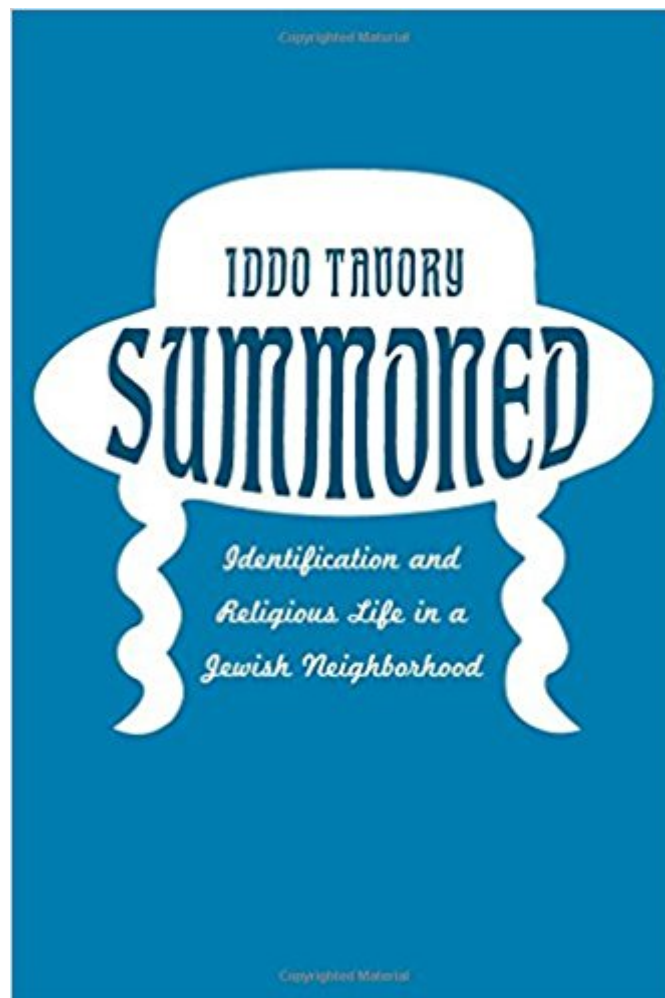




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Summoned: Identification And Religious Life In A Jewish Neighborhood



Synopsis

On a typical weekday, men of the Beverly-La Brea Orthodox community wake up early, beginning their day with Talmud reading and prayer at 5:45am, before joining Los Angeles's traffic. Those who work "Jewish jobs" — teachers, kosher supervisors, or rabbis — will stay enmeshed in the Orthodox world throughout the workday. But even for the majority of men who spend their days in the world of gentiles, religious life constantly reasserts itself. Neighborhood fixtures like Jewish schools and synagogues are always after more involvement; evening classes and prayers pull them in; the streets themselves seem to remind them of who they are. And so the week goes, culminating as the sabbatical observances on Friday afternoon stretch into Saturday evening. Life in this community, as Iddo Tavory describes it, is palpably thick with the twin pulls of observance and sociality. In *Summoned*, Tavory takes readers to the heart of the exhilarating — at times exhausting — life of the Beverly-La Brea Orthodox community. Just blocks from West Hollywood's nightlife, the Orthodox community thrives next to the impure sights, sounds, and smells they encounter every day. But to sustain this life, as Tavory shows, is not simply a moral decision they make. To be Orthodox is to be constantly called into being. People are reminded of who they are as they are called upon by organizations, prayer quorums, the nods of strangers, whiffs of unkosher food floating through the street, or the rarer Anti-Semitic remarks. Again and again, they find themselves summoned both into social life and into their identity as Orthodox Jews. At the close of Tavory's fascinating ethnography, we come away with a better understanding of the dynamics of social worlds, identity, interaction and self — not only in Beverly-La Brea, but in society at large.

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Customer Reviews

“Tavory’s carefully observed and insightful book *Summoned* [is] a rich ethnographic portrait of Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jews living today in the Beverly-La Brea neighborhood. . . . Tavory’s broader point is that religious communities actually, all communities maintain themselves not just by teaching new members norms and values, but also by filling people’s daily lives with situations that end up activating and reinforcing their self-conceptions. If you’re a sociologist or anthropologist, this is interesting. . . . Readers who are neither will likely be more intrigued by other features of Orthodox life Tavory describes. (First Things) “While cultivating the concept of summoning through the investigation of Orthodox Jews, Tavory demonstrates its broader applicability through use in multiple contexts. *Summoned* is superbly written and offers valuable insights into a broad range of subjects of sociological interest, including the practice of fieldwork, the evolution of Jewish life, the social history of Los Angeles, and the enduring value of Erving Goffman’s theorizing. Valuable for readers interested in ethnographic research, Jewish and religious studies, urban communities, and ethnicity. Highly recommended. (Choice) “*Summoned* is an engaging and immersive account of the thick activity in Los Angeles’s Orthodox Jewish community, Beverly La Brea. The book offers a Mariana Trench-level dive into the meanings derived from interactions, myths, and gossip that energize the everyday actions of the devout. The book will generate good ideas and fresh debate for some time. . . . Summoning serves as the pivot upon which Tavory gingerly unspools the visible and invisible facets of Jewish life. . . . In a particularly illustrative section, Tavory reveals Beverly La Brea’s moral obstacle course, showing how the devout remap their paths on the Sabbath (e.g., avoiding push-button crosswalks) and their daily efforts to navigate the more impious aspects of Los Angeles life. Reminiscent of the very best of ethnographic observations, wherein our unseen politics, cultural tastes, senses of self, and romantic inclinations all manifest themselves into observable phenomena, Tavory shows how summoning is an infusion of moral commitment into practice and interactions. (American Journal of Sociology) “*Summoned* tremendously sharpens our understanding of what identity, self, social interaction, and culture really mean. Tavory broadens and enriches our understanding of social life and its actors; how other individuals, communities, and worldviews all intersect and

combine to shape our lives, in ways both subtle and far-reaching. This book is fascinating and highly original. A superb ethnography. (William Helmreich, author of *The World of the Yeshiva*)

“Summoned” is an imaginative study of an urban neighborhood occupied by a sectarian Jewish community which makes great demands on its members, and manages to organize—in a setting not especially conducive to such an effort—a full social and religious life. Though the imageries of Orthodoxy and celebrity are quite different—a religious landscape of redemption on the one hand, and that of tabloids, bikinis and television shows on the other—Tavory demonstrates how they both occupy social worlds in which their identification is both invoked and made meaningful. He makes a compelling and interesting theoretical case based on extensive and comprehensive research. (Howard S. Becker, author of *What About Mozart? What About Murder?*)

“This finely observed, beautifully crafted ethnography takes the reader into the intricate life of an ultra-Orthodox Jewish community thriving in ultra-secular Los Angeles. At once witty and deeply serious, *Summoned* describes the moral obstacle course religious Jews face as they navigate the neighborhood, the identities and commitments evoked in everyday interactions, and the exquisite judgment required to enact religious obligations. At a deeper level, *Summoned* offers a new way of thinking about the interconnections among situations and anticipated situations that determine the density of summoning to which we are all subject. Masquerading as a study of an exotic sect in a lively urban neighborhood, Tavory’s analysis of how ultra-Orthodox Jews are summoned—grabbed by the world around them and reminded of who they are and what they are supposed to be doing—turns out to be not only about these fascinating groups and their strange ways, but about all of us.” (Ann Swidler, author of *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters*)

Iddo Tavory is assistant professor of sociology at New York University. He is coauthor of *Abductive Analysis: Theorizing Qualitative Research*, also published by the University of Chicago Press.

The book was well-written and informative, with a mildly amusing casual commentary by the author that added some levity to what sometimes could be rather dry anthropology academic jargon. My only critique is that 1. I thought the author should have fleshed out further the hashkafic [what he called 'sub-affiliations'] differences inside the Beverly-La Brea frum community (i.e. more into Ashkenazi v. Sephardic, Modern v. Yeshivish, Yeshivish v. Chassidic, etc.), 2. I felt the ending was

anticlimax and gave the impression of 'more research needs to be done' rather than giving a concrete conclusion, and 3. I wish the author had contrasted La Brea with the Pico-Robertson frum community, but understand that may not have been feasible in his position. I liked it, however, and I recommend it strongly for those who want to learn about the Orthodox Jewish world, particularly its more right-wing L.A. neighborhood (in contrast to the frum neighborhood in Pico-Robertson, considered more Modern).

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