

HOW TWENTY- SOMETHINGS MATE NOW

Three (Very Jewish) Rabbis' Daughters,
Inhabiting a Multicultural, Radically New World,
Dish Seriously About Their Non-Jewish Partnering.

by SUSAN SCHNUR

IT HAS RECENTLY OCCURRED TO ME THAT “NORMATIVE” Jewish-American experience lasts exactly one generation. What I mean by that is that my Jewish experience—which I thought would stay, somehow, the ongoing Jewish-American one, certainly the one shared by my children—turns out to have been specific to coming-of-age in New Jersey and New York in the 1960s and ‘70s. In that world, Jews were largely Jewishly literate—they’d gone to Hebrew school, had immigrant grandparents (or sometimes parents), their families belonged to synagogues. It never occurred to us that Yiddish accents had a lifespan, or that fealty to Israel might one day become complicated.

If I were less narcissistic, I might have noticed, indeed, that my parents’ Jewish young-adulthood was very different from mine. They and their siblings all, for example, married first-generation American Jews from Trenton, New Jersey—*how shietl is that?*—and WWII and the Holocaust breathed down on them in a way that was not true for me. My 91-year-old mother confirms (I just checked in with her) that her children’s experience, thirty years on, seemed to her worlds apart. Having recently strained to wrap my head around my own twentysomething kids’ Jewish *Zeitgeist*, I look back at my nuptial experience of the 1970s—marrying the Jewish son of two Eastern European immigrants, which felt to me at the time like an act of free will—as quaint and overdetermined, a sepia Jewish Hallmark card. *Who knew?* Time marches on, and what feels, perhaps, assimilative and de-Judaizing to one generation, feels normative to the next.

AND SO I SAT DOWN WITH MY DAUGHTER AND TWO OF HER strongly Jewishly-identified twentysomething acquaintances—

three rabbis’ kids—and asked them about their felt world, its progressive *Zeitgeist*, their intellectual socialization—and how all of this has inflected their interpersonal choices. All three of these young women—Sophie, Tali and Abby—are deeply engaged in Judaism, religiously, affectively, intellectually and culturally, and they chose to attend colleges with substantial Jewish populations, where they each assumed various positions of Jewish leadership. (Tali is currently in college; Sophie’s about to graduate; Abby finished a year ago.) They also chose to attend colleges with very liberal values, and, as feminists, they were not looking for universities with Orthodox populations. (“Orthodoxy is totally not an option for me,” is how Tali put it.) What I wanted to get a bead on mostly, though, to be honest, was something that struck me as a radically shifted generational experience, the fact that *all three of my informants, despite trenchant Jewish identities, are currently in, and/or have recently been in, long-term romantic relationships with non-Jews—and they are also consonant with the idea of someday marrying partners who are not Jewish.*

I first asked the young women how they thought their Jewish campus experience would feel most foreign to me. Well, they said, **first**, I’d be surprised by how **few Jewish students have two Jewish parents**. **Second**, I’d be surprised by **the extremely high level of Jewish illiteracy** among Jews.

“Thinking Chanukah has 12 days, not knowing the difference between the words ‘kiddish’ and ‘kaddish’—this isn’t unusual,” Abby said. She described its “being hard to find other Jewish kids to feel Jewish with. Like you lead a Seder for other campus Jews and it feels really empty, like you’re ‘performing



your ethnicity.” Tali and Sophie concurred. Tali added, “Even in the context of Jewish summer programs, I’ve experienced such a huge gap between me and the other Jews in terms of practice and knowledge. Since high school, even when I’m with Jews who’ve opted in as Jews, I’m so often the ‘resident Jew.’”

Third, they said I’d be surprised to find that **it’s largely seen as racist (or otherwise discriminatory) for a Jew to want to date or marry only other Jews.** “To say that I’d limit who I date, that I’d automatically rule someone out because they’re not Jewish—that’s offensive to people,” Sophie said. “It’s outdated. Jews are seen as white and privileged, and liberal university campuses celebrate diversity and pluralism.” Abby said, “Dating non-Jews is seen as positive, it gives you legitimacy, it proves something about you, that you’re open to other people and cultures. My girlfriend, who is half-white/Christian and half-Indian/Hindu, used to say, after I started dating her, that I had more cred now.”

Fourth, the young women said that I’d find that **the binary Jewish/Christian world—which classically defined ‘us’ as Jews and ‘them’ as Christians—no longer exists.** “Binary is dead,” Sophie reported—no more sacred non-meeting twains. There are Buddhist, Muslim and religiously non-identifying students on campus; there are those who define their faith not heritably but through choice; there are many international students; there

are gay, bisexual, queer and straight students. In other words, “there are multiple dimensions upon which I might experience a person as ‘us’ or ‘them,’ ‘same’ or ‘other,’” said Abby. “Another Jew might feel ‘other’ to me. Another minority person might feel ‘same.’ Or someone might feel, depending on the social criteria, very ‘same’ on certain levels and very ‘other’ on others.”

The young women attributed feelings of “sameness” to a range of experiences and identities: “Anyone at college who identifies as religious, even if their religion is different.”

“My Hindu-Indian girlfriend used to say, after we started dating, ‘You have more cred now. At college, a Jew dating a non-Jew is seen as positive... it proves you’re open to other people + cultures.’”

“Someone of a different minority culture who’s really committed to that, intellectually and emotionally.” “If you have a complex understanding of sexuality.” “If you’ve converted and you care about being Jewish, that’s ‘same,’ but if you’re nicely acquiescing and going through the motions for me, that’s ‘other.’” “Israel is a big part of my identity, as is Hebrew—that feels ‘same.’” “Liberals—a no-brainer.”

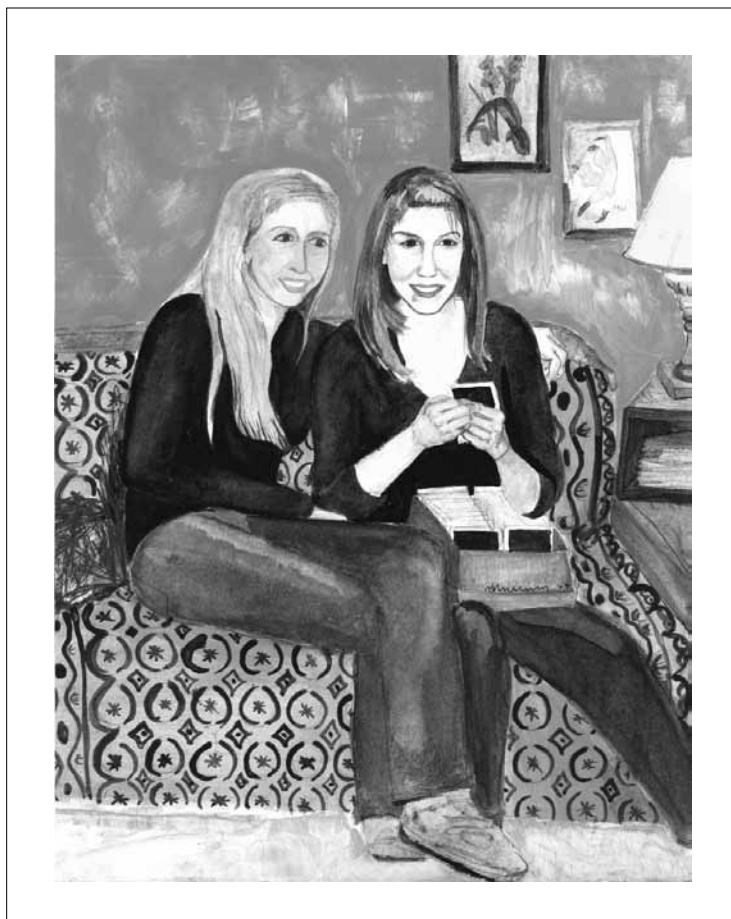
As for “other”: “The idea of a God-given Torah feels ‘other’ to me.” “Orthodox experience in which women are specta-

tors.” “Anyone not living with white privilege, or living with food insecurity, or truly living in poverty—they’re ‘other,’ but I don’t like to confront this.” “As someone working with the poor, they don’t feel ‘other’ to me, they feel ‘same,’ but I acknowledge our differences.” “Jews who don’t identify as Jews.” “Homophobes.”

And it gets complicated and paradoxical. “With Jews on campus, I couldn’t *davven* with my full voice—because I was one of the only voices—and they weren’t a group that I could talk through my spiritual practices and decisions with. So I joined the gospel choir and moved into a Buddhist campus community, and that works,” said Tali. Likewise Abby remembered a semester off-campus. “Living on the Lakota reservation in North Dakota was one of the most Jewish times I ever felt. People would say, ‘She’s Jewish the way we’re Indian.’”

People having **hybrid identities** was the **fifth** way the young women thought their campus experience would feel different to me. Post-colonial, post-modern hybridity—living *between* cultures—is an ascendant cultural value. To paraphrase Zadie Smith, “Each woman must be true to her selves—plural.” One’s identity is *expected* to be complex and multiple. “You may not be multiracial or multicultural yourself, but your coupling often is,” said Sophie. If you’re an Ashkenazi Jew dating another Ashkenazi Jew, in other words, that can seem almost redundant and unimaginative. It can also seem as though you’re purveying a triumphal white culture. “Being American-born, English-speaking, middle-class, white. There’s some guilt about that,” Sophie said. “I feel less entitled to care about this group since we’re not struggling.”

Related to this—**number six**—is **a somewhat vanished sense of being Jewish as a minority experience**. As my informants talked about the various males and females they’ve dated, I



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another Jew just because they’re Jewish is antiquated—that’s the **eighth** big difference. “It’s totally irrelevant to me whether you’re Jewish if you don’t identify as Jewish,” Tali said. “I would gain from dating a Jew if he had knowledge, identity and the desire to practice, otherwise dating an unidentified Jew and a non-Jew are pretty much in the same category to me. And Jews who once identified but now hate it, that’s not going to work out for me.”

The idea that being Jewish means *de facto* sharing a *sensibility*, at least while one’s life is lived on a liberal college campus, has little currency. To feel that one shares a sensibility—religious or cultural—one might do better looking to non-Jews. “There are so few Jewishly-identified Jews you have to mix and match,” said Tali. “Having some other culture feels right.” These young women are not looking to share content, as I did, in my twenties, with my

realized how dynamic it can feel to reach outside of one’s Jewish self to regain, paradoxically, that insurgent sense of Jewish outsiderliness.

Tali and Abby would be considered, by most accounts, religious. They are Sabbath observers (in a self-made but consistent fashion); one is a daily *davvener*, the other a weekly *davvener*; they keep *kashrut*. Sophie is observant to a lesser extent. “**Religion is just bad—that’s its reputation at liberal colleges,**” Tali said. (**Number seven.**) “The fact that I identify as a religious person makes me feel very ‘other’ at my university. I’m not someone who rejected religion, and I’m also not someone who just discovered it.”

“At all our colleges, religion is like a dirty word,” Sophie said. “It’s considered old-fashioned and close-minded,” Tali added, “and it causes wars. Religion causes wars.” Abby: “It’s superstitious.” Tali: “It’s irrational and it makes people be hateful.” Sophie: “Or misogynist.” Hey, the jury was in.

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boyfriends and then husband—meaning that we celebrated the same holidays, history and vernacular language—but sensibility.

“I have a friend who jokes about the ‘Church of Oberlin,’” Abby said. “It’s a ‘belief’ in environmentalism, feminism, liberal politics, abortion rights, gun control and being green. These are my values.” As it turned out, her campus Hillel “didn’t have my values.” Spirituality is sometimes a value, too—the idea of connecting with something larger than oneself—but this isn’t religious, it’s *trans*-religion.

Perhaps the most radical idea to me is **number nine**: the idea that **a strongly identified Jew can be compleat unto herself**—she doesn’t need a Jewish partner. “I assume I’ll have a partner who is willing to say *kiddish* with me,” said Sophie, “but that partner doesn’t have to be Jewish.”

“When I travel in Asia or South America and I’m the only Jew, it’s okay,” said Tali. “I mark space by *davvening* and through keeping Shabbat, and that’s home. No matter where I am.” Abby agreed, adding, “Being very Jewish is somewhat internal. It’s very disconnected from dating or marriage.” Part of this “identity construction” goes back to the way these three young women were raised.

“My parents were very clear that until my bat mitzvah they dictated the practice for the family, and after that you dictate your personal practice insofar as it doesn’t conflict with theirs in the house,” said Tali. “If you want to drive somewhere on Shabbat, that’s up to you, but don’t use the house phone. Just basic respect, but autonomy. They made their choices and I’m going to make mine.”

“My mother modeled giving me access to a wide range of Jewish things,” said Sophie, “like I went to an Orthodox Day School. She shot some of these things

down, and then basically gave me license to pick and choose.” She added, “It’s a comfort to me.”

(Another twentysomething Jewish woman with whom I spoke—who has, as she put it, a partner who’s “ethnically and religiously ambiguous” who “hates organized religion,” told me: “I go to synagogue and to Jewish events as a functional single. I look and smell like a single person in the Jewish world, and I make what’s Jewish in our household. My non-Jewish partner knows a lot about religion, she appreciates its power, she gives me a lot of space. I also don’t have to share decision-making,” she added, “and I kind of like that.” My informants agreed that a Jewish partner sometimes meant “a whole lot of icky dialogue and compromise.”)

On campus, **authenticity is also a value. (Ten)**. “If you’re not going through a process, your identity isn’t authentic,” explained Tali. “It’s more authentic if you work it out for yourself.”

Finally, **(eleventh)**, **these young women**, though conventionally religious Jews in most ways, **aren’t looking for Judaism to prescribe what they should do**. They’re not looking to take on a Judaism “that’s a whole extrinsic system,” as Abby put it, with obligations, dogma, theology, halacha and rules. “A shul, a rabbi, those don’t seem so important,” Sophie said. “We are the text, the text comes from within.”



AND SO, WITH THIS INTRODUCTION, I ASKED

Sophie, Tali and Abby to walk me, separately, through each of their dating histories—their boyfriends, and girlfriends, from the time they left Jewish day schools (which they all attended) to the present. For Tali, that was after high school; for Sophie and Abby, that was from ninth grade on. Who they dated, how they made sense of it, what worked and didn’t work, and what they imagine for themselves in the years ahead.

After listening to these three, I offer some concluding thoughts on page 45.

Sophie's Dating History

“MY FIRST BOYFRIEND, TUC, WASN’T JEWISH,

but no one at my high school was; it was an urban, public magnet school in Boston, a city we had just moved to. Tuc was Vietnamese, an immigrant. I tend to feel sameness with Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants, and kids of immigrants. It’s a kind of identification with traditional cultures, pre-modern cultures. I learned Yiddish as a teenager. I loved his mother, who spoke no English—I think that was part of what I loved. Tuc was part of my “group” at high school; I kind of identified as Asian by default, because I didn’t really

identify with the white kids. Being with Tuc seemed kind of endogamous. The white kids, they were so much taller than me, I really felt they wouldn’t notice me as a romantic object, and they did sports and lived in different neighborhoods.

“Tuc and I were very interested in where the other was coming from, we talked about Jewish and Vietnamese-Buddhist stuff a lot. I felt it was his prerogative, though, not mine, to say we were ‘similar,’ because I came from a privileged place, socio-economically and racially. I’d say, ‘In your culture, who gets the best cut of

meat, the kids or your father?’ I’d say, ‘Take me to your temple.’ He loved spending *shabbos* at my house. But there was a part of me that was a little wary. Did we really know each other? Was this relationship really viable, or did our exotic differences actually obscure who the other person was and whether we were honestly compatible? We always have salads with dinner at my house and I remember him saying, ‘Jews eat salad.’ We were together for two years. That’s a really long time in high school.

“Freshman year at college I had my first girlfriend, and it didn’t feel

like a problem to me that she wasn't Jewish because we shared being queer. Heterosexual couples don't 'share' heterosexuality in this way. There was a class distinction between Tammy and me—she was working-class—that felt familiar to me, it was like the kids from my high school. But her background felt like a big disconnect for her on our [Ivy League] campus. She didn't personally identify with an ethnic-cultural heritage, and that started to feel very 'other' to me. We broke up after about a year. I wouldn't go back to a relationship like that again.

"My next girlfriend, junior year, was the first Jewish person I ever dated, and it was funny because her father was one of these totally uncommitted Israelis. Her mom was a nice Jew from Long Island, so it was a mixed marriage. I was very aware of Mimi being the first Jew I'd ever been with, and it was nice in a way—it was one less thing to think about, I knew her milieu. I knew exactly what her parents were going to be like; I knew what her home shul was probably like, her parents' apartment in Manhattan, their friends. Her family was really different from ours in several ways, but we started with a basic frame of reference, with being able to anticipate things instead of the relationship being a completely blank slate.

"We met through both being in the college's klezmer band, though there are, of course, non-Jews in our band, so that wasn't determinative. With Mimi, there was an ease factor—being able to go to High Holiday services together and have it not be a whole fucking production. On the other hand, when it is a whole fucking production—*should she come, will she be offended, will she be disappointed, do I want her there, how would I explain things to her*—that can be awesome. There's

a developmental piece, I'm sure, when you're involved with someone non-Jewish. It helps you clarify what matters to you about your Jewish identity.

"After Mimi, there were a couple of Jewish women at school who were interested in me, I think, because they thought it was awesome that I had the traditional-



observant-Judaism thing. And I was queer. I remember thinking, 'Wow, you wouldn't think I was so cool unless you were like, Whoa, here's someone who's pulling off the Jewish queer thing.' I didn't get into romantic relationships with them, though.

"Senior year I had a relationship with Mira, a southern Indian girl raised in America from the age of six, and we held back from exploring each other's exotism, which I liked—but of course we were aware that our early childhoods took place half-way around the world from each other's. At one point she asked me, 'Would you like me if I wasn't Indian?' And then she was like, "Well, what would

I even be, is there even a me, without being Indian?' That presented a kind of wonderful confusion.

"Looking ahead, I could imagine being with a non-Jew very long-term *if* they're from a different minority culture and really committed to that. I wouldn't have to explain my intellectual or emotional Jewish commitment, the not-completely-rational-religious component. Of course, there's also this question of whether I end up with a man or a woman. With the latter, there's this whole 'intersectionality' thing, as they say in ethnic studies—that two different minority identities aren't just additive, they really transform each other. So if I'm in a lesbian community, would I be less likely to be part of a Jewish community because my kids will have this other form of support? Or maybe a queer community would put me geographically in a place where I'd be more likely to have access to a strong Jewish community as well.

"But if I'm with a guy, well, I won't have to live in New York or Boston or Berkeley, and I could move near my brother, who's an organic farmer, but then my kids won't go to Jewish day school, blah blah blah. And then there's trying to meet a queer, strongly-identified Jewish person—which might be *extremely* hard.

"Lately I've been thinking that my partner's group-identity isn't that important, that my work is to determine my own relationship to my own Judaism—the rest will be commentary. I'm a deeply identified Jew, but I live in this multicultural place—how can I expect myself to live there without falling in love with the other people who live there, too? What I assume is that *I'm* going to transmit Jewish stuff to my kids, and my partner, whether Jewish or not, is going to be a part of that, because I don't want to do it single-handedly."

Tali's Dating History

"MY FIRST FALLING-IN-LOVE, REALLY serious relationship was with an Israeli man, the year between high school and college, during a year of global studies based in Israel. We shared a common 'language' and knowledge-base and sensibility about time and space that's Jewish—the lifecycle, the *haggim* [holi-

days], the history—but he knew all this without its being something he had taken on personally, and he had chosen *not* to take it on personally. He had rejected religious Judaism, he was totally secular. So we had all the 'things' we needed—the framework to talk about these things and we *could* talk about them—but he still

wasn't the same kind of Jew I was at all. It was totally inter-cultural, which I sometimes would forget—because, after all, we were two Jews in Israel.

"But I loved showing him my spirituality, and when he did *kiddush* I loved him, and he really liked how much my spirituality challenged him. But he had reject-

ed Orthodoxy, not progressive, feminist Judaism, and I had rejected that, too—but I was still religious. So I was introducing this whole new language to him.

“The relationship was doomed, though, because we were both starting school in different countries for the next four years. The Jewish piece didn’t ultimately feel like a conflict, but the American/Israeli thing *was* a conflict. And my family was not very excited about me falling in love with an Israeli—it triggered a lot of...fear...of losing me to this other place. And, like, Israeli *men* are not Nice Jewish Boys. But I did picture our future—I was in love with him in that way—and it was a Jewish house, an Israeli house, we spoke Hebrew to our kids, our kids spoke Hebrew. It was great to think about how that household would be Jewish, even though I would be the only one supplying the spirituality.

“And he was a kibbutznik, so he was the *real deal*. A huge part of my Jewish identity is growing up in a socialist Jewish camp that was affiliated with Habonim Dror.

“And then I started college and suddenly, for the first time, I met so many Jews who were not Jewishly identified. There were literally only a handful of guys on a level of Jewish practice and commitment that would make it meaningful to me that they were Jewish. So, okay, I’m thinking, *Do I want to be single for four years, or try to work it with a woman because she’s Jewish, or what?* I’d known I was open to dating non-Jews, and here I was.

“Then I met Tristan—it was sophomore year; we’re still together, it’s been a year and a half—and he asked me to go to this show as a second date, and I couldn’t go because I was leading High Holidays

services on campus. And he came to *Kol Nidre!* Which was such a statement, you know. He knew instinctively not to make eye contact—because it wasn’t about me and it wasn’t about him, and he got that. He was totally interested in the *machzor* the whole time, reading it, and I was like,

I was like, ‘Oh, *chavurah*—great!’ So he knew that the religion that causes wars can be distinct from something intimate and beautiful. And I was like, ‘Okay, I can work with that.’ And because he wasn’t Jewish he was open to whatever I wanted to share with him about Judaism.

“So...after a year, I was like—I had a few drinks, I couldn’t say this otherwise—I, umm, also, don’t know, umm, if I need to make a family with someone’s who’s Jewish, I don’t know that.’ He was like, ‘I know!’ Everything I said, he was like, ‘I know.’ But our relationship had transitioned to a “we really love each other” kind of thing, so this was a little painful.

“And then summer was coming, and I was in a leadership position at my Jewish camp, and—this was insane!—I hired him to be the nature-teacher guy; he was, like, the only non-Jew at the camp. It was totally irrelevant to staff that I had a non-Jewish boyfriend; no one brought up the issue once all summer. It was intense, though, so he felt this really big need to say, ‘I’m not Jewish! I’m not here to get changed!’ but at the same time, he was like, ‘This is super fun! And look, I learned these prayers, ha ha ha.’ But he did make it clear to me at that point that he doesn’t identify as a

religious person...and that’s hard for me.

“Where we are now, Tristan and I, I want him to *like* Judaism. If he doesn’t like it, it’s like not liking a part of me, and that hurts. He thinks a lot of *halakhic* observance is stupid, and we definitely have different ideas about Israel. He’s like, ‘You guys just don’t confront some of the actual challenges about Israel,’ and I’m like, ‘Well...it’s hard.’

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“We coined this word - ARMADILLO - which means, ‘Oh NO, we’re in this FORWARD-thinking, PRESSURE CONVERSATION, and we DON’T WANT to be here, so we’re STOPPING. INTER-couples get INTO ARMADILLOS: INTER-RACIAL, INTER-CLASS, INTER-CULTURAL.”

‘Ookay....’ So he saw me lead *Kol Nidre* with a tallit over my head and everything.

“He had already told me he wasn’t religious, but I was like, ‘I hope he doesn’t hate religion,’ because so many people do at college and that would be such a big blockade. But he said that when he was a kid his family did a Sunday-afternoon-sort-of-Christian-Bible-study-ethical-education-sing-a-few-songs sort of thing—it was lay-led, a few families. And in my head

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“That I might love Tristan ‘in spite of’ his not being Jewish—like, ‘Everything else about you, Tristan, is great!’—that’s difficult for a person to hear.

“Since I moved out of my parents’ house and our very Jewish community four years ago, I’ve felt very lonely in my Jewish ritual practice. It’s a solo thing, every Shabbat is like a battle, and that sucks.

“So...in the long-term? Finding a romantic partner who’s looking for

something similar to you Jewishly would mean—automatically—you’re not doing it alone. But finding these people? Totally a needle in a haystack! My brother is finding community, though. He helped build a community at college, and another one after college, and it’s wonderful. He’s modeling this for me.

“It’s not that I would be looking for a Jew—it’s that I would be looking for a really, really, really specific *type* of Jew—who practices a Judaism that’s

based in tradition but asks questions, who values the role of song in *davvening*, who understands sacred space, what it means to build community—so maybe someone non-Jewish, but supportive and religiously parallel, would make more sense.

“I don’t know who I’m going to wind up with. I know it will be way easier if I find someone who overlaps Jewishly, but, I don’t know, there may somehow be counterweights that end up counting more...you know?”

Abby's Dating History

“THE FIRST PERSON I DATED AT COLLEGE,

Amir, was religiously interesting. His father was Jewish (but not very practicing), his mother was not, and he was in the process of converting. My Judaism looked really different from his. We were

both in vulnerable, searching places. Amir was just beginning to develop his Judaism, and I came from a Judaism that I loved, but I was now feeling kind of spiritually isolated and without community. We wanted different Judaisms—that’s

plural—and in our youngness it wasn’t easy. Sometimes it came down to, ‘In my Judaism we can watch TV on *shabbos*, but in your Judaism we can’t’—which wasn’t even really addressing how to share a holy day, and we couldn’t resolve these

things because, for us, there’s no definitive opinion—we believe in ‘customizing’ Judaism—and we’re two different Jews.

“So after Amir there was Zeezee. I met her when we were both counselors, one summer, at a camp for underserved youth. She was not Jewish; she was black, but she had nothing to say about her culture, so that kind of silenced me about cultural identity and about my spiritual or ritual anything, and so my Jewish observance always felt to her like it came out of nowhere. Like, ‘Oh my God, we’re in a restaurant, the sun’s going to set in a minute, I gotta get the check, I gotta get the check, *shabbos* is coming!’ She’d be like, ‘*What* is happening?’ Part of our problem, I think, was that we met during this time and in this place where I was kind of experimenting with doing less Jewishly.

“Then, junior year, I spent my great semester on the Lakota reservation, and it was like no other place I’d ever been. It was very celebratory of different minority faiths, of the similarities we shared, and it didn’t feel tokenizing because, in the context of

“Being Jewish is no longer a minority experience. As a Jew, I identify with Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants. I can imagine marrying a non-Jew from a different minority culture, if they are really committed to that.”



the woman I met there, Ann, we were so intensely different. It wasn't like when Jews say to African-Americans, 'Oh wow, *you* were slaves, we were slaves!' in a way that's reductive and culturally appropriate. It was values-based, like, 'You have this very different story from us, but we extract the same values.' It was incredibly exciting.

"I felt very religiously liberated with Ann, very free to express my full Jewishness. I have spiritual ideas—about the soul, about the nature of humanness, about Torah—that I feel are kind of antiquated, I'm kind of embarrassed about them, but Ann and I had intelligent conversation about all of this, and it wasn't New Age-y, it wasn't empty of history and tradition. I remember sharing the story about Moshe striking the rock, and the folks there were saying things like, 'Don't undermine your tradition! Don't say, 'This is just a story.' *Revel* in it, let your mind get blown by your tradition.' That was unspeakably freeing. After we broke up, Ann said, 'The next time you have one of your holidays, re-examine your culture, give it more credit.' That has been a real gift, a validation, that came out of an interfaith relationship.

"And then all of a sudden queer Judaism seemed possible—this 'two-things-can-exist-at-once-and-isn't-that-nice' thing—and that became its own celebration: queer seders on campus (for Jews and Jewish enthusiasts, and queers and allies), queer Jewish movies and books, a queer Jewish student group. That's when I started dating Alpana, senior year, with whom I've been for a year and a half; we're still together. She's half-white/Christian,

half-Indian/Hindu. Right away, *shabbos* with Alpana felt much more *shabbosdik* than it had ever with Amir.

"Because Alpana wasn't Jewish, though, and I wasn't Hindu, we screeched into these scarily future-oriented conversations, and I remember thinking, 'Who else has to do this, at this stage of life at this super liberal college? Who else has to talk about *long-term*? Two Jews don't have to talk about this!' We coined this word—'armadillo'—which means, 'Oh, no, we're in this forward-thinking pressure conversation, and we don't want to be here, so we're stopping.' Since then, I've realized that 'inter' couples get into armadillos: *inter-racial*, *inter-class*, *inter-cultural*.

"Alpana meditates every morning as part of the spiritual practice she shares with her mom—she never misses it—and I actively learned how to do it from her, and I take it seriously. Her tradition has enhanced my Jewish practice. At first we talked so much about religion—how we each pray, what we believe—and we were so excited about our similarities. But then religion suddenly got very difficult, we were butting heads hardcore. In Hindu settings I would freak out about meditating in front of a statue. It really hurt her feelings, she saw it as kind of colonialist: 'The British came to India and thought our traditions were 'folk' and 'simple-minded.'" She'd say, 'I know you're not saying the same thing, but you're essentially coming from the same tradition.'

"She has this guru—she has his picture in her room—she believes he's enlightened, like the Dalai Lama. And

I find it hard to *davven* in a room with a picture of a big man. It just is. But we talked about it a lot, and I was like, 'Okay, Jews have 70 names for God' and she was like, 'Yeah, we have 100 different statues for God,' but ultimately it's one God—polytheism is a construction, too, the way Maimonides talks about a personified God being a tool. So that was a big thing for me to learn.

"Alpana and I, our theologies match. I believe in God, and believing in God makes me a bad match for most progressives, for most feminists. And with other observant Jews, the problem is that practice and spirituality are on the table, but theology and divinity are not.

"What I know about the future is that I'll have a Jewish household, without a doubt. I could never, oops, just misplace my Judaism—*hey, where'd it crawl off to?*—after doing *havdalah* on Rocky Butte. Would I want my partner to convert if they weren't Jewish? Unknown. Maybe if I was dating a Protestant white person we would really love the same music, the same art, we'd want to raise children the same way; other great things would factor in. But they will have to be willing to keep a Jewish household with me, with some kind of Shabbat and some semblance of kosher, and we'll Jewishly educate our kids.

"For my parents and grandparents it was obvious that they'd marry Jews. They had Jewish communities everywhere they went, they only knew Jewish people! For me, I've had 'opposite' experiences that make all of this harder, but these are also what have proven my Judaism."

[Susan Schnur, continued from page 13]

SO WHAT ARE MY FEELINGS, AFTER TALKING WITH these three young women? That if they end up marrying non-Jews, I'll feel very sad. But I have to look honestly at the legacy we've bequeathed these kids—a profoundly Jewish one, but also mix-and-match. At my family's seders, for example, we sing Guatemalan and anti-apartheid freedom songs, as well as Yiddish and Judeo-Arabic ones. I want to have my matzah, it seems, and eat it, too.

But maybe these twentysomethings will retrofit Judaism to match a shiny new, and very different, world. Indeed, the Judaism I live is often a poor fit for me: I don't believe in a traditional God; many prayers—and "*Baruch atah adonai elohainu melech ha-olam*"—alienate me; ritual circumcision (though I'm

fully on-board) strikes me as gross if I, God forbid, actually think about it; traditional kosher meat is no longer the ethical standard for either the animal or the planet.

As I said at the start of this piece, it has recently occurred to me, duh, that the "normative" Jewish-American experience lasts exactly one generation. Sophie, Tali and Abby will not be marrying first-generation American-Jews from Trenton, New Jersey—about this, I am certain.

But they are literate and smart and stunningly thoughtful, and I trust them. ■

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Philadelphia artist Molly Mullaby is a self-taught illustrator and portrait painter. To commission work and to see more, go to www.mollyworks.com.