchers should be aware that our behavior reflects on the genealogical community. We should treat archival records and the staff people who maintain them with respect.
6. If data presented relies on work already previously undertaken, proper credit for such work should be given to the originator, which also acts as a disclaimer in the event that it may encompass error(s). Researchers must refrain from plagiarism and respect copyrights.
7. Researchers should maintain confidentiality of client communications and research, except as permitted, in writing, by the client or required by court or professional disciplinary proceedings.
8. Researchers should represent their abilities, services and credentials honestly. Should there be financial implications in providing genealogical research services, the purveyor of such services should state the likely costs involved to the client and should only charge the agreed quantum for the research undertaken. Any potential conflicts of interest should be disclosed. Written agreements should be prepared which stipulate the scope of the project, fees, payment structure, estimated number of hours, deadlines, and any agreed-upon reports. Any changes to the terms of the agreement should be discussed in advance, be mutually acceptable and signed by both parties.
9. If data is acquired that seems to contain the potential for harming the interests of other people, great caution should be applied to the treatment of any such data and wide consultation may be appropriate as to how such data is used. Information concerning living persons should be treated with appropriate discretion. A confidential discussion with an ethical authority (e.g. a respected Rabbinic Beth Din) or reference to ethical principles already placed in the public domain (e.g. by a regulating body such as the [British] Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives (AGRA) or the Board for Certification of Genealogists may be helpful in such circumstances.

Regarding the “right to privacy” versus the “freedom of information” area of potential conflict:

- While understanding the privacy concerns of both the public and governmental agencies, the IAJGS will continue to advocate for access to all records relevant to genealogical research. Individual genealogists should respect requests made by persons asking that certain information about themselves or family members be kept private.

- More recent data should be evaluated in the light of sensitivities of the living versus the importance of disseminating information.
- Generally, requests made to genealogical researchers should be respected when individuals ask that certain information about themselves or family members be kept private.
- If it is decided not to publish any particular piece of information, there should be a clear statement to that effect so that the reader is not misled by the omission.

Code of Conduct/Ethics statement approved by the IAJGS Board of Directors, 2 November 2002, amended on 6 August 2016, and 13 June 2017.