



I was a crypto Jew

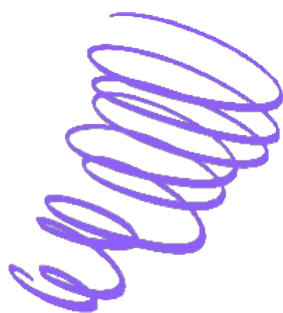


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At around 19, I began attending Jewish gatherings. The first questions were about whether I had attended Jewish summer camps or the Jewish school as a child. My "no" was met with surprise and disbelief; it seemed almost unthinkable to them that a Jew could live outside the community by "choice," like Spinoza.

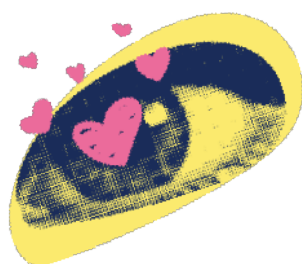
Growing up in Stockholm, Sweden, with a Swedish mother and an Israeli father, my life was a blend of diverse cultural influences. Like many Jews in the diaspora, I began grappling with questions about my Jewish identity at an early age.



The first time I truly faced my Jewishness was when I was just seven. A Palestinian classmate discovered my heritage and asked, "Are you a Jew?" At that young age, my father hadn't yet explained the complexities of antisemitism to me. Although I was not consciously aware of the prejudice that might come with being Jewish, my subconscious instinctively understood. My response was a quick "no."

Despite the potential tensions, that classmate and I developed a friendship. This was remarkable given her family's disdain for Jews and my father's reservations about Muslims. I even celebrated Eid with her family once, a gesture that spoke to the bridges we could build despite our backgrounds.

My father, ever a proud Israeli, flew the Israeli flag on our balcony—a symbol of our identity that felt safe and accepted in Sweden at that time, especially with an Israeli neighbour nearby. In a non-Jewish neighbourhood, my father's joy at having an Israeli neighbour is something I truly understand now. What it means to meet another Jew, another Israeli. However, as I grew older and the political climate changed, I became acutely aware of the risks associated with openly identifying as Jewish and Israeli in Sweden.



This realization led me to conceal my identity, often telling people I was Polish, a nod to our family's history before Israel's establishment. Thus began my life as a "cryptoJew," hiding my Jewish identity. With my parents' divorce, I became further distanced from Jewish traditions at my mother's house, unaware of the thriving Jewish community in Stockholm.

At around 19, I began attending Jewish gatherings with my brother. The first questions I encountered were about whether I had attended Jewish summer camps or the Jewish school as a child. My answers—no—were met with surprise and disbelief; it seemed almost unthinkable to them that a Jew could live outside the community by "choice," like Spinoza.

This left me feeling alienated, neither fully part of the Jewish community nor entirely Swedish. Especially in my own eyes. When you look different, carry a different legacy and life history than the people you are surrounded with, naturally these questions occur; Does every secular Jew experience a crisis about their Jewish identity at some point? I certainly did.

But rather than retreating from it, I chose to embrace it. I began keeping semi-kosher, learning Hebrew, and immersing myself in Jewish history. I decided that marrying a Jewish man was important to me and started filling my home with Judaica art.

My Israeli identity became a cornerstone of who I am; I passionately defended Israel, whether in discussions with non-Zionist Jewish boyfriends, on social media, or at university. I first visited my home country Israel in August 2023, and there I felt more Jewish than Israeli, but in the diaspora I feel more Israeli than Jewish. It wasn't until I started psychoanalysis that I realized this incredible need for identification.

Yet, despite my strong identification with my Jewish heritage, there are moments when I feel like an impostor. The fact that my mother is not Jewish sometimes makes me question the authenticity of my Jewishness, despite today's broader understanding that identity is not solely determined by matrilineal heritage.

Society's perceptions still play a role, and navigating these complex feelings is an ongoing journey. The ongoing conflict plays a huge part in my Israeli identification, the hate and despise I receive from "the other side" who antagonizes me because I'm Israeli and Jewish.

Even if I wanted to escape it, I can't.

I face it at university where pro-Palestinians shouted "Juden-Intifada", which translates to "Jew-Intifada". I face it with antizionist professors and students, as well as the comments I receive on social media wishing death on me. Violent protestors pass by my street. My old Palestinian friend is now wishing death on Jews at social media.

I once read a story about Moishele, a Jewish boy who got lost in the woods, was found by a Christian family, grew up Christian and years later accidentally walked into a synagogue and immediately experienced this holy feeling of coming home. It's a powerful story affirming that every Jew will find their home again. I can't choose between my identities, neither do I want to.