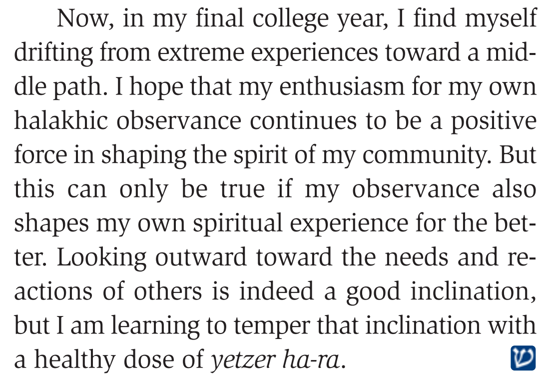
presence in the world. Focusing all my energies outward, trying to model a religious personality that would fit my ideal religious community, I had turned my own practice into a shell of what a religious experience should be.

Last summer, I spent two months in Tel Aviv. It seems ironic that the shift in attitude that would rescue my religious experience took place in Israel's most secular city. But my time in Tel Aviv was an exercise in taming a *yetzer tov* gone wild. Unattached to any religious community in particular, I began to make religious choices in nobody's interest but my own. Some days, I woke up late and — for the first time in years — simply didn't pray. After a while, I began to feel the absence of prayer in my life. And when I did begin to pray regularly again, the experience was more powerful than it had been in years.

Now, in my final college year, I find myself drifting from extreme experiences toward a middle path. I hope that my enthusiasm for my own halakhic observance continues to be a positive force in shaping the spirit of my community. But this can only be true if my observance also shapes my own spiritual experience for the better. Looking outward toward the needs and reactions of others is indeed a good inclination, but I am learning to temper that inclination with a healthy dose of *yetzer ha-ra*.



Outside the Box: DIY Jewish

BEN DREYFUS

I made history before I was born: I was the first fetus ever to be ordained as a rabbi. You see, back in the 1970s, women rabbis were still rare, and my mother happened to be the first to be pregnant at the time of ordination. Of course, no Jewish denomination actually accepts s*mikha in utero* as valid credentials, and I never developed any interest in pursuing postnatal rabbinical training.

Growing up as the child of a congregational rabbi, I was never into the "rabbi's kid" gig either. In an aging community with few other children around, it felt as if my siblings and I were on display. Fortunately, I had positive Jewish experiences elsewhere through my immediate and extended family and my summers at Jewish camp. I caught a glimpse of what an active Jewish life could look like, though it was limited in scope to isolated bubbles of time and space.

At college, it became clear my first weekend that I was the only freshman who had chosen to move in prior to Shabbat, but had not opted to live in a dorm that was accessible without an electronic keycard. I didn't fit into any of the established boxes, and though confused about where I belonged, I also felt confident and resolute enough to know that I wasn't going to try on one of the more established identities out of expediency. And so I set myself the task of learning what I needed to learn to make informed decisions about my own Jewish practice, a process that I hope has not abated fourteen years later. If I didn't belong in any of the smaller boxes I saw, I was going to carve out my own niche in the larger pluralistic Jewish community. Eventually, I learned that the boxes may not have been as firm as I had assumed. Shockingly, I wasn't the only 18-year-old who had questions about identity; the others may have appeared to my untrained eye to be conforming, but in fact we were all going through parallel struggles and finding our paths.

My cohort graduated and launched themselves into the adult world at exactly the right time. Moving first to Jerusalem and then to New York a decade ago, I was positioned to catch the wave of the independent *minyan* boom (about which much has already been written) and then to contribute to it, founding one *minyan* and participating actively in several others. Through my networks and communities, I have had the opportunity to live in an empowered Jewish culture, where if we think of something that isn't happening, our first reaction is to make it happen ourselves. Institutions and labels are seen as means to an end, but not as inherently valuable.

One year, before Pesach, it was time to get rid of the *chametz*. Since I was leaving town for the whole week, I didn't bother to switch my kitchen over to make it usable for Pesach. Instead, I decided to sell my *chametz* for the week, to rid myself of it. (There is an interesting discussion to be had about whether this popular practice is appropriate, but that is beyond the scope of this essay.) So I found a non-Jewish friend, wrote up a contract, and we both signed it and made the sale official. Meanwhile, other people were also selling their *chametz*, but instead of finding a buyer directly, they

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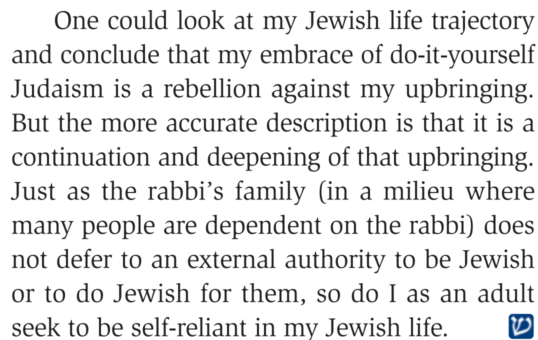
were going through a rabbi as their agent, either in person or over the Internet. Even some independent *minyanim*, that don't employ any clergy during the year, were making arrangements with rabbis who offered to be agents for *minyan* participants' *chametz* sales. When I saw this, I thought, "This is silly. When I was growing up, we never went to a rabbi to sell our *chametz*. My mother just sold it.… Oh — right!" And then the epiphany hit.



One could look at my Jewish life trajectory and conclude that my embrace of do-it-yourself Judaism is a rebellion against my upbringing. But the more accurate description is that it is a continuation and deepening of that upbringing. Just as the rabbi's family (in a milieu where many people are dependent on the rabbi) does not defer to an external authority to be Jewish or to do Jewish for them, so do I as an adult seek to be self-reliant in my Jewish life.

Does it Matter if Authenticity Is Authentic?

NOAM PIANKO

"Authentic? Get Real" read a recent *New York Times* headline (in the Fashion & Style section). The article highlighted the obsession with authenticity in our popular culture (one example cited Katie Couric claiming, "I think I love to be my authentic self.") The piece concluded with a snarky critique of the authenticity trend as a highly calculated form of self-presentation more akin to stage management than thoughtful introspection. Whether or not authenticity is authentic, its cultural prominence plays a significant role in the vocabulary and practices of Jewish identity formation. How can we understand the impact of this turn toward authenticity as a mode of self-discovery?

The first thing to realize is that the search for authenticity is not a new phenomenon for American Jews. The Jewish embrace of authenticity reflects a much larger cultural preoccupation with the concept of a shared ancestry that links the individual to a stable origin. Charles Lindholm's recent book, *Culture and Authenticity*, explores the emergence of "authenticity" as a touchstone of identity. The search for authentic roots emerged, he argues, in the 19th century. A new concept, authenticity addressed the individual and collective needs sparked by the disruptive economic, social, technological, and political changes that overturned a far more stable and clearly stratified society. With roles transformed, hierarchies rejected, and novel possibilities for social advancement offered, origins became increasingly in doubt and up for grabs. The resulting sense of disorder and status confusion sparked a popular interest in tracing an authentic lineage to bolster individual and collective identities.

American Jews, like other ethnic groups, created a narrative of authenticity rooted in geographic and genealogical origins. The popularity of "Fiddler on the Roof" illustrates the power of this trope. Tevye's "tradition" emphasizes a geographic origin, ancestral roots, and clear outsider status fueled by antisemitism and persecution. Tradition for the sake of tradition fulfills the need for an authentic lineage. At the same time, a tradition stripped of its content, practice, or beliefs addresses other social needs of immigrant communities. For instance, by focusing primarily on ancestry and not content, *Fiddler*'s tradition avoids the internal fragmentation that would arise from any attempt to define Jewish identity itself. Plus, identification with the tradition is largely symbolic. Individuals are free to shed those aspects of the tradition that might retard the acculturation process. It thus allows Jews to be clearly different without crossing socio-cultural norms of behavior.

The legacy of authenticity linked to ancestors and a symbolic tradition can still be seen in communal conversations around "continuity" and "intermarriage" (and more recently in the emergence of DNA testing). This emphasis on descent as a road map for both narrating the past and moving toward the future reflects an enduring preoccupation with Jewish authenticity based on genealogical and geographic origins. Jewish identity in the future, this perspective implies, will share this mode of authenticity. The clarity of descent has displaced the ambiguity of Jewish belief and practice as the primary criterion for authentic Jewishness.

As someone whose early identity was shaped by a passionate if off-key performance of "If I Were a Rich Man," I am sad to acknowledge that changing notions of authenticity may have finally caught up with "Fiddler on the Roof." The popular concepts of authenticity discussed in *The New York Times* article eschew

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