



The Surprising Filmmaker Behind Hasidic Women Intimacy Documentary

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Last week I posted an excerpt from the new, awesome documentary “[Shekinah: The Intimate Life of Hasidic Women](#).” I assumed the film’s director was a Hasidic woman, most likely a baalat teshuva with a background in film. So I was pretty shocked when I came across this– the opening minute of “Shekinah,” featuring the film’s director, two-time Academy-Award nominee and liberal Jew Abbey Neidik:

How did the idea for Shekinah come about?

My old assistant Monika Lightstone [CJW: who is the executive producer of Shekinah] moved to Hollywood and worked on some film projects. Then she got divorced and hit some hard times. The Hasidim really helped her out. She has long been interested in different spiritual ideas, and then decided to become a Hasid herself. I asked her if she felt that this was all a bit of a throwback to prefeminist days, and she said that in fact she felt more liberated than her secular sisters. That really hit me. I realized that I had grown up with a stereotype of them, even though I grew up in a kosher home. Even though I knew a bit of their culture I was still relying primarily on stereotypes in my perception of them. And that’s always a strong reason to pursue a documentary project.

What was the biggest revelation for you, as you were interviewing subjects for the film?

Making love on Shabbat [the Sabbath, a Jewish day of prayer] is almost mandatory. It’s considered a blessing... They see sex as a holy act because it’s connected to procreation. In Judaism, God is a creator. Everything is creation. Lovemaking is the very act of creation.

Neidik told Janice Arnold of the Canadian Jewish News:

“Behind the rigid, drab exterior that the Chassidic people present to the world, there exists a vibrant, passionate sensuality that seems more liberating and fulfilling than that of the secular world I come from...”

“They say that, most of the time, we are unaware of our transcendental identity and that in marriage and lovemaking, it is possible to become aware of the spiritual...”

“In our materialistic, consumer-driven world, I believe we all need a little more of this kind of soul.”