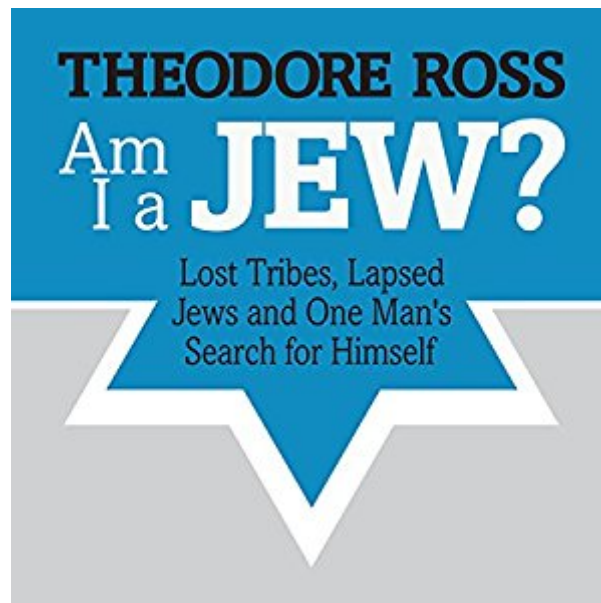




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# Am I A Jew?: Lost Tribes, Lapsed Jews, And One Man's Search For Himself



## Synopsis

What makes someone Jewish? Theodore Ross was nine years old when he moved with his mother from New York City to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Once there, his mother decided, for both personal and spiritual reasons, to have her family pretend not to be Jewish. He went to an Episcopal school, where he studied the New Testament, sang in the choir, and even took Communion. Later, as an adult, he wondered: Am I still Jewish? Seeking an answer, Ross traveled around the country and to Israel, visiting a wide variety of Jewish communities. From "Crypto-Jews" in New Mexico and secluded ultra-devout Orthodox towns in upstate New York to a rare Classical Reform congregation in Kansas City, Ross tries to understand himself by experiencing the diversity of Judaism. Quirky and self-aware, introspective and impassioned, *Am I a Jew?* is a story about the universal struggle to define a relationship (or lack thereof) with religion.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 8 hours and 11 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Gildan Media, LLC

Audible.com Release Date: November 1, 2012

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00A04S0YO

Best Sellers Rank: #78 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism #562 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > Jewish #2001 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Biographies & Memoirs > Personal Memoirs

## Customer Reviews

Superbly written, *Am I a Jew* is part travelogue to particular Jewish homes, people and part memoir by a man struggling to define himself as a Jew. The book falters by focusing so much on extremes in Judaism. One rabbi was so odd and a caricature. I would've liked to have seen more reporting in mainstream Jewish temples. It would've added balance. But read this book. It's wonderful writing and storytelling.

Fascinating for those, like me, who are interested in Jewish survival. And fun to read!

As a non-jew but flattering myself that I was quite familiar with current Jewish culture, this book was a revelation. I had always assumed that Judaism was not evangelical, and was comprised of only a few converts. It was a revelation to see how many organizations there were to accept new converts, and to increase religious participation in orthodox and more liberal expressions, including migration to Israel. Ross does a great job explaining Hebrew terms and Jewish concepts to this layman. Primarily, though it's a touching and affecting story about a man trying to find a sense of history and community. While he doesn't quite find a perfect niche, Ross eventually finds peace with his own way of being Jewish. An informative and compelling read.

I am glad this book was a Kindle purchase as it is easy to rid myself of it. (I don't burn Jewish books.) But, back to Ross and his search for himself. How he felt what he wrote would help him is beyond me. Trashing several people was disrespectful. Why? There appears to be a hidden agenda?

Author seems to have an axe to grind with everyone he writes about. As for the Rabbi in KC - I know the man. Why this author took time to reflect upon what some might consider negative personality and the incessant fixation with the Rabbi's diet - simply is uncalled for. Even after being invited to spend a night at the Rabbi's home, the author lashes out with an evil that is in him, certainly not in the Rabbi. Theodore Ross may be a Jew, but he is an embarrassment to the rest of us. This book was not worth the effort to write. It is certainly not worth the effort to read.

When Theodore Ross moved with his mother and brother from New York to Mississippi, his mother decided (fearful of antisemitism) they should keep their Jewish background a secret to the outside world. Years later, Ross, now married and father, searches for his own Jewish identity. The question, as he explains near the end of the book, is not really whether he *is* Jewish, but what his Jewish background means to him and what he wants to do with it. To find answers, he travels through several American states and he makes a trip to Israel. He visits 'Crypto-Jews' in New Mexico, watches a Sukkah building contest, visits a Reform community, celebrates Shabbat with the Orthodox, goes to Jewish dating events and even a 'Jewish' burlesque show directed at secular Jewish youngsters, learns about the Beta Israel and Falash Muri communities in Israel, and in between these visits he also confronts his mother. Different aspects of Jewish identity are treated. Before I started reading this book I was a little afraid it would be a dull listing of the standard kinds of

Judaism, but Ross' genuine interest and curiosity and his lively and often very funny style of writing definitely make this book worth reading. For me, a European secular Jew, this book was also interesting for its peek into the diversity of Jewish culture and Judaism in the United States, and to see differences and similarities between Jewish culture in the US and here. As a secular person (like Ross) questioning identity and looking for spirituality and meaning this book was definitely interesting, I think this aspect might also be interesting to a broader audience. p.s. For those without any knowledge of Jewish culture this is an accessible book, since he explains various Jewish terms and practices he encounters on his journeys.

The way in which Ross approached the writing of this book was based on mocking people; not on truth-seeking. I agreed to interview him, and he twisted everything I said, and everything in which he participated he created non-existent facts, or purposely distorted the facts to be negative. He was a guest at my home, and did nothing but cast aspersions on everyone he met. He was so anxious to have an interview with us, yet he did not report ANYTHING I told him; rather he used the opportunity to create a smear campaign on everyone to whom I introduced him. I can't see this book going anywhere; it is such a rag; both in content and binding. It contains much falsified reporting, and is not representative of a person who is seeking truth. It is not surprising that he wrote this to regain a position in journalism to recoup the losses he had after he was fired from his job in Harper's. Look up his blog; he was indeed fired from his job at Harper's. Furthermore, he informed me that he would show me a draft of the book for my approval, and would not use our names. He did nothing of the sort, and while my friend received an e mail notifying her of the book's publishing, I did not; despite my writing to him. He did not respond to my e mail, which at first told him of my anticipation of reading it, nor did he respond when I demanded an apology for his inappropriateness. He obviously was hiding from those from whom he benefited.

I actually found it to be an interesting read. The author is sort of like me, non observant, yet interested in his inherited faith. He really does do a "cafeteria-style " journey through American Judaism. The book is mostly entertaining and in parts almost scholarly. If the subject of American Judaism is of some interest to you, it is worth reading.

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