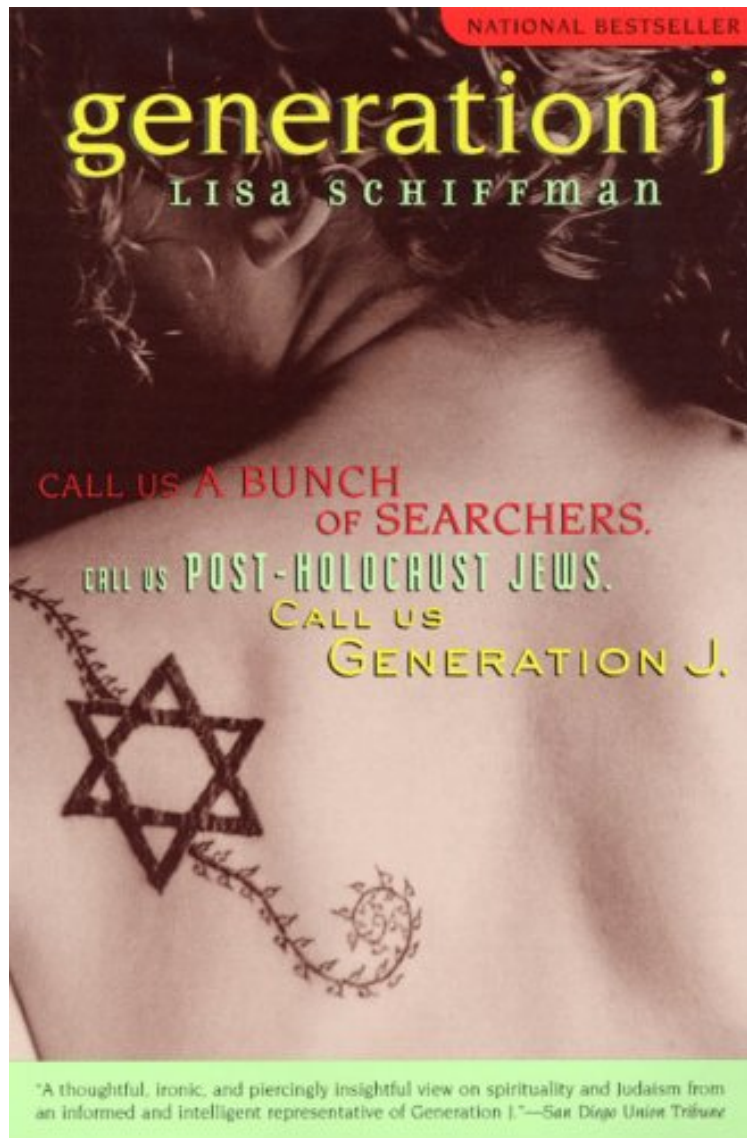


## Generation J

Lisa Schiffman

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**Lisa Schiffman : Generation J** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Generation J:

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Being Your Own JewBy Jonathan FreundAn accessible and humorous chronicle of one woman's search for a Jewish-ness that is both personal and communal.Lisa Schiffman was an educated, liberal, workshop-attending city-dweller, with grandparents who had emigrated from Europe, and parents who had either rejected Judaism altogether or else did it by the numbers. For her, being Jewish had always been more

of an 'activity' than an identity. In her thirties, however, she found herself wanting more; she wanted to continue to be a modern individual yet also wanted to be one within the tribe. Blazing her own path, she explores ways in which she is already Jewish without realizing it ("The Zen of Being Jewish"), experiments with the laws of kashrut ("Kosher-Me?"), and musters up the courage to visit a mikvah ("Stray Hairs and Painted Nails"), all of which leads her to her own definitions and rituals. I greatly enjoyed this entertaining and enlightening read. It is especially apt for anyone -- Jewish or not -- who is seeking to create his or her own, unique religious or spiritual identity. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. More personal than I expected By Eric J. Akawie I feel that this book was somewhat mis-marketed. It is a very personal, ideosyncratic journey through Judaism in a very specific place, with very specific issues. I had hoped for more of a broad survey of how young Jews in America are approaching their Judaism, the questions they are asking, and the answers they are arriving at. Instead, it is primarily Schiffman's own personal experiences, flavored heavily by her own prejudices. While this can be the basis for an interesting exploration, I don't think she ever really examined her fundamental beliefs and postulates in a way that provides her a useful base from which to extrapolate her own experiences. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Overgeneralized Title By Cultural Groupie This is a cute story about the author's search for what being Jewish means to her. The title is misleading because she doesn't really interview any other American Jews, either secular or religious, although she does seem to know a lot of rabbis, authors, and mystics. And she explores many different traditions within Judaism which is interesting because as an outsider, I didn't know anything about these different versions. Overall while I like the book, the author bugs me because she seems to have really low self-esteem--and maybe that's her point, she's confused about her identity (like, I'm ethnically Jewish, but what does that mean?)--so she fixates on her nose (is it too Jewish?) and her voice (I'm a bad singer so I should be quiet in a singing prayer service). And I'm also bothered by the fact that she never really explores whether or not she believes in God! Judaism is a religion too, and she's trying to check out all these different spiritual practices but without even being open to the idea of spirituality. And a rabbi tells her that to really learn about the faith, she needs to read in a community or with a partner and discuss the texts and what they mean, but of course she disregards his advice and goes and tries to read Leviticus and other Jewish texts on her own. I'm pretty sure most people would consult an experienced person if they wanted to figure out how exactly to keep kosher, for example. It's cute, funny at times, and there's some interesting anecdotes about different threads of Judaism, but overall it's not a book that tries to talk about Jewish people or the Jewish faith, it's really just the author's own personal story. I'm not sure I would have read it if I'd realized that at the outset, but I guess overall I'm glad I did because I learned a few interesting things.

"I'm not alone. I am part of a generation of fragmented Jews. We're in a kind of limbo. We're suspended between young adulthood and middle age, between Judaism and atheism, between a desire to believe in religion and a personal history of skepticism. Call us a bunch of searchers. Call us post-Holocaust Jews. Call us Generation J." Generation J is the ambivalent generation: unaffiliated seekers, men and women who have grown up questioning the bounds of organized religion. Lisa Schiffman is one of these seekers, and Generation J chronicles her journey through the contradictory landscape of Jewish identity. Moving from the personal to the universal, from autobiography to anthropology, from laughter to tears, Schiffman shows us the many ways in which one can be religious. Whether dipping into a ritual bath, getting henna-tattooed with the Star of David, unravelling the mysteries of the kabbalah, or confronting what Jewish tradition has to say about gay marriage, Schiffman reveals the conflicts of meaning and connection common to all who try to chart their own spiritual path. And, through it all, with humor and sensitivity, she confronts the reasons for her own quest and begins to untangle some of the thorniest questions about identity, community, and religion in America today. This engaging exploration of what it means to be Jewish is every bit as much a fascinating tour of the varieties of contemporary Jewish practice as it is an unusual personal quest. Smart, funny, and provocative, Schiffman brilliantly explores the problems and possibilities facing any spiritual seeker today.

.com Generation J is a beautifully written, constantly courageous, hip, wise memoir by a young woman determined to figure out what it means to be Jewish. Lisa Schiffman, who grew up in the mostly Christian community of Levittown, New Jersey, writes of her own alienated adolescence: "We were a generation of Jews who'd grown up on television, with Barbie, with rhinoplasty as a way of life. Assimilation wasn't something we strove for; it was the condition into which we were born." Feeling unmoored in early adulthood, Schiffman begins a search for the essence of the Jewish identity she feels exiled from. She undertakes experiments such as eating nonkosher food every day for a week, and gently confronting her parents' ignorance of their own religion. Oddly, her greatest religious epiphany comes from the experience of getting a henna tattoo--a vine across her torso, with the Star of David at the end. The tattoo sets off what she calls, elsewhere in the book, "a big think-through": "There is the vine. There is me. There's Judaism, the religion of paradox and reconciliation. I'll learn from it what I can. I'll sort out my own conflicted truths. I refuse to reject myself--any part. I no longer choose to exile." --Michael Joseph Gross From Publishers Weekly Although positioned as emblematic of a generation of searching, post-Holocaust Jews, this memoir is actually the more specific story of a once engaging and exasperating 30-something Jewish woman attempting to reconsider her assimilation. A former

editor at the San Francisco of Books, Schiffman presents a spiritual journey that has a Northern Californian cast: she attends a workshop on Judaism and psychology, talks with Rodger Kamenetz (author of *The Jew in the Lotus*), and interviews Rabbi Lew, who headed the Berkeley Zen center before returning to conservative Judaism. Having been raised in near-complete ignorance of her religion, Schiffman speculates about how Judaism might benefit from a new "brand" identity and voices amazement at the plethora of kosher supermarket products. On the other hand, she knows enough about anthropology to conclude that she should look outside that discipline for insights, since its major theorists dismiss the spiritual. Ultimately, Schiffman finds a congenial rabbi who validates her piecemeal approach to Judaism, and she decides to start reading the Torah with a friend. It's unfortunate that Schiffman seems to have operated in a vacuum, oblivious to similar quests that regularly appear in the Jewish press. When she ends her book by getting a temporary Star of David tattoo, it's not surprising that she doesn't cite the biblical prohibition against indelible tattoos nor the post-concentration camp implication of tattooing. (Sept.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Library Journal* What does being Jewish mean? Is it a cultural identity? An ethnic identity? A religious identity? At the end of this busy century, so many Jews are seeking to answer that question that, according to editor and book critic Schiffman, they form a generation of seekers, Generation J. Here, in a breezy, breathless, and overly personal fashion, Schiffman writes about their seemingly endless search for meaning. Traveling a quirky, circuitous path, Schiffman haphazardly probes just about everything out there: tai chi, witchcraft, rabbis, priests, and that new wave of popular spirituality, the kabbala. But this short, disappointing book never gets past the surface layer of meaning. Not recommended. Aidelle Rudman, Touro Coll. Lib., New York Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.