DOING JEWISH AT BURNING MAN: A SCHOLARLY PERSONAL NARRATIVE ON IDENTITY, COMMUNITY, AND SPIRITUALITY

By

Becca Grumet

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Jewish Nonprofit Management

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion

Spring 2016

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
LOS ANGELES SCHOOL

ZELIKOW SCHOOL OF JEWISH NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT

DOING JEWISH AT BURNING MAN: A SCHOLARLY PERSONAL NARRATIVE ON IDENTITY, COMMUNITY, AND SPIRITUALITY

By

Becca Grumet

Approved By:

_____
Advisor

_____
ZSJNM Director

Table of Contents

Abstract

On August 30th, 2016, I boarded a tiny plane at LAX to Reno, Nevada, and then a packed bus to the Burning Man Festival in the Black Rock Desert. I stayed with a theme camp called Milk + Honey for one week, which is known for its giant Friday night Shabbat service and dinner open to all. Some Jewish scholars have briefly written about Jewish happenings at Burning Man, but I went to study what Jewish identity, community, and spirituality looked like at my specific camp, a camp I found was *doing* some very Jewish stuff without necessarily *being* very Jewish. I also went to the Burn as a personal exploration of whether I could form a spirituality and community tied to Judaism that I had not found elsewhere in the default world. Through 13 on-site interviews and immersive observation, I did have a spiritual awakening while experiencing Black Rock City and also became inspired by the Milk + Honey community. I found that there is much to be learned from the greater Burning Man principle of radical inclusion that is practiced so well in the smaller Jew-ish community at Milk + Honey, a practice in which Jews and non-Jews can opt in whenever and however they please. With 33% of the camp identifying as not Jewish, Milk + Honey is a useful example of how default-world Jewish communities and organizations can radically make space for anyone who wishes to join - religious, spiritual, secular, and, most importantly, not Jewish.

Acknowledgements

This project, while academic, is also the most difficult and personal piece of art I have created to date. I do not often talk about myself in my work, but Burning Man was such a personal experience that it became necessary to tie myself to the academic questions, thus this capstone becoming a scholarly personal narrative. Thank you, reader, for going on this personal journey with me.

Thank you to all of the faculty and staff at Hebrew Union College-Los Angeles for believing in the value of this project, most notably Richard Siegel, who continually inspires me to be a radical Jew. Thank you to Erik Ludwig, Mandi Richardson, Saba Soomekh, and Sarah Benor, as well as Varun Soni at the University of Southern California for giving me wonderful insights on religion and spirituality in popular culture. To the ZSJNM class of 2016, thank you for being there for me through this process, for answering my texts for help, for picking my dusty and exhausted self up from the airport.

To the Milk + Honey family, who welcomed me so beautifully, and the many who took time out of their Burn or daily lives afterwards to speak with me. Whether you know it or not, you are such an important part of Burning Man.

To my family back home and my partner who patiently waited for my call after a week off the grid without them. Thank you for supporting me in the weird and crazy things I choose to do in life.

And lastly, to my late grandfather Stanley Lustig, who always told me that my greatest talent was writing. I hope you are somewhere sitting in a recliner reading this in large print format, because it is most of all for you.

Introduction

It was almost midnight as the wheels of the coach I was on finally hit "playa," the alkaline dust that covers the Black Rock Desert. We were supposed to have been there five hours before, when we would have the comforts of sunlight as we set up our tents, staked them down with rebar, and learned the land of our camps. Instead, it had been a ten-hour journey from Reno, Nevada, to the site of Black Rock City, the temporary grid set up each year for the Burning Man Festival. Ten hours to creep down seventy miles of one-lane highway suddenly seemed so worth it. We had made it. We were Burners.

Those who were awake as we entered the gates of the city whispered to each other on the bus. A fellow "virgin" sat behind me, making small talk with a young, attractive woman, whom I had overheard telling him she was an actress back in the default world, in her case the same world as mine, Los Angeles. The man behind me started telling her about a screenplay he was writing, he wondered if she would know of any literary agents, and I grit my teeth in front of them. Of course. I had come to Burning Man to shed the competitive scramble of my city, to learn about myself and what makes Burners spiritually tick, and in no way did I want to hear one more word about the goings on in Hollywood, who had gotten what meeting with who, who was attached to what project- any of it. I no longer cared. For the next week, none of it mattered.

After all, it had been five and a half years in Los Angeles trying to prove I could "make it" in the industry that runs the town. Four of those years had been during college at what has been deemed the number one film program in the country, but even while I was attending school, there was an intense pressure to get noticed as quickly as possible. Rise through the ranks at your summer internships. Make the right connections. Be a *star*. Each fall during the first week of classes, I would dream of what it would be like to escape for just one week, to disappear in an invisible city of tens of thousands in the desert, where I did not have to be a star, but be *among* the stars, where life was not dictated by your Google calendar and a class schedule but by the sun, the moon, and the largest blasts of fire one has ever seen.

Though I considered myself a spiritual person, filmmaking had left little room to feed my soul. After college I found myself accepting admission to a graduate program at none other than Hebrew Union College, the building no one noticed, though was ironically located less than a mile from my film school building in downtown LA. My film colleagues assumed I was attending to become a rabbi when I was actually going to study Jewish nonprofits. I reasoned with myself. It could take years for me to write, produce, and distribute a film and touch lives, or I could learn how to help people in a much faster, tangible way through nonprofit organizations, while at the same time attempting to reconnect with my Jewish self.

Watching as a Black Rock City volunteer scanned my Burning Man ticket, it was real. I had finally made it to the stars. We filed off the bus and I picked up my giant pack, dragging it over to a large bell. I had done my homework enough to know that as a first-time virgin Burner, I was destined to ring this bell, and throw myself down onto the playa dust, drowning myself in the iconic covering for the first time. I had no idea just how much I would wear playa as a second skin as time went on.

I also had no idea "reconnecting with my Jewish self" would allow me to cross Burning Man off of my bucket list, but it all kind of makes sense. While Burning Man is much written and talked about as being a personal experience, it can also be a tribal one. Many Burners organize themselves into theme camps, which are large groups of people living, sleeping, eating, and generally doing Burning Man alongside each other, while also offering events or gifts to the greater community. After ringing the bell, I boarded a second bus that would transport me to the six o'clock grid line, where I then walked the short distance to my theme camp at 7:15 & C. It was dark, but several art cars blasting music and lights drove by me. I eventually saw a large dome I recognized from pictures online, and the banner of my camp hanging off of a trailer. Milk + Honey. Where crunchy Jews and their friends come to burn. This was my home for the next eight days.

My name is Becca, I am 24 years old, and I have spent countless hours grappling with what being Jewish means to me. It is true, many Jews have done the same. And yet, not many of those have enrolled themselves in a Jewish graduate program, held countless Jewish jobs, and attended a variety of Jewish seminars. Maybe I am just a masochist.

My Jewish involvement has become a running joke in my non-Jewish friend circles—which were my only circles up until a year and a half ago. "Becca's off being Jewish again," they say, after I excuse myself to attend my umpteenth young professionals happy hour for a Jewish organization. Casual Shabbat dinners at people's homes have become a regular staple on my Google calendar. I moved to a new apartment in the Jewish neighborhood of Pico Robertson

with another student from my program and put a mezuzah on our front door. Many people assume that I am no longer an artist when I continually try and find ways to blend the arts and culture with my Jewish identity.

I think I keep trying new things because I still cannot decide exactly *how* I want to act on this huge, important, identity - an identity that despite the strange "privilege" of being born to two Jewish parents, feels inaccurate when I walk into a synagogue, feels like a lie when I say a prayer, and an embarrassing, misrepresentative side note when people ask me where I attend graduate school. I constantly complain about the exclusivity of the Jewish club, of the barriers to entry when it comes to not knowing Hebrew or the "right" melodies, when to outsiders I am practically president. Maybe not president, but close enough. Perhaps I am the secretary.

As previously stated, I like being around other Jews, and I am more than involved. I strongly identify with the culture, despite feeling alienated from the religion. I certainly *feel* Jewish, and I have come far enough in my exploration of identity to know feeling Jewish is *being* Jewish. But the question remains: how do I want to *do* Jewish? What do I want the Jewish community I surround myself with to look like? In college, in between making films, I went to the campus Hillel for someone to give me some ideas and found myself recruited for various leadership positions and a Birthright trip. I later did seminars and workshops with creative Jewish start-up organizations and learned about the deep roots of Jewish culture in the arts. And then, I went to Jewish graduate school in an effort to add to the entire muddled conversation on such identity. And still, I am not satisfied with this question of *how.* The synagogue rarely inspires me. I like engaging with Jewish art and culture but it does not necessarily make me feel spiritually connected. I also have a hard time connecting to meditation, chanting, or movement. So if I am a spiritual person, what *does* my Jewishness look like in spiritual practice?

When it came time to propose my masters thesis, I had an epiphany. I would combine the longing that had been brewing for the playa since years before with an effort to try yet another new Jewish spiritual experience. In the process, I would gather what the default world Jewish community could learn from Burning Man. And so I asked the questions: *what does it look and feel like to "do" Jewish at Burning Man? Could I find the spiritual connection to the Jewish community I longed for on the playa? Had others done so and in what ways? What could Jewish professionals and organized Jewish life learn from my research on engaging Jews who seek spirituality and community?* Five months later, I found out. This is my story, and the stories of the Burners I engaged with at the Milk + Honey camp during the Burning Man Festival in 2015.

Methodology

Upon choosing my research topic, I immediately took to Google for a simple search: "Jewish Burning Man." One of the first results was for Sukkat Shalom, a 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to "nourish the faith of those who sleep in the dust." The organization, since 2008, has been the home for the Milk + Honey theme camp, which was also called Sukkat Shalom until 2014. The photos on their site revealed a large dome adorned with a Jewish star that housed a giant Shabbat service. I knew I had seen a dome like that before.

I thought back to those creative start-ups I had dabbled with on my Jewish journey and recalled a Jewish professional friend I had made at one such program hanging off of the large dome in some of her Facebook photos. I contacted her, and she revealed that she would be one of

the camp coordinators for Milk + Honey 2015. Because the camp's application also requires a referral from a former "Honey," she agreed to be my reference, and after the Sukkat Shalom board signed off on my research, I was in. A few weeks later, I turned in my application to the Burning Man Organization for the low-income ticket program, and I was officially awarded a ticket to the festival over seven weeks later.

While this is a mixed methods study, the majority of my methodology was direct immersive observation as a member of the Milk + Honey camp. I did not just study Burners for this research, I became a Burner. Much of my observations were written down while extensively journaling during periods of personal reflection. I also took photos and video during some of my time on the playa to capture visual representations of the Milk + Honey camp and their Friday night Shabbat.

While on the playa, I conducted eleven audio recorded interviews with Milk + Honey camp members. I also conducted two interviews before the Friday night Shabbat service with Burners from other camps who decided to visit strictly for Shabbat. Post-burn, I did four more interviews over the phone, three of which were with Burners who had been on the playa with me weeks before. The fourth phone interview was with a co-founder of the original Sukkat Shalom in 2008, who had been unable to attend the 2015 burn. Each interview, whether in person or via phone, lasted anywhere from twenty minutes to over an hour.

Exactly one month after returning, I sent out a survey to all 72 Milk + Honey camp members about their experience with Burning Man 2015. I received 27 responses, or 37.5% of the camp. The camp members were reached via email through a camp roster sent out by the coordinators after everyone's return. The survey included many Likert scale questions about their reasons for camping with Milk + Honey, Jewish identity, and spiritual practice. It also

provided open-ended opportunities for participants to comment on such questions and a section at the end for those to reflect in long form if so desired. Due to space limitations, most of the survey data is not included in this thesis.

In terms of names throughout the project, I have used the Burner or "playa name" that a person goes by while at Burning Man, or their first name if they do not have a playa name. All interviewees granted consent for me to use their first name or in some cases last name in the project.

Background

Overview of Burning Man

In 1986, two friends named Larry Harvey and Jerry James carried an 8-foot-tall "man" they had made out of wood onto the shores of San Francisco's Baker Beach for a friends and family bonfire of around 20 people. There was little to no organization or explanation behind the event, though the annual burning of Harvey and James' wooden figures became an attractive spectacle to the underground San Francisco Cacophony Society, a group known for alternative newsletters and free-spirit happenings in the area. Cacophonists Michael Michael and John Law had been considering an event of their own in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada. When a Golden Gate National Recreation Area ranger finally put a stop to the Baker Beach bonfire in 1990, now of a 40-foot sculpture with 800 people in attendance, Burning Man's desert home of today -- Black Rock City -- was born (Chen, 2009, pg. 26-28).

The Cacophonists called their outings into the world "Zone Trips," advertised as a way to "travel to a conceptual otherworld of space and time" (Gilmore, 2010, pg. 21). The original 1990

desert Zone Trip of approximately 100 people that would become Burning Man was advertised in the Cacophony Society's monthly newsletter, *Rough Draft,* as such:

> "On this particular expedition, we shall travel to a vast, desolate white expanse stretching onward to the horizon in all directions… A place where you could gain nothing or lose everything and no one would ever know. A place well beyond that which you think you understand. We will be accompanied by the Burning Man, a 40 foot tall wooden icon which will travel with us into the Zone and there meet with destiny. This excursion is an opportunity to leave your old self and be reborn through the cleansing forces of the trackless, pure desert."

From that first Zone Trip, the event expanded to include a *Survival Guide* for attending, a volunteer group of Black Rock Rangers, and even a *Black Rock Gazette* newspaper. In 1993, the now "Black Rock Arts Festival" included the iconic art-cars seen on the desert playa and theme camps, or groups of participants playing on a collective idea or shared community identity. 1995 saw the formation of a legal partnership by Harvey, Michael, and Law, with the recruitment of friends into a large division of labor. After land disputes with law authorities over the next few years and falling-outs between organizers over the scale of the event, in 1998 an LLC had been formed with the remaining organizers. The now seven-day event was such a staple in people's lives that many Rangers worked year-round on operations and a San Francisco headquarters was opened (Chen, 2009, pg. 29-35).

Burning Man went from an insider prankster event to a phenomenon. With an intricate theme each year created by Harvey, artists continue to take on the challenge of producing grandiose experiences for Burning Man participants, or Burners, to engage with in the desert. Hundreds of creative theme camps emerged as the festival population of Black Rock City grew over the years, from 15,000 in 1998 to a whopping 65,922 in 2014 (http://burningman.org/timeline/). Starting in 2004, Burners were asked to abide by Harvey's "10 Principles," including radical inclusion, gifting, decommodification, radical self-reliance, radical

self-expression, communal effort, civic responsibility, participation, immediacy, and leave no trace, as the city of tens of thousands must be completely erased from the desert earth no more than one month after the event each year. These principles create the unique framework of Burning Man, in which there is no commerce aside from coffee and ice sold in the Center Camp Cafe, and Burners are asked to never spectate, but give in to immersing themselves in the radical community (http://burningman.org/culture/philosophical-center/10-principles/).

Burning Man has become so well studied and talked about that it has found a place among American popular culture. There are also several ways to tie in Burning Man as a pop culture event to the concepts of religion and spirituality.

Religion and Spirituality in Popular Culture

36% of millennials under 30 years old are religiously unaffiliated, says Pew Research Center in 2015, calling them "religious nones." Spirituality, though, is a big identifier among university students, with ⅔ of students identifying with the phrase "spiritual not religious" (Lipka, 2015). Young people find comforts that spirituality provides over religion, whether favoring personal experience over the experiences of others, personal relationships over institutional ones with the divine, or a focus on asking questions instead of answering them. Religion has been portrayed as a source of violence on the world stage, sometimes through terrorism and extremism, and has the ability to alienate youth with its various stances on ideology (such as anti-LGBT movements), and numerous accounts of abuse and cover-ups. With these instances in mind, it seems more favorable to seek spiritual fulfillment on one's own than to affiliate.

While many people prefer not to identify with religion, that does not mean they will not identify with a particular tribe in popular culture. Finding the sacred in the secular is nothing new, after all. In American culture, for example, there is not only civil religion, with our pilgrimages to Washington D.C., effectively taking in monuments as relics, the Supreme Court justices as high priests, and even the president as pope, but we find a kind of religion in our shared communities surrounding popular culture. John Sexton, President of New York University, is most notable for delivering the gospel of baseball in his college course and corresponding work *Baseball as a Road to God: Seeing Beyond the Game.* Die-hard fans of Oprah Winfrey, her magazine, television network, and favorite things, might resonate with the work of Yale University religious studies professor Kathryn Lofton in *Oprah: the Gospel of an Icon.* And then there are the musicians, of course, who started alternative religious communities, the Deadheads who followed Jerry Garcia from the 1970s through the 90s, or Bob Marley, who spread the actual religious undertones of Rastafari faster than any religion before through the technology of music recording (V. Soni, personal communication).

If the radicalism at Burning Man sounds familiar, it is due to its evolution from such alternative religious movements predecessors in contemporary American culture, including New Age, countercultural, and utopian movements such as Woodstock in the 1960s, punk movements of the 1970s and 1980s, the electronic dance scene of the 1990s, and music festival culture of today. Such movements have been connected in history by their participants' desire to find deeper meaning away from the default world, and Burning Man is no such exception. This broad exploration of self typically aligns more with definitions of spirituality than religion, and the Burning Man organizers stress that while they believe the experience of Burning Man can produce positive spiritual change in the world, it is not attached to any kind of supernatural

dogma. Everything at Burning Man, they say, is left open to interpretation (Gilmore, 2010, pg. 45-46).

As seen with Milk + Honey, there are religious traditions that purposefully share their practice at Burning Man. However, Burners seem to have created yet another secular religion in the event itself and their lifestyle around it. The journey to the playa each year is a kind of pilgrimage to engage in the ritual act of burning The Man. Apart from a need to engage with their Burner community each year and reconnect with other members of the "tribe," there is an element of seeking transcendence at the event. For many, this is achieved through the act of taking psychotropic or psychedelic drugs, reminiscent of Native American vision questing in the desert. When tasked to put their visions and elevated experiences into words, Burners react much in the way of their religious predecessors in turning to art, music, and dance to express their euphoric and transcendent searches for meaning. Impressive and sometimes colossal art installations are a highlight of the Burning Man festival, as is a highly anticipated lineup of DJs and dance clubs. One can even critique Burning Man in the same way religion is often criticized, in that older, original Burners are fed up with rising costs and weekend party culture at the event, where the wealthiest of Silicon Valley come out to plug and play, taking private jets directly onto the Black Rock City airstrip and staying in five star accommodations. Likewise, many older adherents to traditional religions are concerned with a new model of practice. For example, a social gospel of loving one's neighbor for some mega churches has turned into a prosperity gospel, where some Christians are encouraged to make as much money as possible. Lastly, Burning Man even has a kind of liturgical calendar, with the annual festival in Black Rock City acting as the high holy days, and smaller, regional events around the world such as Los Angeles

Decompression, the Midwest's Lakes of Fire, and Freezer Burn in central Texas. The parallels are endless (V. Soni, personal communication).

Spirituality By the Numbers at Burning Man

While spirituality can be found simply through the nature of the event, in the burning of "The Man" statue each year, or in making the trek out to Black Rock City, it can also be found in the people themselves. 30% of Burners in 2013 attended the event to "grow or connect spiritually," and 49% proclaimed themselves "spiritual but not religious" (Heller, Beaulieu-Prévost, McRae, Nelson-Gal, and the 2013 Census Lab, 2014). The majority of Burners surveyed (58%) by ethnographer Lee Gilmore on spirituality (2010) considered themselves "spiritual, but not religious" (31%), while less were "spiritual in some way" while not embracing or rejecting any particular religious tradition (11%), "spiritual" while also identifying an interest in multiple religious traditions (10%), or actually named an affiliation with one non historically Western or Abrahamic religious tradition (6%). These participants described their personal spiritualities in all kinds of ways, from "connectedness" to "being guided by the divine universe" to one participant's mixing and matching of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Wiccanism (Gilmore, 2010, pg. 48-51).

In the same Gilmore study, 46% of respondents affirmed that their own experience of Burning Man was, in various ways, spiritual, with many of these respondents describing a sense of connection to others or to community. Others in this group spoke about Burning Man stemming from "beyond ordinary reality," or finding it a meaningful vehicle for self-expression, self-exploration, or self-renewal. All in all, Gilmore found that most Burners she surveyed described Burning Man in a way that resisted or rejected traditional religion, instead finding the

event "an arena that by design invites multiple constructions and layers of meaning." Some in fact use the festival and its rituals to seek this connectedness, community, and meaning that promotes spirituality over religion (Gilmore, 2010, pg. 57-62).

Jews at Burning Man

If Burning Man and its participants are generally surveyed as more "spiritual than religious," how then do Jews fit in at Burning Man? While organized religion is commonly alluded to in ritual and often parodied in Black Rock City, self-identified Jews are indeed present on the playa, though in small recorded numbers. Gilmore's survey in 2004 saw 6% of respondents who affiliated with Judaism or Christianity (Gilmore, 2010, pg. 49), and only 6% of participants identified as Jewish in the 2013 Black Rock City Census. The Census, however, was only able to survey close to 17% of the peak population that year of 69,613 Burners, leading one to believe there are even more unrecorded Jews at the event (http://burningman.org/timeline/#!/2013).

Jews at Burning Man are easiest to locate in organized theme camps, such as Congregation B'nai Hamidbar ("Children of the Desert"), which organized as a response in 2003 to the festival's theme that inspired much play on religion and spirituality: *Beyond Belief.* Many of its members had spent Friday nights together at the previous year's festival at a "davening potluck" organized by now-Rabbi Menachem Cohen and eventually organized into the congregational camp. In 2004, the success of B'nai Hamidbar saw it rebrand into the larger "Black Rock JCC" camp with the following post on their website:

> "What if your local Jewish Community Center offered Kabbalistic experiences, mind-expanding ecstatic sabbath services, and summer camp for grownups? What if people of all and no religions came together to unify Heaven and Earth? Welcome to Bnai Hamidbar's Black Rock JCC." (http://www.metatronics.net/burn/index2004.htm)

Aside from just Friday night congregating for Shabbat, the camp aimed to operate in the style of a default-world JCC, with programming throughout the week of the festival. The 2004 event calendar included arts and crafts with hemp necklace making, queer-friendly "matchmaking," BYOS (bring your own siddur) meditation, midnight visionquesting, and a Havdalah ceremony before the burning of "The Man." One of its founders, scholar and Rabbi Jay Michaelson said of the Black Rock JCC: "None of us really knew what we were doing and it's not nearly as good as Milk + Honey is now. That camp, we just threw it open to be like 'hey if you're Jewish and wanna camp at Burning Man,' that's definitely not enough to have in common with people you want to camp with. So we got some people who had some entitlement issues and some people who were sweet but clueless. We were all sweet but clueless."

In 2008, the Sukkat Shalom camp appeared on the playa, aiming to "nourish the faith of those who sleep in the dust." They have been the most notable Jewish presence on the playa for the last seven years, offering a welcoming home to Jews and non-Jews both for camp membership and the open Kabbalat Shabbat service. Nathaniel Lepp, one of Sukkat Shalom's co-founders, was inspired to create the camp after attending previous Burns and camping with a large village that excelled at a large, thriving kitchen system that provided two meals per day. Lepp, also a resident of the Moishe House in Providence, Rhode Island at the time, banded together with residents from Moishe House Boston and Moishe House London to write a funding proposal to Moishe House headquarters for $10,000 to sustain the camp. The proposal was rejected due to the economic crash in 2008, but the three houses came together along with some of Lepp's community of friends (both Jewish and non-Jewish) from Brown University for the first iteration of Sukkat Shalom. Lepp states on the creation of the name:

> In the process of positioning ourselves and conceiving ourselves and the camp, we named it Sukkat Shalom. We named it a very Jewish name. So I think there's a line in the Amidah - Ufros aleinu Sukkat Shalom l'chaim - like spread within us. It could say like spread before us a place of peace, but I think you could translate it as disseminate within us, or on us, a place to be. So Sukkat Shalom we thought was pretty cool. And there's another line in the Amidah which I love which became our tagline for the year um'kayeim emunato lisheinei afar. The one who fulfills the fate of those who sleep in the dust. So we were just exploding with oh my god, it's perfect! Ah!

The Friday night Shabbat experience has become so popular with hundreds of Burners that the camp was able to crowdfund over $10,000 in 2014 to provide a Shabbat dinner for its participants and visitors. Since 2014, Sukkat Shalom, also a 501(c)(3), has appeared on the playa under the name Milk + Honey (https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/art-fueled-shabbat-dinner-and-service-with-sukkat-shalom-at-burning-man-2014).

For the last two years, there has also been a "Midburn" regional Burning Man event in Israel, put on by a community of Israeli Burners who began unofficially organizing Burner community events in their homeland in 2011. Much like the original Larry Harvey bonfires in San Francisco, the events have gone from a 600 person beach bonfire to officially Burning Man recognized festivals in the Negev desert with over 3,000 participants. Midburn, like Burning Man, allows artists to build large-scale installations in a temporary city in the desert, and seems to only be growing larger (http://midburn.org/en-event/).

What is Jewish Spirituality?

In terms Jewish of spiritual movements, the countercultural lifestyle of the late 1960s saw the formation of the *Havurah* movement beginning in Boston. The movement included a creative approach to being Jewish, incorporating the art world, film, and photography, as well as music and dance, leading to an explosion of explicitly spiritually inspired works of art (Diner, 2004, pg.

357). The work that helped to inspire even more Jews associating with the *Havurah* movement was *The Jewish Catalog*, a do-it-yourself toolkit and guidebook for awakening Jewish spirituality, where Jews could find resources for prayer, rituals, as well as the arts and culture (Orshan Kahn, 2011, pg. 21-22).

From the *Havurah* movement emerged the Jewish Renewal Movement, incorporating mystical traditions while also drawing from Eastern meditative practice. Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi published the seminal work *Jews with Feeling* in 2005 in order to equip Jews with tools for better spiritual practice and to help them find more meaning in being Jewish through communities like the Renewal Movement (Orshan Kahn, 2011, pg. 23). He writes: "Our challenge today is to be Jewish in a way that fills our lives with meaning. We want to be Jewish with awareness, to 'do Jewish' in a way that satisfies our souls" (pg. xi).

Such instances of spirituality historically within Judaism, however, are moving from traditional examples of having been found in text or a congregational movement. As Hazon's 2014 *JOFEE (Jewish Outdoor Food and Environmental Education) Report* indicates, there has been a significant increase in the way some Jews are experiencing their Jewishness out in nature, and thus, their spirituality. Organized Jewish outdoor programs have been on the rise for the last 15 years, such as Wilderness Torah, a 501(c)(3) offering programs such as "Passover in the Desert" or "Tu Bishvat in the Redwoods" (Hazon, 2014, pg. 10). Among common program goals gathered across different JOFEE experiences include "building Jewish spirituality and skills in ritual-making" (pg. 21).

Chapter 1

Welcome Home

While arriving at Burning Man for the first time in the dark was disorienting, confusing, and a little frustrating, it made waking up to the quiet morning of Black Rock City that much more exciting. I was grateful for the head lamp I had bought in preparation for the darkness, which made setting up my tent slightly easier, though not on my hands, which were raw from hammering down tent stakes in the cold night. I was hyper conscious of those sleeping in close proximity to my little 15 square feet of home, my lamp continually shining in on their precious private space, but I would later learn those tents were probably empty, as very few Burners sleep at night. In the morning, I crawled out of my little space to be greeted by the smells of something I certainly did not expect but definitely appreciated. Was that bacon? It was. But more on that later.

I followed the smell to the kitchen to see the intricately designed shelves of cookware, bowls, and flatware, the large solar-powered freezers, and the 3-step dishwashing station that would become like second nature to me (soap, rinse, sanitize). That night, an Israeli man named Avri whom I would learn was one of the oldest in our camp, a father in his 50s now settled in Topanga Canyon, huddled next to me under a blanket as he ate what he could only describe in the dark as leftover lentil mush. “Welcome home,” he’d told me after a long hug. This was a common phrase known for Burners to say at the start of every Burn.

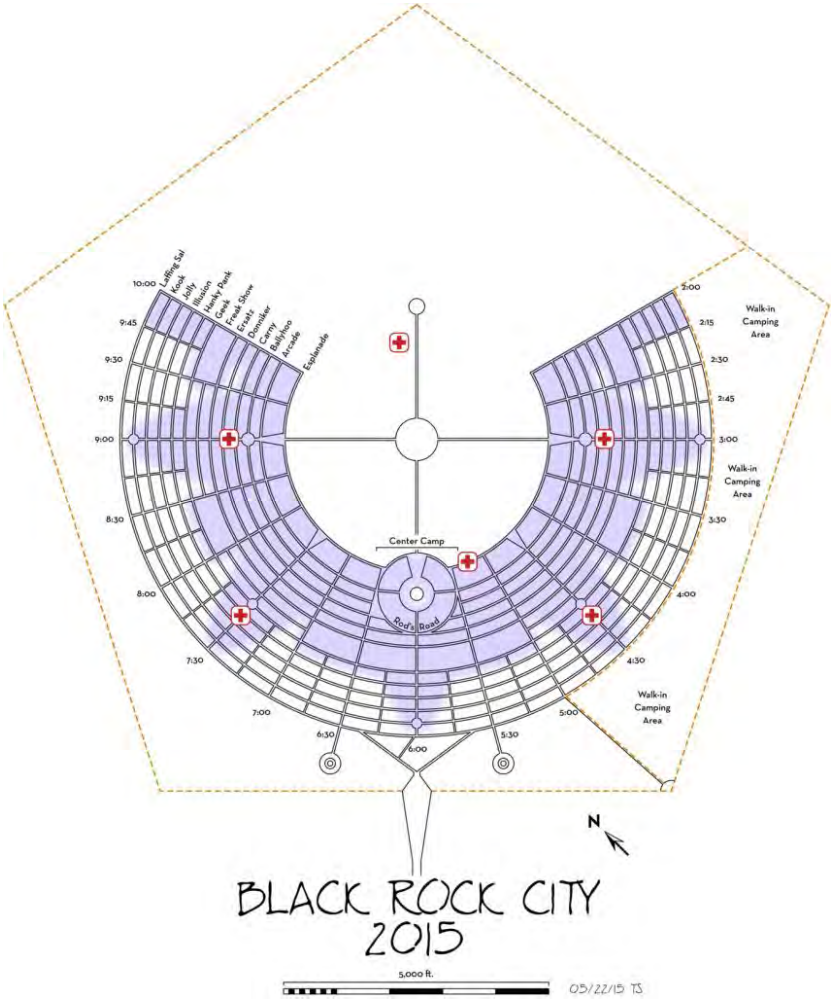
A team of assigned kitchen duty camp members were already putting out mountains of pancakes and bacon onto a communal buffet table. Other bleary eyed camp members stumbled over to the buffet from their tents. I tried to introduce myself to a few, but their names would never stick right then - it was far too early, and like me they had either appeared at Milk + Honey in the wee hours of the morning to set up camp or had been exploring the open playa until sunrise. People were already starting to talk about “The Woman,” a piece of artwork that faced away from The Man, who apparently was beautiful and moved her chest in and out to simulate breath. I made a mental note to visit her.

There were enough of us to form a small circle around the buffet. Someone suggested we say a blessing over the meal, and I prepared my ears for the typical hamotzi, as I had heard so many times over meals with my friends from graduate school. Instead, we put our arms around each other, and someone thanked everyone who had prepared the food in English. Then, we ate. That was it. I grabbed a bowl and plastic camping fork from the kitchen and stabbed pancakes and bacon into it. After being stranded on a bus for over ten hours with nothing to eat, I decided it was the best piece of bacon I had ever tasted.

I brought my bowl over to the living room area, which faced the dome on C road where I had stumbled in the night before. I had approached with my giant backpack and an extra duffel, taking in the impressive setup of the living space -- numerous couches and coffee tables, a bar top table, musical instruments strewn about, and twinkle lights dangling above. In the daylight I noticed the array of solar panels, which powered our electric appliances in the camp and allowed us those twinkle lights all through the night. It had all arrived in two giant trailers, both of which had now been transformed into extra socializing and resting space; a “cuddle cave” full of soft things to sleep on, and a “boudoir” full of extra coats, clothing items, hats, jewelry, and a vanity complete with makeup and accessories. It quickly became clear how much work the early arrival crew had put in before my journey, and the pride Milk + Honey had in its infrastructure.

It was finally time to make my way through the grid of the city. I had heard about Center Camp Cafe, located appropriately in the center of the C shaped city gridlines. Most Burners

navigated the stretch of the 1.5-mile-wide half circle of city via bicycle, and Milk + Honey worked hard year round to gather and fix bikes for camp members to borrow during the week. I, however, not being the best cyclist, decided I would navigate Black Rock City for the entirety of my stay on foot - starting with Center Camp Cafe.



I was pleased with the ten minute walk it took for me to reach it, easily visible with its multi-colored flags rising out of its large tent dome structure. This was my first taste of seeing Black Rock City in action, with all its crazy art car contraptions, its nudity, and yes, even its children. It was hard to keep the exuberant smile off of my face as I took in the other participants around me, the one that so well illustrated the feeling of completing a dream I had longed for. I

suddenly had the familiar urge to "tag" myself at Black Rock City, or post a status on Facebook, but pushed it down. It was not as if my cell phone had service, anyway. I was unplugged for a week.

Center Camp Cafe looked decorated in the style of the year's theme, "Carnival of Mirrors," built as a red and white striped circus tent. It contained distortion fun-house mirrors, Burners volunteering to paint faces or read tarot cards, and gymnasts doing floor exercises in the middle of the tent while onlookers watched on cushions around them, some dozing off peacefully for a nap. I noticed the coffee bar on the outskirts of the tent - from my research I knew that Center Camp Cafe was one of two establishments at Burning Man where cash was accepted, in this case, for various caffeinated beverages. The other was the ice camp, located just outside Center Camp, where Burners were sent on runs to cart large bags of ice back to their camps, usually on art cars or wagons attached to their bicycles.

The other annual recurring part of Center Camp, aside from the coffee bar, was the stage, where an ongoing 24-hour open mic took place. The stage was currently empty as performers switched around, and I noticed many audience members reading a newspaper on the couches in front of it. After being pointed to a large box of papers called the *BRC Weekly*, I sat down with one and began to read the satirical cover story entitled: "Let's bitch about Burning Man!" And in a matter of minutes, I had dozed off on a dusty couch alongside dozens of other Burners. Sleep was inevitable after such a long journey the night before. I felt rejuvenated when I woke up an hour later.

After my nap, I remembered that because I was doing research, I had to register myself with the Media Tent, located next to the ice camp just across from Center Camp. I entered through a giant clown's mouth into the tent, where dozens of what looked like reporters,

journalists, and filmmakers were gathered with their equipment. Volunteers were helping everyone fill out forms about their projects, handing out official press badges and tags for their cameras. This all felt silly to me, but as a filmmaker I knew it was very necessary. I registered and sat down to wait for my credentials. Some people juggled video rigs, two or three professional cameras with various lenses, microphones, and headphones. I looked down at my bulky digital camera and the sound recorder poking out of my multi-colored fanny pack and thought even that was far too much.

There was a young Asian-American woman next to me in a big floppy hat and striped socks also waiting for her camera credentials. She told me about how she was attending Burning Man in the hopes to interview participants for a documentary about Chinese Burners. I brightened, telling her of my project that also looked at a shared cultural identity among Burners, while also tackling spirituality. It felt comforting to know there were other people around me interested in cultural research, which despite Burning Man having a decent amount of academia surrounding it, seems so truly *un*-Burner-like when one is actually on the playa.

Terms like *research* and *observation,* especially, sound anti-Burning Man due to the Ten Principles founded by Larry Harvey in 2004, one of the biggest principles being *participation.* "Burning Man is not a spectator sport," a longtime Burner classmate had reminded me upon hearing the topic for my thesis. The message stayed with me, and echoed through my brain as I sat with all of the other hopeful journalists and camerapeople, waiting for permission to do exactly that - spectate on other Burners. I made a pledge to myself that afternoon to participate, to *burn* a little bit and get to know more of Black Rock City. Only then could I conduct fully immersive research.

Chapter 2

Hitbodedut

Over the summer, I had been going to Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles each and every day, taking my last rigorous course load of classes towards my masters degree. Each Tuesday, all of the students were required to gather in a class called "Experiences in Religious Expression," or ERE, where students grouped up to provide a religious experience for their fellow classmates. My group chose to lead a niggun singing session, others provided reflective craft-making, or mindfulness meditation. One particular Tuesday, a peculiar rabbinic student told us we would be doing something called *hitbodedut.*

None of us took ERE very seriously. I suppose I should not say *none of us*, but very few. For hours on end during the summer we were confined to a building most mocked by calling it a prison, not just because it was school but because it *physically looked like a prison.* Lunch breaks were spent getting outside as much as possible, whether it was gathering around with our lunch sacks on the outdoor patio picnic tables or taking a schlep to a food truck down the street near USC. So when *hitbodedut* was revealed to be something along the lines of "spiritual walking," we naturally rejoiced. ERE that day would be spent outside.

Hitbodedut is a form of Chassidic meditation popularized by Rabbi Nachman of Breslov where one engages in conversation with God on a walk. This conversation preferably occurs in the forests or fields, because "all the grasses join in his prayer and increase in his effectiveness and power," Rabbi Nachman wrote (Likutey Moharan II, 11). But that Tuesday at Hebrew Union College, each student engaged in *hitbodedut* while meandering around the parking lot and

sidewalks. I must admit at the time, I did not even participate fully, and broke my solitary *hitbodedut* to take a walk and converse with a fellow classmate, probably about a presentation coming up or something unimportant.

It is not the forest or a field, but it turns out the open playa of Black Rock City is an extremely conducive place for *hitbodedut.* More so, it is necessary. When one's only alone time comes in the form of a snooze in the small square footage of a tent, exploring the playa on your own becomes the only solution. This, combined with the fact that I was new to Milk + Honey, new to Black Rock City, plain old new to Burner culture, I found myself quite alone those first few days of Burning Man when not enticing camp members for interviews. So on my first night, I remembered what ERE had taught me and set out into the open playa, past Center Camp Cafe, towards The Man and the abyss beyond.

I quickly realized I was going to die. Not because it was far, or because I was by myself, but because it was *dark.* You will remember I do not ride bicycles, which at Milk + Honey came equipped with LED string lights allowing other bikes and art cars to see one in the dark. I was lucky enough that another camp member saw me heading out, asked what I was doing, and generously offered me some pink LEDs to thread through my Camelbak hydration backpack. Combined with my flashing red headlamp, I felt much better knowing it was much less likely for me to get run over by a mutant vehicle.

I set out, down the 7 o'clock line towards The Man. The buzzing energy away from the camps was exhilarating, as Burners set out into the night in their brightest lit-up outfits. Directly in front of The Man along 7 o'clock was a metal tree lit up with multicolored large bulbs. This art piece was called TrEeD, and was meant to be a resting place as well as a bike rack. I used TrEeD for the remainder of the festival to guide me back home in the right direction. I even got

stuck in a particularly nasty dust storm one day, and navigated my way to hide under TrEeD, finding a few other Burners on foot to take shelter alongside me.

The Man was built on a raised platform, with a midway of games and side shows around it, again aligning with the "Carnival of Mirrors" overall theme of the Burn. A crowd had gathered around a group of fire dancers nearby, and I stopped to sit and watch them, noticing it was a circle of anyone who wished to join with their fire, not necessarily a synchronized performance. Nothing was really a performance at Burning Man, as I said, not a *spectacle,* and yet everyone at the same time was putting on the part of citizen of a show called Black Rock City. I looked up at The Man now behind me. He was the main event for Saturday.

I looked into the distance behind The Man, and realized I could see a curvaceous purple figure with her back to him. This must be The Woman people were talking about the night I arrived, I thought, and headed towards her, glad for my pink LEDs as I entered a section of playa

without any lit-up art or fire shows. The Woman, officially titled R-Evolution, was quite different than the build of The Man, which was designed geometrically, with sort of an upside down triangular head and stick figure body. The Woman had wiring that made her look like the human form, and gave her life, with outstretched arms facing away from The Man. In my mind I gave her a voice that matched her triumphant stance as she mechanically breathed in and out, a voice that said something like "This is me. I am here as I am," which could sound very much like a Burner mantra in the right context. We were all there as our purest selves, perhaps, these versions of ourselves that trekked out to the desert to live radically in an alternate universe for seven days.

After The Woman, I kept walking. It was here that I started to remember *hitbodedut,* alone out on the playa exploring various art pieces, and figured why the hell not? I would do some talking to God; a God, mind you, I had many problems with and was not ever sure existed.

But I walked, and I talked. I told God about how lucky I felt to be in Black Rock City, that even though I was alone in that moment, that my heart felt so full to have accomplished one of my dreams. I told God how worried I was about being in a cell reception dead zone when my grandfather's health had been quickly declining all summer, how I had made the decision to not be emergency contacted should he pass. I told God I felt selfish for such a decision, but my mother had explained staying to finish the festival was what my grandfather would have wanted.

And just as I started to become worried that I had walked too far, a man on a bicycle pulling a loveseat built up on a carriage rode up to me, noticed my fatigue on foot, and asked if I would like a ride to Center Camp Cafe. I had not been planning to go back to Center Camp that night, but I started to feel like this was God intervening in my *hitbodedut.* I gratefully accepted, and smiled at the wind in my face as this man rode his bicycle with me trailing behind on the bench he had built. There were art cars blaring all around us, all the way to Center Camp, and despite not feeling much connection to my camp yet, to the famed Milk + Honey I had come to study, I felt comfortable in my solo journey that night. It was one of the most spiritual nights of my life.

Chapter 3

Honey Moo-Moos

I could already feel myself connecting to spirituality on the playa, even through a Jewish spiritual practice, and I had only spent less than two full days as a Burner. Shabbat was still days away. But I was still learning very much about this research question of *what does it look and feel like to "do" Jewish at Burning Man?* For this question I needed to turn to the people surrounding me, who lovingly dubbed themselves "Honey Moo-Moos" or "Honeys" for short. The Honeys had the answers, both the alumni who had been at the camp for years, and the "virgins" who were either new to the camp, Burning Man, or both. So I set out to do some interviews.

Jewish identity among Honeys

Before delving into what it looks like to *do* Jewish, I wanted to find out what *being* or identifying as Jewish (or not Jewish) meant to the individual Honeys. Often times I struggle with what to call myself, what brand of being Jewish I want to wear, and sometimes it changes from week to week. This makes it very difficult for me to find a Jewish community that feels like home. *Cultural* and *secular* are words that always come to mind, but having such an interest in spirituality could add so much to those labels. "Secular but spiritual" seems the closest thing I could come up with to describe myself in my research questions. But I wanted to know what other flavors of "Jewish" I was camping next to.

At first glance, I would have guessed that most of the Honeys were Jewish, though many were not. In fact, non-Jewish Honeys came in at 33%, according to my survey. Of the Honeys who surfaced as Jewish or grew up in Judaism, I assumed many grew up in the Reform or Conservative movements. However, I spoke to two campers who grew up on the Orthodox side of the spectrum, one Black Hat and the other Modern Orthodox. They both had loosened their levels of observance after going to college. A Honey at his second burn but new to Milk + Honey who called himself "Father Nature" (age 30) explained how his Jewish identity journey had taken many twists and turns:

> So I was raised in a religious home and I kind of knew it was bullshit the whole time, I was like I'm pretty sure if I turn on a light on Friday night, everything is going to be okay. And so I was raised that way, and I had a lot of clashing with my parents because of that in my family and then I turned away for a while, and then I came back to it in my own way, in a strong way, of feeling connected to Jews and my tribe and actually recently I've been a lot less connected than I ever have been.

Most people I spoke to had grown up on the less observant side of the spectrum, and still very much struggled with how to identify. Of my survey respondents, 15% identified as Renewal, 11% non-denominational, 11% culturally Jewish, 11% secularly Jewish, 11% just Jewish, and 33% not Jewish. But my interviews explore a little bit more what these ambiguous labels could personally mean. My favorite response to this question came from a second year Honey named Sam. He told me, "I've joked at many points in my life that the most Jewish thing about me is that I don't always identify as being Jewish."

I interviewed a 27 year old woman named Squeak, also a virgin Burner, as she tried to comb a huge dreadlock that had manifested in just a couple days out of her hair. Even though I did not grow up in the Reform movement, I identified with her greatly on various levels. She said:

> I grew up in a very traditional bougey East coast Jewish Reform life where we went to Sunday school and we went to temple on the high holy days and my mom really wanted us to do Shabbat every once in a while. And they sent me and my sister to URJ camps and I hated it. I did not connect with my Jewishness in any way, it was sort of a bother more than anything that I had to go to this. But it was a very normal thing in my town to be Jewish. All the cool girls were Jewish.

She said about her Jewish identity in college: "it was 'I'm Jewish,' but that's it, just because I am Jewish, not because I feel Jewish." Squeak's describing of her identity in such terms has made me contemplate a lot about what it means to *be* Jewish versus *feel* Jewish, let alone *do* Jewish.

Interestingly, Lotus, one of the 2015 camp coordinators brought to Milk + Honey through her Brown University connections, described how she *feels* Jewish, though she excludes herself from a more technical definition:

> So the idea about Judaism equaling community was cemented pretty strongly at Brown. And that was why I was like this yeah, I want this. I'm not even bat mitzvahed, I don't have Hebrew, but I feel very Jewish and identify as Jewish even though I'm technically not, because my mother is Catholic. And then hearing about Sukkat Shalom and being like yep, exactly. Yes that. Because Shabbat and community and bringing people together and that felt really aligned with what I like most and what I feel most comfortable in. Where I feel like I can offer.

Similarly to Lotus, other Honeys I spoke with talked about being or feeling Jewish when surrounded by community. Eric, a longtime Burner and Honey in his early 30s, first felt a deep connection to being Jewish while working at Camp Tawonga in northern California, a camp which often came up as a parallel Jewish experience to Milk + Honey in some of my other interviews. His community experience at Tawonga was so influential to his Jewish identity that it set him on a path of doing clinical pastoral work, organizing alternative minyanim in Israel, and finally on a tour of potential rabbinical schools. He said:

> So when I arrived at Tawonga and there was all this intentionality behind it, I think I had always been attuned to that, even though I'm not sure I was taught that stuff growing up. And so I reached there the idea of meaningfulness and intentional living blew up for me. And it became clear that a certain form of Judaism, that people do that. Live in community. And I loved summer camp but I think summer camp is a dream in a lot of

> ways. The question is always how to bring it home. And in my life I'm not interested in bringing it home, I'm interested in it being my home.

Another longtime Honey, Gleam, who is part of the 33% not Jewish number, met some Honeys out on the playa during her third Burn in 2010. After hitting it off with many people from the camp, she became a regular, eventually taking leadership on the creation of the boudoir and the cuddle cave on the "Committee of Awesomeness," the leadership board of Milk + Honey. She will also be one of the camp co-coordinators at Burning Man 2016. Like Eric, she found Jewish community at summer camp and her Jewish connections blossomed:

> I'm not Jewish, but I've been sort of mysteriously surrounded by Jewish community my whole life. I went to a sleepaway camp on the east coast that was 99% Jewish, did Shabbas every Friday night there, so I've long since been steeped in the culture. It's a huge part of home, too, a lot of Shabbat dinners. And I go to Passover every year now. And I think it's been a pretty seamless introduction to honoring tradition and giving thanks for one's life by having a map to refer back to. A way to say thanks.

Whether one grew up surrounded by Jewish community like Gleam, or found Jewish community for the first time at Milk + Honey, there are many non-Jewish Honeys who enjoy being in a community inspired by Jewish values. In the first year of Sukkat Shalom, it was described approximately half Jewish, half non-Jewish. I spoke with a virgin Honey called Silver Priestess, who told me of her connections to some Jewish Honeys she met at a tobacco pipe ceremony called Medicine Path in the Bay area.

> Well, my connection to Milk + Honey was just the beautiful beings that I knew who already came here and some of them are Jewish and it was such a non issue for me to apply and be a part of this group whether or not I was Jewish, it just didn't come up and it's all inclusive. To be quite honest I don't even have a lot of knowledge about the Jewish faith or culture or anything like that, so I'm picking up all the information that I can but at the same time I just feel like it just doesn't matter. I'm just here enjoying all these beautiful beings and it's beautiful to witness their connection with God and what it looks like for them.

With so many Honeys like Gleam and Silver Priestess over the years continuing and adding to the camp's diversity, there was a natural progression towards shifting Milk + Honey's overall

camp identity towards something more inclusive and truthful to what its community actually looked like and communicated to the playa. Now that I knew what some of the Honeys' personal Jewish or non-Jewish journeys to Milk + Honey looked like, I moved on to this idea of an overall Milk + Honey camp identity.

Milk + Honey camp identity

If I was to decipher what *doing* Jewish looked like at Burning Man, and what I could relay back to the world about how such a community does it, I had to deconstruct how the Honeys themselves felt about Milk + Honey's identity at Burning Man as a Jewish space. Ultimately, I had to consider the possibility that the camp became interpreted as a Jewish space due to its offering of Shabbat to the Burning Man community, something I considered an act of *doing* Jewish. But is it possible to *do* Jewish without inherently *being* Jewish? The answer seemed to be yes, though many Honeys felt differently about the camp *being* Jewish to varying degrees.

A big change to consider during my stay in 2015 was the lack of many of the camp's longtime alumni, including its co-founders, who had been unable to make it out to that year's Burn. Without several of these Jewish and non-Jewish alumni returning, camp leaders made an effort to do more outreach to new faces, which was so successful that the camp became the largest it has ever been at 72 people, with new Honeys outnumbering the old. Another factor determining outreach populations is the required referral and nomination process for new members, where one is only admitted to the camp if they have received a recommendation from a former camper. This process creates a buddy system, where new campers are easily introduced and blended into the fold via their reference.

It became very clear during my interviews that while the overall camp vibe remains similar from year to year, its Jewish content on the playa outside of Shabbat tends to vary depending on where the *activation energy* comes from, or a person's motivation to create something. Along those lines, the Jewish demographic makeup of the camp could also reflect who receives outreach from the referral system. For example, some of the new faces to camp had been contacts Honeys had met through the Camp Tawonga and Wilderness Torah communities in the Bay Area, especially a signature event of Wilderness Torah called Passover in the Desert. Many were also frequenters of the East Bay Moishe House. Dharma, who lives in Brooklyn, noted a difference from the "east coast Judaism" style he practices to Milk + Honey:

> This is a very west coast Judaism camp. So bacon in the morning and niggunim in the evening or something. That's how it is in my experience in both San Francisco and LA, actually, where there's a little less dissonance around some of that dissonance. So that really works kinda for me even though I don't eat bacon. So it's a little weird actually, but not in any tight way.

Gleam noted because of the west coast Judaism connections of many new campers, Milk + Honey seemed "more Jewish" to her in 2015, and that she appreciated the fluidity of the Jewish component in that way from year to year. She said, "there's space for [Judaism] to take up as much as it wants to or needs to or is appropriate at the time, and the community is in dynamic conversation about everything in a way that allows dynamic shifts to happen."

Lotus, one of the 2015 camp coordinators, first brought the camp's concept and use of *activation energy* to me to explain how the camp's Jewish content is created on an individually desired basis:

> Every year is different. Last year there was a 'Bloodies and Bagels' for Jews on the playa because it was something someone at camp wanted to do. Other years Eric has led mincha ma'ariv and shacharit or at least one service a day or something. We've had kabbalah workshops by a former camper who works at a JCC in the normal world in California. This year is especially not very Jewish except for Shabbat. But other years it

> just depends on who brings what to the community. Maybe that's something interesting - how Jewish we are is determined by where the activation energy is, we talk about that a lot. Projects happen because there's activation energy behind them in this community and for this. And if someone wants to do it, it'll happen.

I happened to meet that JCC professional, Ron Feldman, aka Heartspace, before Shabbat started on Friday night. Ron, who has written many articles on Judaism at Burning Man, told me about his past experiences camping and leading Jewish activities with Milk + Honey:

> I've offered a class on kabbalah a few years, maybe 30 or 40 people come so that's kinda Jewish. Do I wish there were more Jewish activities? Eh. I think [Shabbat] is really important and it works time-wise, and this is really significant. I don't know if there really needs to be a lot more. I think if you offer some stuff some people will show up. I mean I remember we offered some morning shacharit services and you wouldn't get a minyan, you know? That's okay.

Ron originally felt the activation energy to *do* more Jewish on the playa, though has since felt it less, because he felt unconnected to the 20s and 30s age group of Milk + Honey. Others were feeling it big time, however, such as Jewish singer-songwriter Mikey Pauker, who not only helped to lead the 2015 Shabbat service, but offered shacharit at The Temple, a short Havdallah ceremony, and did a set of Jewish music at Center Camp Cafe. When I later spoke with Nathaniel Lepp over the phone, one of Milk + Honey's original co-founders, about if he aspired for Milk + Honey to do more Jewish efforts on the playa, he told me about Mikey's activation energy in wanting to expand Milk + Honey's Shabbat:

> There were conversations with a whole new funder about creating a new pocket of pure explicit un-diluted Judaism on the playa. And it would have a yeshivah, and text study, and a kosher kitchen and I am so pro-that. The Milk + Honey community might be capable of it but those who are really committed to it might have to team up and do it as its own parallel effort.

Bambi, a second year Honey working on his doctorate in Jewish Studies at UC Berkeley, agreed that a more explicit Jewish camp would be of interest to him, but not as part of Milk + Honey.

> I don't think I would camp [at a more Jewish camp]. I think I would be really glad to collaborate with them. I would be delighted to bring more of my talents as a Jewish educator and ritual leader, but Milk + Honey is my people. Just the vibe we've been building, the culture that's become the norm I think is irreplaceable and incommensurate. There couldn't be another one.

But the "vibe and culture that's become the norm" Bambi mentions has seemed to drift farther and farther away from much Judaism or Jewish practice at all. Aside from the 33% non-Jewish statistic among campers from my survey, it has become apparent in a big way from the camp's renaming from Sukkat Shalom to Milk + Honey in 2014, or even the serving of the bacon I so thoroughly enjoyed while at camp. I spoke with the current board president of the 501(c)(3) nonprofit that still exists under the name Sukkat Shalom, Mighty, who is not Jewish and also served as one of the camp co-coordinators during Milk + Honey's inaugural year in 2014. She remembers talk of changing the name as early as her first Burn with Sukkat Shalom in 2011, though it would take three more years to fully make the switch.

Mighty told me about wanting to have "reverence for the people in the community for whom it was important to have a name that invoked Judaism," though it was not especially important to her since she was raised Catholic and currently does not practice any religion. For many, using the name Milk + Honey has become a more accurate picture of who the Honeys are. Mighty went on to say:

> So definitely changing the name, I think I didn't have strong feelings about it when it was happening but I've come to really like the name Milk + Honey. It is more accessible to people when explaining the camp and people who aren't familiar with Sukkat Shalom who aren't Jewish, it's easier to remember. I think that it brought out more of a playfulness in the way that the camp thinks of itself and that's been cool.

Stephanie Lepp, aka Jedi, met her husband Nathaniel, the co-founder of Sukkat Shalom, during the camp's first iteration in 2008 and considers herself a "grandmother" of sorts to the Milk + Honey family. She was put in charge of facilitating the name change, which she said was

done by gathering various opinions through the Sukkat Shalom virtual community as well as in person meetings before going to a vote:

> For a variety of reasons from the 'didn't necessarily encompass who we are' to 'it's hard to pronounce in Hebrew,' [the name change] had just really been on the table for a while. And one potential outcome of the process could have been keep the name. Sukkat Shalom was a contender for sure. Who are we? What are we about? What are we for? What are our values? Looking at the names and why do we like them? Then doing some brainstorming and voting and ending up with something that didn't make everybody happy but made enough people happy that we felt like we could move forward and who knows? It might change again.

Nathaniel added:

> We changed the name 2 years ago just to better reflect our mixed heritage. Half the camp has no Jewish identity at all. And many of those people are super, super leaders in the camp. Camp coordinators. Big Committee of Awesomeness leaders. It just was not working. And I'm really happy that it got done. So Milk + Honey is a Jewish allusion but it's also English words that are pronounceable and fits with the yummy home feeling of the camp.

I remember the old Sukkat Shalom website being one of the first things that came up when I decided to do my project and googled "Jewish Burning Man." However, as easy as it was to find the camp, some camp members attribute the name change to the mixed messaging and perhaps even false advertising as to what Milk + Honey really is. Lotus offered:

> People were like this [name] is too Jewish, I'm not Jewish, and other people were like no we can't change it because this is who we are, this is like a watering down and it's bad and it's assimilative and Milk + Honey! It has Israel and issues! And also we were running into problems where people thought we were providing three services a day. People would email us and say 'oh we really want to camp with you' and had these hardcore Jewish things they wanted to do on the playa and we said that's not us, we're not what you think we are.

Gleam recalled similar experiences with camp applications and Jews looking for immediate community on the playa:

> I was just operating from the question of is our camp named in a way that is inclusive to everyone who's a part of it? Is it named in a way that communicates to the outside world,

> the outside playa who we are? For a long time it was no, because from a registration side we were getting a lot of random folks coming from Israel or for their first Burn who were looking for a landing place and that isn't what this is, this is a group of friends who mostly happen to be Jewish. But then to hear from the folks who felt like they had this relationship that had been tied to them made to feel shameful about being practicing young Jews saying we're going to change the name, people feeling like it's not cool to say we're from Sukkat Shalom, people are embarrassed, was all really informative for me, but I still ultimately agree that as our camp has grown, that a lot of the infrastructure team are no longer people so tied to the Jewish tradition, and so it feels like this kind of strange tension that has been held.

When I asked Eric about his thoughts on the changing Jewish identity of Milk + Honey, his answer was thoughtfully honest:

> It's bittersweet. It's great to have so many people in, but tradition requires a consistency. And when the people aren't around to keep building that growth it gets stunted. So it's bittersweet. I mean, the name change happened for a reason. I definitely wanted Sukkat Shalom, because I figure if we should be a Jewish camp we should have a Jewish name, but I'm not sure that's what it is anymore.

While this was the second year of identifying as Milk + Honey, it was the first year that the camp kitchen provided meat of any kind, and specifically pork, to its campers. From my observation, it seemed as if most people in the camp were happy to have easy protein added to their Burner diet, perhaps not even realizing the symbolism in the new menu item and what it could mean for moving away from Jewish dietary laws. Others aware of the symbolic shift, like Dharma, lovingly joked about Milk + Honey as "The Jewish-ish camp. The bacon camp." He went on to say that the use of different pots for meat in the Milk + Honey kitchen made it perfectly possible for someone to keep kosher, and "if you're turned off by bacon, that's your issue." Gabe, a Jewish camp professional who grew up in the Conservative movement, spoke of his appreciation for the diversity of Milk + Honey, bacon and all:

> I think part of being a Jewish community is being a welcome community and being inclusive and it's what Judaism offers - not an exclusivity, it's not that being tribal has its benefits, but the ancient brand of tribalism where you stick to your own kind doesn't serve us anymore. So I'm happy to see people from all walks of life and I'm happy that they feel comfortable joining and celebrating with us. There is a part of me that feels a

> little strange like at breakfast with bacon in a Jewish camp, but again everyone practices differently and for people who eat bacon, why the hell not? I hear it's delicious and full of protein, so. And it's pretty easy to prepare, so it seems like perfect playa food.

Gleam agreed that the nutritional and logistical value of adding meat to the Milk + Honey menu was crucial and outweighed tradition:

> The meat is a great question because I think for some people in particular it's not just any meat, we're having bacon. Obviously there are people who definitely keep kosher among the community and I feel it's an interesting question about growth versus this practical question of being in a place where it's hard to meet all of our core nutritional needs and 2 weeks of lentils is hard. I really like the practice of there are all of these things whether it comes to us through spirituality, this generation is like I'm not going to just say these are the rules and follow them, I'm going to ask really intentional questions through my practice every day, like why am I doing this? To be like no, I want to eat bacon, I do eat bacon, it doesn't change my relationship to spirit to eat bacon on the playa.

Despite these big changes in name and diet, both efforts to better acknowledge the diversity among Honeys, the camp has never thought about letting go of their Shabbat celebration. The Shabbat service and dinner remains the camp's signature event and gift to the Burning Man community, and so far there are no plans to change that. Of the Honeys I spoke to, both Jewish and non-Jewish, there are only warm feelings surrounding the gift of providing the Shabbat, however there seem to be an interestingly diverse responses when inviting folks to a religiously affiliated ceremony on the playa. For some this added to the conversation on fluctuating Jewish camp identity.

Some, like Lotus, mostly get excited about inviting people to Shabbat, but understand the challenges. "I definitely have a little anxiety about it because I don't want people to feel like I'm proselytizing. I say we're a Jew-ish camp," she told me, and that she describes the service as an intentional gathering about song and coming together. She told me this particular story:

> Like this morning I was at a camp way far out at the edge called Mystic, there was this woman I was connecting with who was talking about how she needs more sisters in her life, she has a hard time connecting with women, and we had this really nice drop in with each other, she's not Jewish for sure but I invited her to Shabbat and I said the

> whole thing is about welcoming the Sabbath bride, a lot of divine feminine, so getting to give that to people and bring that to people is how I relate to it here.

Squeak ultimately felt happy in her decision to camp with Milk + Honey but conflicted about telling others about it:

> I have to say when people ask me what camp I'm at and I say we're Milk + Honey, it's the Jewish camp, I'm a little bit embarrassed about it, I don't know why. Because I don't want them to make an assumption of me and my religion that I'm like super Jewish religious, not that I'd be offended if they did, I don't care, but that's not who I am. So I do think that being at this camp - and it could be in my own head, it probably is - it could be a preconceived notion if anyone asks that's just not at all true.

Another Jewish camper who grew up in the Reform movement, Duchess, took a different approach in how he described the nature of the Shabbat event. Used to doing very loose Shabbat dinners in his home with very few blessings, many non-Jews, and a home cooked meal, Duchess took a much more casual approach in his description:

> So my elevator pitch has sounded like this: we're not even doing a Jewish service. We're inviting people for some Jewish traditional songs and a family meal. Because I do think it would be problematic to go around the entire playa and invite people to services. I think offering services is not weird, if you wanted to on a Saturday morning offer a small service or on Friday night, but I think if that was our big public event and it included lots of praying, I would feel weird about inviting everybody on the playa there.

The Shabbat dinner portion has only gotten larger, as the Sukkat Shalom 501(c)(3) was able to crowdfund dollars to build Bedouin style tables and provide more food. This certainly requires more energy from Honeys at the camp to serve food and direct traffic. Lotus recalls, in the earlier days, Shabbat dinner looking more like a potluck, where food was ladled out onto makeshift tin foil plates. While the dinner has expanded with efforts from Sukkat Shalom/Milk + Honey directly, Gleam mentioned how the service has become more "outsourced" over the years:

> This year a bunch of people who are working on it are not camping with us. And in previous years that's been true too. That's been another interesting layer of the equation. Like okay, we're still advertising this thing but we're not Jewish enough to throw it ourselves, so who's going to come in and lead prayers? But I do think it's done in a way

> that feels very much like this community to me. It's very inclusive, I've heard a tremendous amount of reflection from people both Jewish and non Jewish that come to it that it's one of their favorite experiences on the playa.

If asked around the playa about what her camp does, Mighty describes Shabbat as an interfaith service and dinner that allows people to "reflect back on the week and get ready for the craziness of the weekend ahead." Though not Jewish, she also identifies with the original tagline of Sukkat Shalom:

> If people ask more about the camp, I'll say it's a Jew-ish camp. If you're looking for a theme of what our camp is, Judaism is definitely something that comes to mind. And then the providing "faith in the dust," the respite from the craziness that's happening everywhere else in Burning Man really resonates with me also, when you come back to the camp and it's well taken care of and it looks nice and comfortable and you feel homey.

I was starting to feel what Mighty described, about having a warm and inviting home base after long days and nights out on the playa. Whatever this camp and identity culture looked like that Burn in 2015, Jewish, non-Jewish, Jew-*ish*, I know I liked it. I was starting to understand that like many things in the Jewish community, Milk + Honey's identity was very personal and very specific to each individual Honey, and it varied in terms of how they got there or how long they had been a part of the community. They *felt* Jewish to different degrees. But by Friday, no matter how one identified personally, it was time to explicitly *do* Jewish. Shabbat was upon us.

Chapter 4

Let's Get Spiritual

By Friday, I was somewhat yearning for Milk + Honey to do Shabbat. This was weird for me, as I could not think of a time when I "yearned" for Shabbat in my life. In some ways, this was supposed to be the main event of my Burn, despite The Man's demise on Saturday or the Temple Burn on Sunday. At sundown, our camp was going to host hundreds of people and *do* lots of Jewish. Would I feel a connection? Would I get my spirituality on as a secular Jew? Would I feel Jewish community? I once again turned to the Honeys to see how they had responded in the past.

Friday Night Shabbat

Father Nature had been to the Milk + Honey Shabbat, then Sukkat Shalom, several years earlier, and it had a profound effect on him, inspiring him to try camping with Milk + Honey when he returned to the playa in 2015:

> I can say that the last Burn I remember coming to the Shabbat at Milk + Honey was a very spiritual moment for me because you don't get connected in the regular world necessarily to so many people who are kind of like of your ilk, and so I remember stumbling into Shabbat and being like wow that is just beautiful, people are singing the tunes but without any of the BS, without much of the rules but with the tradition and the love, and it was a really amazing experience.

When I asked Sam what he got from the previous year's Shabbat, he said: "I feel like I felt a wide range of emotions on that night, like a lot of the youthful knee jerk reactions, Jewish ritual definitely boiled up inside of me… but also at the same time felt immense gratitude and love for the ceremony of it and for the community that it brought together." As Friday approached, reactions to past playa Shabbats like Father Nature's and Sam's made me wonder what the

service would look like, if it would have any certain style to it. Nathaniel helped paint a picture in describing the very first Sukkat Shalom Shabbat in 2008:

> This one was very much grounded in the Havurah or Renewal movement in Judaism and so it was very beautiful song and there was some reflective meditation and it was really really moving. People loved it immediately. There were hundreds of people at the first one. Which was a great indicator that wow, we're really tapping into something, people want this.

Despite some of the service recently being outsourced to Burners from other camps, there were some in-house Honeys contributing this year, including Dharma, involved for years but camping with Milk + Honey for the first time. "It's a good group of people," he told me. "We're doing the Four Worlds model, which I think is simpler than the full Kabbalat Shabbat scenario, so going through body, heart, mind, spirit. But it is the traditional flow of the service. It'll be crunchy, but hopefully loud enough to get people's attention." Gabe, who wanted to contribute to the camp through Shabbat even at his first Burn, talked about collaborating with Dharma and others:

> I've been a little involved in planning the Friday night service and that's been interesting seeing the different voices that want a traditional Jewish service and those that are coming into it with no connection - not even no connection to Hebrew - but feeling a sense of alienation from Hebrew so trying to balance the desires of everyone to create a container that is going to help everyone.

While he was not helping lead this year, I spoke to Eric about his experience helping with past Shabbats. We sat on some dusty couches in front of the camp geometric dome, which had been covered for most of the week as safe refuge from the dust, as well as workshop space, but had since had its wiring exposed to get ready for the service:

> What happens in there isn't gonna happen anywhere else, and it can't because the energy here is specific and only exists for a short period of time. The texture of it is only going to be different. We're dusty and high. It was tremendous because a lot of people don't see what Judaism can look like. They see it as a black hat, white shirt tradition but there are endless ways to interpret the material and use it in different ways. So the service was

> really beautiful and so many Israelis went up to me afterwards and said 'I've never seen anything like that before, that's Judaism?'

I asked Bambi, another Honey helping with Shabbat this year, to describe to me what to expect based on his experiences at the last Shabbat. As well as agreeing with Nathaniel that the Shabbat carries a Renewal flavor, he personally loved the accessibility implemented into the service:

> There was a lot of Jewish content, but we didn't do that much singing per se in Hebrew. We didn't give out siddurim, anyone could participate with their heart and their voice and their soul. I think that's pretty unique, to have a service that both feels authentically Jewish and deeply accessible, and creative all at the same time. I've only been there for 2 years but both times were some of the best Kabbalat Shabbats I've ever been to, and I've been to hundreds of wonderful, innovative, spiritual Kabbalat Shabbats, but there's something special that happens there on the playa.

During my interview with Duchess, we sat huddled inside his tent under the shade structure as one of the worst white-outs of the week happened around us. Both new to the camp, we speculated together what we might see on Friday.

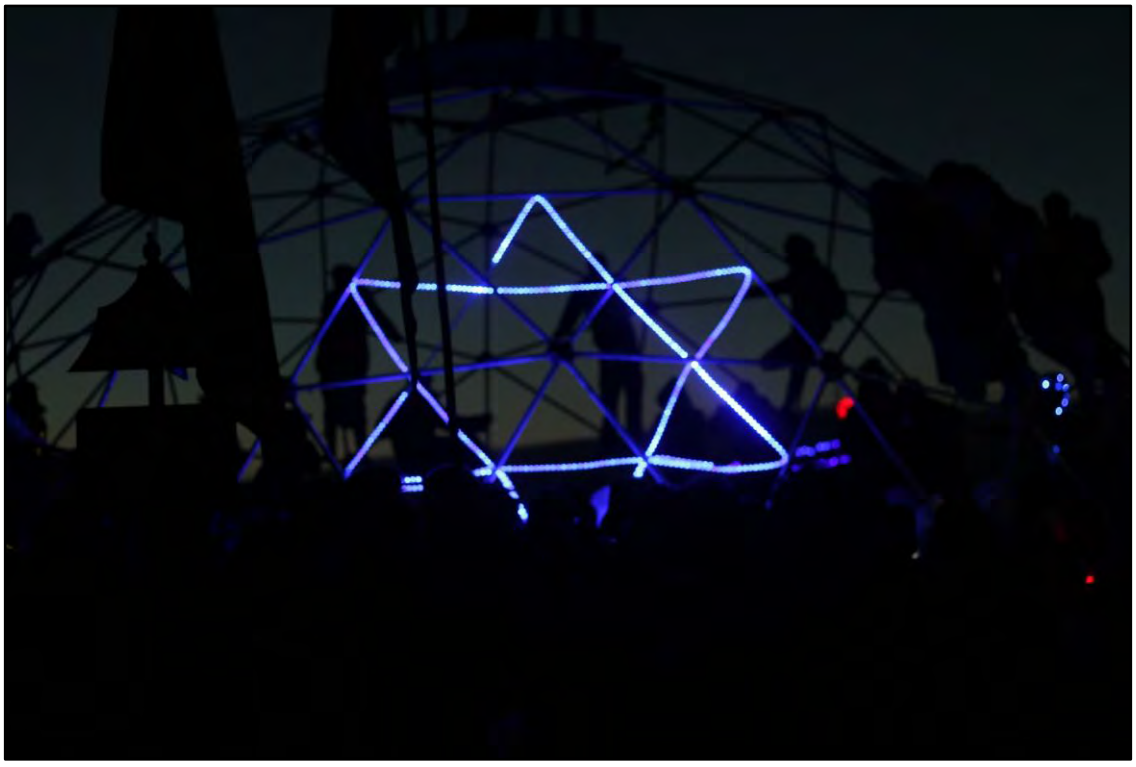
> I'm hoping to get a sense of community out of Shabbat. I'm excited to see who shows up. As someone who has done Jewish community organizing, I'd really love to see… who are the people of Burning Man when they heard? And I've said it to so many people and they say oh yeah Shabbat, I'm Jewish, I'm a quarter Jewish, I should come. And I wonder who actually shows up. Who's the Jew or who's the goy who shows up for Shabbat on the playa? Who wants this as a spiritual experience or as a family experience?

Duchess and I had a lot of the same questions, and it was finally time to answer such questions for ourselves. Preparations started after breakfast was served. Prior to arriving on the playa, everyone had electronically signed up for certain shifts throughout the day to prepare for the evening's crowd. There was the laborious transformation of the comfy living room setup to the rows of custom dining tables. There was the all-day preparation of the vegetarian dinner in the kitchen, of which there would be two seatings to accommodate the hundreds of guests at the camp. There was the welcoming of Burners into the camp, from both busy road entrances. Gleam and another camper called Starfish brought each Honey into the boudoir to have their faces painted with white and gold to signify who belonged to the camp. It was an all-day affair of hard work before celebrating a day of rest.

It was finally time. The sun was going down, and Burners were starting to flood into the dome on the floor, on the couches surrounding the dome, and some had even started to climb up for an aerial view. I took the first few minutes of getting situated to talk to those who were only visiting for Shabbat. I sat down next to a woman named Jody, who said she had heard about the Shabbat through Bambi. They had spent time together at Hadar in New York, and like Bambi, Jody had been raised Modern Orthodox.

"I've been looking forward to the Milk + Honey Shabbat for a very long time. Since I heard it existed, it was even more of a goal of mine to get to Burning Man," Jody told me. "I really appreciate the alternative spirituality vibe that Burning Man has and have progressive experimental views on Judaism, and so it seemed to make sense." Despite the fact that Jody and I came from very different Jewish households, I agreed. It did make sense. Rather, I wanted so badly for Burning Man to make sense, for Milk + Honey to make sense, for all of it to give me spirituality and community in my life. The nigguns began. The prayers commenced, and I heard beautiful music, but I will always remember what I saw:


Milk & Honey



What I noticed most was there were all kinds of people in attendance. I have attended Shabbat services and dinners with an intersectional theme, be it a "MLK Shabbat" or "Rainbow Shabbat," but this was something more. Many times at these attempts to be intersectional I have found an audience of mostly Jews. I think for the first time I saw so much diverse representation at a Jewish event that it really felt like a sharing of Jewish culture with the community, in this case the community of Black Rock City. A few Honeys, including Dharma as rabbi and Mikey Pauker as songleader, sat in the middle of the dome as others filled in around them. Everyone in the dome sat down, while the crowd stood outside the dome, climbed on top of it, or lounged on couches. The inner leading circle took us through what Dharma had described to me earlier as the Four Worlds model of Kabbalat Shabbat, encouraging those unfamiliar with the tunes of the prayers to hum or "lai lai" along. This was another thing that stood out to me as I dodged in and out of the outside circles with my camera, trying to capture as much as I could: many of the attendees, whether or not they were Jewish, whether or not they knew the tunes, *actually* hummed, clapped, swayed, and lai lai'd along. Many of these people were more engaged at a Jewish service than I had ever been, and they did not even know the words.

As everyone sat down for dinner, breaking challah and patiently waiting for a Honey in white and gold to bring them an enormous platter of delicious hot food, I felt a warm community around me. Even if just a temporary one, for one Shabbat service and dinner, all the Burners in attendance had become connected through *doing* something Jewish on the playa. It was a lot to digest. While I had lost her in the crowd of people, Jody's voice came back to me: "I think just being able to see that there are more people like me, people who care about Judaism somewhere enough that they took time out of their Burn to arrive here and people who are clearly interested in some other form of spiritual practice…" There certainly was something extraordinary going

on here. Jedi, the "grandmother" of the camp, explained to me her views on the importance of the Shabbat to the Burning Man community:

> I would say from the perspective of Burning Man or the people in Black Rock City, Shabbat is something that I don't think is really otherwise offered. It's a unique gift and once you get to Friday, it's just like whatever drugs you've done or however many nights you've slept it's just like ah, a breath of fresh air to be able to show up for this experience that is familiar, that you know, that invites people to rest. That quiets it down. Next to you are these other people, strangers. It's just a moment of peace and being at the end of the week which I think is really valuable for the people who come.

As people got up from their tables, they profusely thanked us for our gift to the playa. The Honeys all helped to clear the platters, the empty bottles of wine, and somehow we washed the endless mountains of dishes under the light of our headlamps. It had certainly been an important night. But I felt there was far more spirituality on the playa than Shabbat, and it was just as if not more important for secular seekers like me.

Spirituality among Honey Moo Moos

There are infinite ways to experience spirituality at Burning Man. But I wanted to know how a spiritual component to their Burn impacted the Milk + Honey community, this Jew-*ish* community, now my community after five days together. For many the allure of being free of the default world is a spiritual experience in itself. For Silver Priestess, this escape and connection on the playa was part of her recovery from addiction:

> Well, God led me here, the medicine led me here. And I don't know what I used to think Burning Man was, but I definitely didn't understand. Last night I had this moment of realization that this is how human beings desire to live in our primal states. Living in community and tribally and not having to get up and go to work for somebody else and not understanding why you're working for them, just working like a slave to pay the bills. Being out here we're just totally free and able to be our most authentic selves and we're able to just be in our humanness and honor everyone else's humanness and there's so much openness and the vulnerability seems to be infinite. We're just very connected to each other and to our environment.

While there are plenty of Burners who are sober, like Silver, it is no secret that many seek higher transcendence through drug use at the event. A virgin Burner, Ilya, travelled to the Burn alone to fulfill a dream of experiencing the energy of Burning Man, leaving his wife and new baby behind. "If you would have told me the first time I'd come to Burning Man was the year that my baby was born, I wouldn't have believed you," he told me, but his wife gave him the blessing to go out and do something for himself spiritually, including the drugs and electronic music. Ilya told me:

> Burning Man represents so much. It has a lot of inertia not as a commercial brand, but as a brand brand. As a thing. And part of the thing that Burning Man is is this another way to live, another way to be. That happens in all sorts of ways other than just drugs, but drugs are one of those things of another way to shift and to perceive how things could be. To live by different rules, the rules that we want as opposed to the rules that are. So that's really compelling. That's really exciting and interesting. So I'm like okay, let me go experience it for myself.

Eric had similar thoughts on Burning Man being a natural spot for finding spirituality, via drugs or otherwise:

> I think [spiritual experiences on the playa] can happen any way, it can happen through enhanced mind states as facilitated by substances and it can very much happen on one's own. I think people are so thirsty for deep connection here and answering big questions: who am I, why am I here; there's so much energy around that, it's very easy for it to come out when meeting someone or feeling it with some of the installations.

Aside from being another way to live, Father Nature finds Burning Man to be a place for spiritual inner reflection. When I asked him what spirituality meant to him, he told me: "[Spirituality] is kind of like Yom Kippur all the time," he said. "Really diving within oneself to find what you want to do here and what your purpose is here, if you have a purpose or if you don't have a purpose, what do you want to do to fill the time, to leave this world a better place?" Many others, when asked about personal spirituality and how that manifests at Burning Man,

talked about connection. A Honey called Walter said he did not feel much connection to the Judaism he grew up with in New York, but agreed that Burning Man is a natural place for spirituality:

> A lot of this stuff is self-evident in terms of how a range of people experience the place. People by nature are spiritual creatures. They're social creatures. They want to feel like they connect to something deeper. And this is a great venue to do it because people are self actualizing all over the place. Which is really the bottom line here because it's a place where people are free to figure out what their passion is and pursue it, figure out what self actualization looks like for them and pursue it; there's a lot of books and menus explaining all the different options to help make that happen.

By "books and menus," Walter refers to the Playa Events guide, a physical book of schedules for each day of the Burn outlining what a Burner can attend at different theme camps starting at 12am. This is how theme camps become popular, which can be determined by the number of events a camp puts on. Despite Milk + Honey applying to put Friday night Shabbat in the guide too late, it has become so popular over the years that hundreds of people came anyway.

Heartspace was one of the few I spoke to who found direct parallels to Judaism in his spirituality at Burning Man, of which he has written about extensively:

> It's a pilgrimage. It's a very ritualistic form very similar to ancient pilgrimages like Sukkot where people would go gather from places around for a week of ritual experience. Even Sukkot, if you read the Talmud, it was a big party much of the time, kind of the same time of year finishing off the summer. Coming to this was the first time I think I had a better sense of what Sukkot is all about, that you really could have thousands of people show up and somehow have a temporary community.

Interestingly enough for Mighty, who is not Jewish, it is within the Jew-*ish* rituals of the camp community that she finds spirituality:

> I think of spirituality in the Milk + Honey community sense. Just participating and putting on the camp and connecting with the people in the community is a spiritual experience for me. Even without knowing the traditions of Judaism that are being brought in for blessing meals and the Shabbat service and other events that we put on, there's definitely sort of like a - it still has a spiritual effect on me to be in such a reverent connected place and to see people in our community.

This being "seen" authentically is an interesting notion to Milk + Honey co-founder Nathaniel:

> A lot of people talk about being seen really well by good friends in a world where there's a lot of labels and snap judgements. I think it is an interesting phenomenon that after the flood of people get back from Burning Man, a huge percentage of people are changing their profile picture to a picture from Burning Man. They feel like they were captured accurately. This is who I am in this silly costume in the dust with this smile on my face. It's a very photogenic environment, but I think it's more about how people feel when that picture is taken.

The Temple

There is probably no place to be "seen" at Burning Man better than The Temple. Each year, a custom-designed Temple is constructed as a place for Burners to go and connect. Many use it as a memorial ground for the dead, bringing elaborate photographs or pieces of art representing their dead loved ones to the Burn with the purpose of saying goodbye. People write all over the walls, or find a spot within the Temple to write, mourn, sing, pray, or do whatever they need to do. Volunteer Temple Guardians sign up in shifts to hold the sacred space around the other Burners. Because Burning Man at any time of the day can be a rush of loud noise and energy, often fueled by drugs and music, the guardians preserve the sanctity of the Temple environment, which is continually somber and quiet, by steering people away who will disturb such a space.

During my first visit to this year's "Temple of Promise," I was not prepared for what happened to me. It does not take long to start reading the messages on the walls, to start looking at the photographs of the lost, to start feeling overwhelmed with emotion. I had not planned on sitting down on a bench to write my own goodbye, but I found myself taking out one of the reporter's notebooks I had been scribbling in all week to write to my grandfather. I suddenly had the sinking feeling sitting inside the beautiful structure, alongside dozens of other Burners, that

he would not be alive when I returned. I wrote to him about how much I loved him, and that if he needed to go while I was gone, that I did not want him to wait for me, that he did not have to, because I would say goodbye on Sunday night when the Temple burnt to the ground, swallowing everything left in it. I placed the letter on the ground next to so many other letters and photos, and wept. No amount of research prepared me for how much I wept.

It was not until my own Temple experience that I started to understand what the Honeys were describing when they told me about their spiritual experiences that took place there. When I later spoke to Gleam about The Temple, her words eerily described my experience:

> Everyone is just a human from the real world at the Temple that has decades of story behind them, and I love that that's a space that is universal enough and meaningful enough that everyone understands that everyone has reasons to be there. And through that, there's this incredible kind of support that shows up where no words are required. It's not like, oh are you grieving, tell me what happened to your grandpa; it's like oh you're at the Temple, you need a hug, you're a human.

I recalled a similar story Squeak had told me about a spiritual experience she had while spending the entire night out with a new group of friends:

> And then we biked out to the Temple which I had not been to yet and all cuddled together against one of their structures. And I watched the sunrise- we watched it together, and

> this girl came over to me and started crying and asked if I could hug her. And I was hugging her and was crying about I don't know what - she didn't tell me. I didn't ask. And I felt really good to be able to help, to listen to a stranger. At first I was a little like whoa, but I don't know. It was so nice. Everyone just listens. Everyone holds space. People don't hold space enough.

"Holding space" typically refers to an individual or group of people creating an environment to listen openly without interruption to another person, giving that person the space to feel emotions freely and vulnerably. This comes up at Burning Man frequently because there is such little judgement that comes with the ten principles. During her interview, Gleam also told me that she would not have ever come back to Burning Man if it were not for The Temple, that when she questions whether she will return for another Burn, she always considers how much she needs The Temple that year in her life:

> It really doesn't matter what else happens, I don't need to go dancing until 3 in the morning, I don't need to go to a workshop and balance my chakras, I just want to go spend some time at the Temple and thank my grandfather for my life. I have yet to meet any Burner who doesn't have the same kind of reaction to the Temple.

Jedi agrees that spirituality on the playa is most tied to The Temple, a religiously and spiritually neutral space for anyone, regardless of where they stand with organized communities back home. The Temple has no affiliations, laws, or rules for its usage; rather it is for any kind of person for any occasion. Jedi says:

> The Temple is just a thriving space; there are always people there purging and praying and writing and meditating and crying, and it's just an important and active part of the city. It really makes me realize the extent of which so many of us don't have that in our cities and our lives. Where is the place we can go and cry and purge and pray? For some people it is in the context of the religion they grew up in in terms of synagogue, which for many people and probably especially the demographic at Burning Man, we don't have a spiritual home like that.

Something I did not expect to experience at The Temple was the actual religious context that Jedi mentioned. The Saturday morning of Shabbat, I made my way out to The Temple with Duchess, and we asked some of the Temple Guardians if they had seen some folks gathering for

"Zach's bar mitzvah." As silly as it sounded, it was true. We were about to attend the bar mitzvah of a 13 year old who made it out to the playa with his father to become a man. A Burning Man?

We soon spotted Dharma, who we knew was officiating the ceremony as rabbi, wearing a tallit. He was gathered with Zach's family and a small crowd of friends and strangers. They were in the middle of blessing Zach, which was done by multiple Burners surrounding him, taking him by the shoulders, and whispering blessings all at once. Zach, in his steampunk top hat, tried not to look overwhelmed as so many people - family, Jews, strangers - wished him well on his journey to adulthood in the middle of the Black Rock Desert behind one of the most unique centers of spirituality in existence. In that moment, he was certainly the coolest 13-year-old kid I knew.

The Man

While The Temple exists as a spiritual space for the entire week until it burns on the last day of the event, The Man does not so much exist for spirituality during the week, but as a symbol of what is to come on Saturday night - the act that started Larry Harvey's Burning Man in the first place. While the Temple Burn is a somber event where everyone sits and quietly waits for the structure to fall, The Man is a loud spectacle, with Burners chanting and yelling to "Burn the fucker down," or "Burn him!" in a strange, almost animalistic ruckus.

I watched The Man Burn in the freezing cold next to Gabe, who had also never seen it burn before. I huddled - a large green trench coat I had found in the boudoir around me - when sudden fireworks burst from The Man and his arms raised to the sky. The crowd really went crazy. Then, his head was on fire, and there was an explosion as he became not much more than

the wire frame holding him together surrounded by flames. When he finally fell to the ground, it was true anarchy as Burners screeched and hollered. We were eventually welcomed by the firemen guarding the platform to step closer, which was necessary to warm ourselves from the cold. There were barefoot Burners running through the field of flames that was once The Man. There were couples on the ground making love by the heat of the fire. Nothing here was off limits.

Conclusions and Recommendations

I had but one last research question to answer. I had seen what it looked and felt like to *do* Jewish at Burning Man, I had found spiritual awakening on the playa, and I had learned about others' spiritual experiences. But there are interesting things that happen when you try to ask someone in the middle of their Burn, most likely surrounded by a torrential dust storm, if they have any ideas on what the organized Jewish community can take away from something like Burning Man or their theme camp. In some ways, Burning Man is the perfect place to ponder life's big questions, a "big, beautiful question" one interviewee even told me upon being asked, but at the same time Burners are trying to escape difficult default world things like organizational structure or the fundamental question of *who is a Jew.* I, after all, had come to shed my disappointing days in the entertainment industry, and yet had come seeking the answers on how to fix another industry altogether - the Jewish nonprofit world. But against the odds, the Honeys helped me piece together what I think all of this could mean for Jewish life.

Milk + Honey as Valuable for Jewish Millennial Identity and Spirituality

There are countless reasons that young Jews turn away from mainstream Judaism, especially in a world where one's Jewish identity is one among many facets of themselves. This is one of the key findings in Reboot's 2006 study on Jewish identity and community: that Jewish American millennials are not as tied to group cohesion and are not facing the same kinds of oppression as previous generations. Many young Jews push their Jewish identity aside or do not find it very important. These findings combined with the trend mentioned in the background section of millennials more broadly feeling less religious make it less likely for young Jews to

involve themselves with mainstream Jewish life. For these purposes, I define "mainstream" as affiliated with traditional models of Jewish organizations, such as synagogues, Federations, and Jewish community centers, as opposed to non-establishment organizations, like the ones featured in the JOFEE Report mentioned earlier. A non-establishment organization tries to connect someone to Jewish life through a specific lens, such as social justice, environmentalism, or popular culture. Organizations in agreement with this definition include Bend the Arc, the Adamah Fellowship, and Reboot.

While it is not a typical year-round organization, I conclude that the Milk + Honey camp could be considered a non-establishment Jewish experience in that it holds the potential to connect a millennial to Jewish life through the lens of Burning Man. The festival as an annual experience also falls in line with Cohen and Kelman's 2005 study which showed that millennials favor episodic experiences over membership models. What if a "high holy days Jew," or one who pleases their parents by finding a free 20s and 30s ticket to a local synagogue once or twice a year, became a "Burning Man Jew," instead making an annual pilgrimage to the playa to do something Jewish? While Burning Man is no easy feat and certainly not free, Milk + Honey has already accidentally impacted young lapsed Jews just with the theme of their camp at the Burn. If such Jews want to take the connections a step further, there are plenty of desert-dwelling parallels to make, Sukkot connections such as the ones Heartspace has written about, and Jewish rituals that can happen with the right activation energy on the playa.

If an unaffiliated millennial Jew is seeking a Jewish-flavored form of spirituality, Milk + Honey also sets the stage to explore that through Shabbat. When I talked to Jedi, she very much saw the Milk + Honey Shabbat as an alternative spiritual Jewish experience, unknowingly using

the buzzword "innovative," which Jewish professionals often use to describe non-establishment experiences:

> From the perspective of just Judaism or for Jewish continuity, it's an innovative experience that is reaching a whole new audience that is maybe not reached or doesn't connect to spirituality off the playa. So there is an importance or value both from the perspective of Burning Man that is unique and from the perspective of Judaism and the renaissance of Jewish spirituality in that it's an innovation. It's an innovative context of which to celebrate Shabbat and experience Jewish spirituality.

Heartspace, an employee of the JCC in Berkeley, agreed that Milk + Honey Shabbat has the possibility to inspire future off-playa Jewish engagement:

> What happens is, if you don't have anything for [the young people], they just don't engage. So the people who do engage are the hardcore more traditional conservative people and everyone else just filters away, finding things they like. So you'll get a lot of people to this Shabbat who otherwise don't do anything Jewish, but it's like oh there's a little touch and maybe that generates something down the road, who knows.

There are many new Jewish spiritual communities that have popped up in the last decade that are inspiring young Jews every day to think more about their Jewish identity and spirituality. Many of these, such as The Kitchen in San Francisco or Ikar in Los Angeles, are not affiliated with a denomination, and Reboot's study confirms that denominational identification is uncommon with millennials. As these unaffiliated spiritual communities emerge and change lives by reigniting passion for Jewish spirituality, I think that Milk + Honey has the ability to do the same due to its unique Shabbat setting at Burning Man. However, on an even larger scale, Burning Man itself is an important landmark to visit for any spirituality seeker.

Burning Man as Spiritual Hub

As with any Friday night service I have attended, part of me really wanted to feel something different about Judaism as a spiritual practice during Milk + Honey's Kabbalat Shabbat. As stated above, I think it has tremendous potential to reconnect a lapsed Jew to seek

more Jewish spiritual content after the playa, and even inspire non-Jews to learn more about Jewish spirituality. But I would be lying to myself if I said that Kabbalat Shabbat was the most spiritual part of my Burn. This might have been due to the fact that I tried to capture it on film for this project. Still, while Milk + Honey as a camp fosters Jewish community and identity, as well as spirituality for many, I found myself at my most spiritual while wandering the playa alone in a meditative state, watching the sun rise, and visiting the Temple.

My experience, the testimonies of my interviewees, and Lee Gilmore's previous research on Burning Man confirm not only that the event is a natural hub for spirituality seekers, but also that it can be important for Jewish seekers to add to their spiritual identities through non-Jewish experiences. In the default world we see this when Jews interweave Buddhism, yoga, or recently mindfulness into their overall spiritual practice. It then makes sense to blend Jewish identity with a Burner spirituality since we have seen the festival draw many parallels to organized religion. Somewhat ironically, my journey around the playa in solitude can be connected to the Jewish meditative practice of *hitbodedut*, but silence and solitude are also part of many other spiritual traditions, such as silent meditation retreats which might include walking.

Despite its name, the Temple is a unique experience in that it is such a spiritual but secular space. People can impose religion on it if they wish, but it is not built with ties to any religion. Therefore, for a Jew who identifies more with spirituality than religion, it can be the ultimate spiritual landmark. It certainly was for me, and I would encourage any spiritual person, especially those who have previously identified with a western religion, to seek The Temple out for release in their life. The Temple has done more for me than any synagogue on Yom Kippur, any chanting of the Mourner's Kaddish, and any Passover Seder.

No Tent Jewish Community

So the Milk + Honey camp at Burning Man seems to qualify as a non-establishment Jewish experience with the potential to reignite a Jewish flame in a millennial, but there is an even bigger takeaway here than inspiring Jews to re-engage. Milk + Honey takes this one step further by opening their tent, literally and figuratively, as wide as possible to the point of having no tent at all. I argue that Milk + Honey is a Jewish non-establishment entity that invites everyone to *do* Jewish without *being* 100% Jewish at its core. While there are plenty of Jewish organizations that accept and welcome non-Jews, I do not know how many of those organizations would describe themselves with such a fluid Jew-*ish* identity as Milk + Honey's, and as we have seen, even some Honeys themselves would not describe the camp as Jewish altogether.

Jewish organizations that outreach to non-Jews typically fall under three different categories: interfaith dialogue groups, usually founded by members of multiple religions, organizations founded by Jews for interfaith families, and Jewish museums which tell the Jewish story to broader audiences. Milk + Honey, however, is a group founded by both Jews and non-Jews using Jewish values and practices to create a blended community and provide a welcoming Shabbat experience for any participant at Burning Man. There are no goals to provide communal dialogue or resources for interfaith families, but only to share some Jewish practices with any who might be interested in bonding with the community - whether one is living with the camp for seven days or only spending one night at Kabbalat Shabbat.

Jewish organizations talk about opening the tent to non-Jews, such as the Union for Reform Judaism's and many synagogues' Judaism 101 or conversion classes available for non-Jews. The URJ's recent call for "audacious hospitality" could sound synonymous to the Burning

Man principle of radical inclusion but focuses only on inviting lapsed Jews into a Jewish tent: "audacious hospitality is the URJ's effort to engage seekers - Jews who are unaffiliated, under-engaged, and in some cases uninspired - in the sacred work of creating a world of wholeness, compassion, and justice." "Big Tent Judaism" is an organization with its own ten principles dedicated to welcoming "everyone interested in finding Jewish community, including those from intermarried households, the unaffiliated, and underserved populations."

However, all of these initiatives come from a place of Jews wanting to welcome primarily non-Jewish partners and interfaith families into the awesome Jewish tent. None of them specifically state their openness to welcoming non-Jews who are not seeking conversion or do not have children with a Jewish partner. But what happens when the tent is founded by Jews and non-Jews together, like Milk + Honey? Then there is no "Jewish tent." It is everyone's tent and no tent at all, a *partially* Jewish community doing some Jewish stuff but with absolutely no limiting walls. Milk + Honey is physically set up this way as well. The camp provides a wall-less shade structure overhead where members place their individual tents underneath, each tent sheltered by a Jew-*ish* camp identity but containing its own identity with a culture and personality that is equally as important to share with the camp. With this model Milk + Honey creates what I will call a No-Tent Jewish Community.

Dharma brought this to my attention as we sat inside the Milk + Honey dome one night and looked around at everyone eating dinner. We were once again discussing the question of *who is a Jew,* but in terms of *is Milk + Honey a Jewish camp*? "And if this camp isn't Jewish, half the Jewish community isn't Jewish in 10, 20 years," he said. "Who are we kidding? This is what the Jewish community actually looks like. It looks like the people who are opting in." Perhaps Sam, the very first person I interviewed, said it best when he joked the most Jewish thing about him

was that he did not always identify as Jewish. Sam's identity crisis, *my* identity crisis, does not even matter at Milk + Honey on the playa. It does not cause the dissonance immediately felt in an establishment organization like a synagogue, that pit of your stomach feeling of *am I Jewish enough for this,* because the camp was founded by Jews and non-Jews together under the Burning Man principle of radical inclusion.

The Burning Man principle of radical inclusion and welcoming came up a lot when I asked the Honeys about what mainstream Jewish life could take away from our experience together. The first principle of radical inclusion as defined on the Burning Man website states: "Anyone may be a part of Burning Man. We welcome and respect the stranger. No prerequisites exist for participation in our community." Now imagine if that was written on the doors to every Jewish space. Milk + Honey is not audaciously *hospitable* to non-Jews, it radically *includes* non-Jews and invites them to try Jewish community because such is the framework under which it was created.

When anything goes and everyone is invited, that is when the magic happens. Frankly, radical inclusion is what keeps Burning Man going, and ironically is one of the most feared ideas by Jews operating under a survivalist agenda. If Dharma's words about Milk + Honey's community looking like the rest of the American Jewish community are true, then, from a survivalist's perspective, the American Jewish community dies. "We have to accept failure," Dharma went on over dinner, looking around at the Honeys eating in the dome, many stemming from one Jewish parent or no Jewish roots at all. Survivalism depends on Jews' ability to make other Jews, as if they are a product (Zelkowicz, 2013, pg. 22). But "failing" seems to be working out pretty well for Milk + Honey, which brings Jews and non-Jews together under a loose theme of Judaism, accepting that many Jews have assimilated into larger society. Co-founder Nathaniel

Lepp talks about accepting assimilation from the very beginnings of forming the camp with non-Jewish friends:

> A big part of the story is I think there's a lot to be explored in the challenge of practicing Judaism in an assimilated world and community. We have all these people who we love who are not Jewish and they don't know Hebrew and they don't know these songs and it doesn't make their heart tickle when they get sung and what do we do with that? But then there's this weird identity thing about it, where it's like no sorry, you have to be born this way. Or you can convert but it takes time, you have to go to school for six months.

On a more micro level with Milk + Honey, everyone is invited to do something Jewish, to identify with something that started with *some* Jewish roots. This radical inclusion practiced in their camp is a point of pride for the Honeys, and they were not shy about wanting to communicate this radical version of destroying the tent to the default organized Jewish community. Lotus told me about Shabbat:

> What can they learn from us? I'm just thinking about Shabbat and what it feels like. I think it can be spiritual for people who are not connected to Judaism. There's a spaciousness in this. But it's also a touchstone, like it's not *not* Jewish. There's definitely Hebrew, it's definitely Kabbalat Shabbat. So it doesn't sacrifice its Judaism at the expense of wanting to have other people in. And people do come who aren't Jewish because they're down because they're like 'oh, an intentional something on Friday night' or they had a nice connection with someone in camp.

Bambi touched on the camp's diversity being an important part of its identity as well:

> [Milk + Honey] is so explicitly a place for Jews and non-Jews, and that is something that we need to embrace, not just as a de facto but as something exciting. How can we create more spaces that are Jew-ish in a sense of content that use Jewish traditions and Jewish spiritual techniques but with audiences that are not per se all Jewish, that are 50/50, or who knows what. I think that's really important.

<u>Outcomes of No Tent Jewish Community</u>

As Gleam noted, Burning Man 2015 might have been a turning point of sorts for the camp, with more Jews acquiring referrals from both individuals involved in non-establishment

and establishment organizations like Wilderness Torah, Camp Tawonga, as well as Bay area Moishe Houses and JCCs. This brings positive outcomes from Milk + Honey's no-tent Jewish community, in that non-Jewish Honeys are being outreached to by the Honeys associated with such organizations via email and social media post-Burn and non-Jewish Honeys are more inclined to attend due to their Milk + Honey connections. These events include Wilderness Torah's Passover in the Desert and Moishe House Shabbat dinners. Specific Jewish Burners now involved in both worlds, the organized Jewish community and the Burner lifestyle, are inadvertently leading the charge in bringing No Tent Jewish community to the default world by inviting non-Jewish Honeys to their happenings.

While getting non-Jews to do more Jewish "stuff" is by no means a goal of Milk + Honey, their non-Jewish members are more inclined to see the friends they made at the Burn and not feel strange about going to such friends' organized Jewish activities, such as a Moishe House dinner. I believe this is a truly special result of Milk + Honey's No Tent makeup, in that after feeling so radically included at a Jew-*ish* camp, a non-Jewish friend would have no discomfort going to a dinner or a Seder that is so intentionally Jewish. Similarly, No Tent inspires non-Jews to get even more involved in the camp. The Sukkat Shalom 501(c)(3) currently has a non-Jewish president. Many non-Jews have been camp coordinators and leaders on the Committee of Awesomeness.

What other pit stops along a person's journey could be a breeding ground for making non-Jews feel comfortable in intimate community with other Jews and participating in Jewish practices? Milk + Honey is certainly playing an interesting role here as an intersection between a Jew-*ish* community and future non-Jewish involvement in default world Jewish organizations. Milk + Honey, then, is helping to take away the stigma for non-Jews to attend Jewish events in

the default world. While many Jewish organizations as described above *are* open to non-Jews attending their events, I believe that an environment like Milk + Honey makes that future involvement even easier, unintimidating, and even more inviting due to the connections built on the playa centered around radical inclusion.

Accepting of Fluid Organizational Identity

Interestingly, you might recall that Milk + Honey, formerly Sukkat Shalom, was created as a place for its founders to have a home at Burning Man for default world Moishe House residents as well as Jewish and non-Jewish friends from Brown University. Here you have a Jewish institution and a secular institution coming together to create something entirely different altogether. As the community grew larger even beyond those networks, cultures were shared, and more Honeys became initiated as family. As we have seen, these institutions led to a new kind of institution at Burning Man, which could then incidentally funnel all kinds of folks into intentional Jewish organizations.

What such Jewish organizations in the default world might take away from Milk + Honey on top of that is the acceptance of change. Milk + Honey was no longer Sukkat Shalom anymore. The name did not communicate the correct picture of their camp to the world. While the camp avoided making changes for many years, they finally faced the reality that identity can be fluid - it is okay to change. They are now well aware of their identity and know what will work and what will not (providing more Jewish day-to-day content, for example, is not part of their identity). Jewish organizations, especially older ones, should have the courage to look at their work and their constituency and see where they could improve. It might even be their name.

Does their name actually describe who they say they are? Does it turn people away? They might not need to change their name, but having a moderated discussion as Milk + Honey did could bring up improvements for their brand and make more folks feel welcome.

I would also like to encourage Jewish organizations to try what Milk + Honey does well - social bridging. Many of these organizations are terrific at social *bonding*, which is providing programmatic space and outreach to their own community, even those marginalized within the community such as LGBTQ Jews and Jews of Color. Social bridging, on the other hand, involves providing such space and outreach to those who are radically different from you (Putnam, 2000). Some Jewish institutions are masters at this, such as NewGround: a Muslim-Jewish Partnership for Change, or the Skirball Cultural Center which brings different communities together through world music concerts and events. Even most JCCs are widely accessible and enjoyed by non-Jews by offering recreational activities.

But as Milk + Honey has done, I would like to see other, especially establishment Jewish organizations network with their non-Jewish friends to bring down the tent, even for just a moment. After all, beautiful things can happen when walls are broken down. Every year, the Burning Man statue and The Temple are built, burnt to the ground, and rise up again as something totally new but with a thread of tradition. Burning something down does not have to be failure. In fire there can be rebirth. So I challenge Jewish organizations to try tearing down the tent: "Anyone may be a part of _____. We welcome and respect the stranger. No prerequisites exist for participation in our community."

After the Temple burned on Sunday night, I spent the last few hours with the friends I had made walking around the remains of Black Rock City. It was a different place now, as many

Burners had left after The Man burnt down to avoid traffic. I had heard the horror stories about what Burners called Exodus, where 70,000 people try to exit the city at once, crawling in their cars for hours. Many camps, including most of Milk + Honey, had been disassembled and packed back up in trailers. Many of the remaining Honeys slept in the cuddle cave that night, having already packed up our tents. At 3AM, I crawled out of the cave and met up with a Honey named G, who had offered me a ride to the airport. His car radio told us that the Exodus wait time was at 3 hours - a miracle compared to the estimated 8 hour wait earlier in the night. I tried to shake as much dust off of myself before getting into the vehicle. Miraculously, it took us only an hour and a half to make it back to the Reno airport, where I would sit for the next 12 hours and wait for my flight. I tried to wash some of the dust out of my hair and off of my clothes in the airport sink, but I eventually gave up. When I passed another dusty Burner waiting for their flight in the terminal, we immediately spoke the same language. We were proud of the dust on our skin.

Now, several months later, my adventure seems far away, almost like a dream. I have told many people that for me Black Rock City really does feel like you have set foot on another planet, something that does not exist on that level anywhere else. I am not sure when I will be back, but I know it will be soon, and I will be at Milk + Honey Shabbat on Friday night. I will walk the playa alone, and watch the sunrise. I will cry and laugh and hold space for strangers at The Temple. I will take my loved ones from the default world into the dust, and I will hug them and say, “welcome home.”

References

Bennett, R. Potts, E. Levin, R. Abramson, S. (2006). *Grande Soy Vanilla Latte with Cinnamon, No Foam… Jewish Identity and Community in a Time of Unlimited Choices.* Reboot. April 2006. http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=329

Chen, K. (2009). *Enabling Creative Chaos: The Organization Behind the Burning Man Event*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Cohen, S. & Kelman, A. (2005). *Cultural Events and Jewish Identities: Young Adult Jews in New York*. UJA-Federation of New York. February 2005: http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=2911

Diner, H. (2004). *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gilmore, L. (2010). *Theater in a Crowded Fire: Ritual and Spirituality at Burning Man*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Hazon. (2014). *Seeds of Opportunity: A National Study of Immersive Jewish Outdoor, Food, and Environmental Education (JOFEE)*. Hazon, Informing Change. http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=19447

Heller, S.M., Beaulieu-Prévost, D., McRae, K, Nelson-Gal, D., and the 2013 Census Lab. (2014). *2013 Black Rock City Census: Weighted results report.* Black Rock City Census. Copyright © 2014 Heller et al.

Lipka, M. (2015, May 12). Millennials increasingly are driving growth of 'nones.' Retrieved from http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/12/millennials-increasingly-are-driving-growth-of-nones/

Orshan Kahn, S. (2011). *Igniting Souls: Creating Meaningful Communal Worship Through Spiritual Experimentation*. HUC-JIR School of Jewish Nonprofit

Management (formerly School of Jewish Communal Service) Masters Theses. Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR). http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=11925

Putnam, R.D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Soni, V., PhD. (2015, October 29). [Personal interview].

Zelkowicz, T. (2013). *Beyond a Humpty Dumpty Narrative: In Search of a New Rhymes and Reasons in the Research of Contemporary Jewish Identity Formation*. *International Journal of Jewish Education Research.* 21-46. http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=21247