#176: How to Build a Values-Driven Fashion Brand as a Jewish Mom with Aja Cohen

FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

With Your Host
Debbie Sassen

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You're listening to the Jewish
Entrepreneur Podcast with DEBBIE SASSEN
episode No. 170. Something

Okay so now we're gonna jump in
Hello Asia welcome to the podcast,
I'm so excited for you to speak with my audience
for them to hear about all of your journeys to Judaism
and activewear and welcome.

Thank you so much for having me.
I'm really excited to be here
I think we can probably speak for two hours
but let's start this episode.
Because you and I have spoken a lot before we hit the record button
let's talk about.

I think it's important for the audience to know a little bit about your journey from being Italian Catholic to Judaism because that has so much influence. How you decided to build your business.

So just give us the highlights of that journey that's a hard one to do
but I'm going to attempt to keep it short. I am from New Jersey I come from a large Italian Catholic family in New Jersey, and we did not grow up so observant but very tied to our Italian heritage. And alsoI look at New Jersey as a heritage as well.

I moved to Brooklyn to attend Pratt Institute for Fashion Design and when I went to Pratt
my dad had said it would be really nice for you to start going to church.

He felt probably scared sending his daughter off to
a huge city and not having any sort of grounding and I said no problem and I went it shortly fizzled out.

I met someone. I met my first serious boyfriend and he was Israeli and Jewish.
And I honestly had no idea what Israeli really meant, I knew obviously what Judaism was,
and I knew I had a ton of Jewish friends and then he said,I can't marry you because you're not Jewish. And I said okay great, I'm 19 and then all of a sudden I started learning about Judaism I fell in love with it I fell out of love with him. And I went on to pursue a conservative conversion first and then later on an Orthodox conversion.

I met my husband at school on a young kipper
and then I was conservative.

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I finished a conservative conversion at the point and then,
I decided to do an Orthodox conversion
when I felt like he was the one and we did.
And we started keeping Shabbos together and I would like to call it intentional Judaism together
and we have kids thank God and then we move back from Brooklyn.
We moved back to New Jersey. And now I'm living in New Jersey, running a modest athleisure
brand in a very short little announcement.

It's like you and I spoke about this before we got onto the episode.
Was really your journey to Judaism
Was it easy?

It's really kind of that Cinderella story right like happily ever after I mean listen
I've been married for a few years a little bit more than you
so you know happily ever after has its challenges along the way,
But we were talking about how the conversion was so much
easier than building a business
it definitely was.

I think even when you tell people you converted two times
and they think sometimes they're like is you know was one you know
a hop skipping a jump and the other one was maybe longer
or both of them were kind of short because you did too.

I'm like no they were actually
you know a year and maybe more for each single one
and they think well it's like
almost like going to get your associates degree
or going back to college and then running a business
like I got my masters and my PhD and my this just never ending
learning and feeling like you're getting ahead
and then feeling like you're a few steps behind
and then moving forward and then coming kind of back.

I think I would say that business is like that in general
because you master a certain level like you created your first. I don't know if it was a skirt
or if it was leggings or something like that and you're like, Now I know how to do this, now I have
to do tops and bottoms and now I have to do dresses
and so on for everything. There's like the thing that you master
and then there's the next stage and then there's new materials and then there's you know
all the different ways.

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But did you have a business before the athletic wear
or this was like the first like
the baby thing that you really wanted
and you grew from this or did you have a practice business.
So I got my degree and I have a BFA in fashion design
so right after college. I got my first job and worked in a you know when you work in corporate fashion they put you into these small boxes of you're designing this one particular category.
So I designed woman's wovens woven shirts,woven bottoms and denim and a large mall retailer and it was my first job out of college.
I was 22 or 23 years old my parents said
you know we're not paying for anything by the end of the summer
so you better get yourself a job.And I said well okay this job was offered to me.

I guess I'm taking this job with a great learning curve. I think it's difficult to go from being out super creative in an art school environment to working in corporate America.
I also have been traveling that whole summer feeling also like I just was out spreading my wings and I'm in this little cube. I don't have any room to grow here you know physically and mentally and what am I doing. I think just like any kind of a thought that came to me which is a comparison to owning my own business, Is that I feel like I can really spread my wings.
I'm not in this little box of that little cube you know quote unquote cubes so to speak
where I can try this and I can do this and I can do that and it just felt very freeing.

Sometimes it can feel a little caged in in other ways but I do think that
Running a business feels a little bit more like creative freedom so I worked in corporate fashion for I would say 10 to 12 years and then I started having children.
Once I started having kids you know they don't really tell you in fashion ,I'd like to kind of share this in general with other friends of mine
we're all women in this program pretty much and we all
you know we had a dream since we were little kids to
become a fashion singer.

I had that epiphany in middle school when I was learning how to sew
and they don't tell you that we're all women we're entering this workforce
we're entering this woman and this industry with all these other women.
Things might want happen things might come up you might wanna get married
you might wanna have a kid you might have a lifestyle to compliment those things
Just natural life you know, life occurrences. It was kind of crazy to me to think that we're all women in this whole program and we never discuss that. And I have some friends and fashion that I'm actually like one of the only ones that still works in fashion,because they also realized how am I supposed to have a business.I supposed to have this career where I'm being told to just keep climbing and climbing and then I might wanna have a kid and I might wanna get married and I might wanna do something and now everyone's like a platys teacher.

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That it's actually really fascinating because I always knew growing up.
I didn't grow up in religious so I didn't grow up orthodoxy group reform

so I knew somewhere in my mind that I wanted to have a large familY
and here I was working on Wall Street.

Probably not far from where you were when you were working in New York right?
And it occurred to me within a very short time that this was not gonna be the life that I was gonna live cause I wanted to have a family and I was the one I was listen
I was the newest one on the trading floor when it was the 24th of December.
I was the one who was taking the men's children to the Xerox machine
if anybody still remembers what a Xerox machine is
and xeroxing their hands like they brought their kids to work
so their wives could be preparing the Christmas dinner party whatever it was decorating the tree and I'm entertaining the kids and I loved it, but it was so clear to me that working 15 hours a day or 18 hours a day or whatever it was this was not gonna be the life for me while I was in New York.

By the way after my first year at Goldman Sachs where I worked I looked for a synagogue and I found myself roasted a conservative synagogue after growing up and then like learning etc. And then I ultimately ended up at Lincoln Square in Manhattan and from there ended up in well. I got transferred to London and then ended up in Israel,where I've been for the last 37 years but interestingly we are out there and you're working and all of a sudden
you want more connection with your roots and spirituality and not just work work
work around the clock. And family starts you know becoming an an important part of your life
so that's kind of what started to happen.

I want we had our first child and I decided to switch from working in corporate fashion to
still in corporate but I worked for a bunch of Syrian families
who own licensed fashion brands. You know that time I was working for Sears designing for the Sears line and we always you know we couldn't design the entire collection we outsourced to these other little licensed brands these Syrian companies and I would go to the meetings and think to myself. Who are these people? How do I get a job here? I would like to keep a job if I could. I could maybe do this. I could still work and be in design but I could you know I can be understood a little bit more. Because at the time when I was working in corporate that's when my husband's name was Evan he also was working in corporate fashion and we had to say sorry.

Now I'm starting to keep this thing called Shabbat I can't work after a certain time it's very awkward to say that when you're a regular persons and not they know you one thing and then

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all of a sudden you say oh no no sorry to my VP like is this holiday called suckers where we sit in the hut and I'm leaving now and she's like no no you have one more. I'm like no I'm leaving like right it sounds like I'm speaking Chinese you know and it's funny now.It was really challenging and you feel like an outsider so I decided well I'm gonna go after this I'm gonna switch from working in mainstream corporate I'm gonna go work for these different Syrian companies and it's gonna be great and when I start I'm gonna say sorry I can't work on Fridays.
Because now I have a baby and I keep Shabbos I can't do that so it was a big deal also to stand up for yourself as a woman which I know you know this I only work four days like this is the product that you're gonna get it's gonna be amazing I'm gonna be awesome but I don't do Friday and it was a big deal cause I had a non Jewish woman boss at the Jewish company, She like that's a big deal to tell another woman no I'm not and I really stood up for myself. I believed what I was doing was right and I knew that what I was offering was amazing but I didn't want to. I don't wanna overstep. I wanted to stand my ground and say this is important and I wanna take my daughter to swim lessons like she was like 6 months old and we went to like swim in the middle of the winter so fun like come on good for you wait a second.

I wanna ask you a question for clarification
because you were working for a Jewish company
and you mentioned Syrians and I know like whether it's in New Jersey deal whatever there's a large Syrian community was this a Jewish owned company that you were working for and were they keeping Shabbos and but this non Jewish woman right?

Cause I'm trying to put the pieces together of your journey fashion in New York
There's a lot of like Brooklyn families and Syrian families that have these really successful huge businesses so most of the time at least in my experience.I don't wanna speak for everybody or you know say anything were always closed for Dante. Friday I'm not sure what time they close because I left at a certain time but I didn't actually work on Fridays, so I wasn't there but whether some people stayed after a certain hour but I know that everyone else you know I've seen the Jews left but yeah it was like a shop subservient office which was really nice. I got really really nice and all of the non Jews went on fabulous trips during September.They went to visit their family in Korea for like a month and they only had to take five days off of work like it was really amazing.

They probably loved it but did they have to work on like December 25th or they also got that off holiday?
Okay they got the best of both worlds so at what point did you decide that you're gonna build your own thing rather than working for somebody else.

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Before I had my second child my son .I'm very active an active person I have been practicing yoga since high school I am a runner, I decided that I wanted to do a yoga teacher training so this is like I'm like so tied to my Judaism it'S like so amazing so I decideI tell my husband I'm gonna go and get my 200 hour teacher training program and I originally wanted to go to India obviously like every other yogi and sit in India for six weeks and have fun and be enlightened and all this stuff but of course I'm a mom now. I'm pregnant with my second kid I live in Brooklyn I keep Shabbos I also have a career I can't go and just leave and do those things I found a firm woman's yoga training program in Crown Heights okay and I did my 200 hour teacher training through this Jewish program.

Which was amazing and then that was like the the next step I said I know I'm a yoga teacher and now I'm gonna start teaching some yoga. It was kind of that was my first you know intro into my side hustle that's still my business actually. It's developed into transcendent. It's developed my yoga business. Everything and I got my teacher training so maybe
you know one job one Syrian job ended another Syrian job happens I
you know I went from another company to another company
and then we moved to New Jersey. And I decided to get my children's yoga certificate for a 95 hour program. I was at another like Jewish run program where I live and then I really loved teaching kids yoga and the woman who ran the program is my friend and she got me a job teaching at the JEC. It's called the Jewish and I guess Jewish Education Center in Elizabeth Maria the JC and I got a job teaching yoga there. For the whole school year like a full time like all day on Thursday.

I was pregnant I needed a new job in fashion not very pregnant I did wasn't showing but I was five months pregnant and I went into another Syrian company and I said
I can do this job and I want to do it three days a week. Because now I teach
yoga on Thursdays and I keep Shabbos and I didn't tell them I was pregnant.I got the job few months later then my belly started really growing I said by the way I'm pregnant
you have a lot of Hotspur and I really valued also teaching yoga and I knew that this was a good job. But it wasn't a dream it was just the job you know people take jobs me included just it was the job that I was good at for the moment. And I do believe that every job leads to another job cause I've taken a lot of not so great jobs and that job really worked out great in the end.

So I started teaching at the JEC and when I went there to interviewI wasn't so modest. I was observant but Modern Orthodox also in the neck and where I live it means a lot of it can mean a lot of things . My first question was I love this, I really want this job, what do I have to wear here and I started to kinda get a little stressed out about it like my gosh what am I gonna wear now.

I'm teaching at this very from school and I my whole career I designed active wear
but it's leggings, it's short, it's sports bras, it's tanks and that's everything that I was wearing at the time. She said no problem, don't worry just come here and you know beat me. I knew obviously everything about this because of leading an observant line.

and she said just make sure you come in to see us and when you teach the class of the kids you can wear leggings. I thought they were very progressive actually so you can wear leggings you can wear a tank top the the door we taped it with black paper and it's all women teachers on These are like kids up until age 5. It's totally fine. I said cool to do that but then every Thursday before getting ready to go to my yoga teaching job.I never knew what to wear and I'm like looking like a crazy person and putting this thing on. And this thing on five layers and this sweater over this tank dress and all of these different things over leggings and then when I got there I'd robes and had on my regular outfit and I started to kind of think well this is ridiculous like there's gotta be something else that.

I can wear to feel comfortable and cute myself then still go about my day there there has to be but I didn't know and it wasn't it wasn't in the brands that I was shopping at the time in activewear like a Lululemon or an Athleta or anything and it just is like the beginning kind of ideas like sort of percolating and I had another child I have three kids thank God. And I went back to the same job that I was working you know my three days a week after my maternity leave it really started to feel like a very dead end position what am I doing here now I have three kids I'm shopping all the way to the city to do this like this is what I wanna do with my life and all of a sudden it's very typical of fashion and this has happened to me before a few months after being back at work from maternity leave they called me into the office and we have a nice relationship. Everyone we'reI'm still friends with these people and they said sorry we don't have the budget anymore you know kind of like you're too expensive we can get this young girl here that's gonna work all these hours you're done and I had been pumping at work and the bed like. I was gosh I'm rapidly pumping for only 10 minutes because I gotta get back to my desk to design more you know more things and I go into the bathroom and I just like I remember staring in the mirror this is not even that long ago.

And I I'm just laughing like this is so funny her sound like of course this is happening to me of course because it happened before the first time that happened. I was young and it scared you know the living daylights out of me and you know you feel like a failure for getting let go and I just thought this is gonna be great like great thank you please thank you for doing this thank you for the motivation I have to say like I pumped like I have 8 kids thank God so I left my government job and this is the difference because I was a tenured employee they couldn't let go of me. I pumped at work for seven kids, my first four I pumped in the bathroom.

I finally got my own office so I could lock the door but it's always like you know it the right time I gonna get a let down and then I'm gonna miss it it's very challenging as a working mom so really hats off to all the working moms who are listening to this episode and they're pumping and then listen when. I opened up my own business with my eighth baby. I was still pumping cause I sent him out I wasn't gonna be one of these working moms who was working from home

and taking care of my baby and not taking up time and using it to invest in my business like that's something that slows women down. I'm not saying you shouldn't do it but I made it made a lot of sense that I continued working during daytime hours I think the hardest job that I've had a million jobs by now is having kids and running your family and making sure you're safe, smart and healthy. And I am not someone who can do that job full time that's not I'm fully capable of. I wanted to be more with my family, but I didn't want to be like you just said I don't want my kid right here next to me while I'm and sometimes they are after school cause now they're a little older and I it's just not the same focus and I'm not doing the same work so at least during the 9 to 5 hours or 9 to 3 sometimes you launched your business and it's almost like you're up almost up to your five year anniversary right that's my five year anniversary it feels like a huge every year feels huge every day feels kind of huge in 5 years. The thing that really inspired me for to start my business after I got let go from that position I saw that a friend that we used to design together at Sears She switched to become a career coach and she was also working in corporate. In that role and then she had a side hustle she was like a new mom as well and we said I rose to her right away and we weren't so close, but something came out that I needed to speak to Sasha and we met downtown and I said okay this is I thought she was gonna help me with my resume and she kind of looked at it and she was like this is what you need to do and I need people to tell me sometimes what I need to do. I'm especially a business owner I'm making all the decisions please tell me what you need for me I would gladly love to get it done check it off the list and move on ask cause I don't wanna think all the time and she said you need to design something for your community and I said okay and she said I don't know what that is and I don't know who these people are and just said that's what you need to do and at the time I wasn't so worried about my losing my job because I had a ton of yoga jobs lined up in the summer.

And I also was consulting for a small brand that summer so we thought at the time It's something I was working with kids with special needs. She said maybe it's something with kids with special needs some sort of some you know clothing some sort of accessory and I'm like doesn't feel like that's what I'm supposed to do I don't know and my husband and I had this plan trip to go hiking in Acadia in Maine and I'm diving and and we kept thinking like on the hikes of like who are these people living this whole life and living in Tina, come seeing these ladies walking all over the place and all their modest activewear and I didn't even think and I'm dominating what is this and then I'm like mid dominating Bamit hits me and said I'm gonna design modest activewear because I see these ladies in my neighborhood and it's it looks heavy and it looks hot and it doesn't active word that I've designed but the active word I designed it's not appropriate for to see a standard we're gonna blend all of the things that I love to do and then I have experience in and now I'm gonna be able to go teach a yoga class if I need to in a from environment and I can wear that to this

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and this is what I'm gonna do and this is my community.It 's amazing how sometimes the thing that you need you know what do they say what does the shame say the blessing is next to the maca you know that right there the reform comes before the maca
The healing comes before the patch, whatever like the cure for poison Ivy is next to the poison Ivy exactly other plants whatever whatever it is.

I know that it's next to the poison Ivy of course it's right there
you know and you just don't know sometimes you need to like be smacked across the face or some like Aha moment of this other person who we don't even really chat that much
and she's also an African American woman she was not in my community
like she's my friend like this like strong black woman and here she is telling me like
These people she had, she really had no idea and listened as a hiker like I've been at the top of Half Dome in Yosemite and I did it in a skirt my husband and I in a month from now.
I was recording we're gonna be in the Grand Tetons hiking I know all about hiking and skirts and you know shorts under my skirts and leggings etc so I'm sure that I have to look at you.
I have to look you up when I get to the States we got you some friends on them for sure cause we do have like brands here in Israel that focus specifically on swimming
and even putting the shorts under the skirts but they're all connected. It does make it more of a challenge and it could be that there are other products out there that I haven't looked for
but hiking is a unique thing.

Yes I'm an avid hiker so that's kind of how the brand the aha started. And as soon as I started my brand.Covid happened. So that was the first big challenge, I guess there was the challenge of figuring out what my purpose was, what my market was going to be
and who these people were. But another I guess we're gonna talk about challenging another part of the challenge is that I'm not you know I'm my friend my like she married a conceited guy she's my conceited and newly conceited.

A friend or Belchuva conceived a friend and she's like you know we're in the challenge but we're not in the challenge so I was like in the challenge of the neck but I'm not in the challenge.That's kind of how I feel too about like running my modest brand or being my Jewish self of like I'm living in the Chulan but I'm not fully in the Chulan I'm like the side dish all right I needed to know who these people were I needed to know what they liked. I you know what they were seeking was it attacked my first thing really was that it was gonna be an attached skirt and leggings of course that seems like what they would want and this is an easy thing. And I started talking about and enjoying focus groups and my first product was to the high school girls The volleyball team in Tina and they said we don't want anything attached. We like our leggings, we like to mix and match, we don't want something under there and then other women on Instagram. I just started an Instagram page not even with a product they just said coming soon

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This thing is coming soon. I started telling everybody about it. My husband's like what are you doing like we don't even ask is it Even we have to do this isn't I'm not doing it . If I don't start talking about it, I'm never gonna do itI have to put it out there you jumped into the chilling pot.

I know, I'm not really in the challenge no I'm in it you're in it
you are deep in there in the chilling pot okay amazing the challenge okay
That's how it is. I am and I started asking them and they said no we don't want it attached because things are you know you wanna wear your under layer at a smaller size sometimes than the other layer and then, I wash my leggings or my shorts more than I wash my skirts and I said well that really fits because I am from the gecko.
I always wanted to make my brand in America and I always wanted to use recycle materials and I care crazy about sustainable fashion and it felt like it aligned with my sustainable fashion mindset of like it's about mixing and matching and getting more use out of your garments and not just wearing.

I didn't wanna just be known as active wear there's so many women that come and they say.I don't work out like it's a leisure like in the regular world everyone knows what a leisure is in the fun world you're just learning what a leisure means like no
you can eat potato chips on your couch and wear my clothing it's okay have to be working out this is about being comfortable and looking cute and put together and being a woman on the go every woman. In 2025 we are more on the go than ever before so definitely on the go and I'm curious.

Has your Italian background at all influenced your style?

 Yes It definitely has I love color I love accessories I have a loud ,
bubbly personality , I feel comes out especially in my marketing and I recently I talk a lot on TikTok about my Italian Jewish upbringing and my journey to Judaism.And I recently started sharing that on Instagram I only share it on Fridays, I have like a specific day and I just do once a week there. And people love it like they meet my parents, they meet my mom, they love my mother, they meet my grandmother before she passed away. It's really like I bring them in because I can't say you know I'm not a convert that doesn't wanna have anything to do with their previous. I was asked this question last week. I am still my previous life, I'm like I'm just my whole life like I'm not I still do the things with my family.I'm super my mom and my dad are on their way here they come all the time like we're very there's nothing really so much to me maybe to some friends that I haven't seen in a long time. I feel like I've changed so much, I'm still the same person I keep Shabbos, I'm kosher, I live in the neck.

I'm still the same Asia that I was when you met me in 6th grade
and that doesn't happen in every conversion situation which is not a bad thing
just, I knew that I really wanted to stay true to that and I didn't want to lose my family or you know my heritage and my husband's always like oh my gosh you're so good at you know

talking to your parents like this cousin or that aunt or that uncle like this is what I do
I love this family.

Let me ask you a few questions because I love speaking with people about their money mindset and how it influences and if our you know viewers could just like look at your eyebrows like oh my gosh yes like setting prices asking people to pay you and and especially design is something that comes so naturally to you right because there's fabrics that you choose and whatever the world wins the sustainable fabrics and you have to pick a price and you have to feel whether it's worth it or if people are gonna pay for it.

Tell me a little bit how your money mindset showed up in your business as you were starting it in and where you think it's developed to five years in.

In the beginning I didn't really think so hard about what I was gonna be charging people I just wanna get people to come in a really instrumental person on my team was or this person named PLA a woman that I know from working in fashion she's Vietnamese she lives in LA and she really was able to speak to the factories and get the products up and running now it's like a well oiled machine thank god so she's not as involved but I just spoke to her last week and she kept saying Asia.
We're not building a cheap product first of all like if anything. I'm building like the most expensive product. It's been made in America since the beginning not just because now all of the smash August tariffs and things there were always made in LA. It has always been from recycled fabrics the fabrics are absolutely amazing that's what my customers say hands down all the time they wash incredible they've had some people have had the first original skirt from 5 years ago and it still looks great so it really speaks for themselves and when I launch. I said wow we're gonna sell it for $58 and she's like looking at me like are you nuts like we're we can't say it's about getting I need people in we need to get customers and she was like okay y and it did it blew out right away two weeks done with the first batch of skirts.

Wow so that was amazing

And you needed to buy I need I also believe that in business you gotta pay to play so you're paying some money you're getting something like that listen there's that lost leader like when someone comes out with a new product there in the supermarket they put out the tables and you got the taste test you get some things for free and my husband works in fashion and more of like the business side.

I became more of a business brain and fashion and really like ponying into margins and what everything costs and knowing what my lowest you know especially for sale items like what's the lowest I could really go on a sale and then slowly I needed. I realized I needed to raise my prices I think like a year later and it jumped I was like 10 dollar increase and then this first

became 68 dollar l the basic thing everything was 68 dollars and I know that I'm not making something attached which maybe another company might sell it for 68 dollars
with leggings and a skirt but you also, I feel like I have to understand or people have to understand why people buy from me.

I'm not sure if you can charge $68 for an item like that you're making a lot of units.

I'm not making a ton of units. I'm a small brand made in America you're buying from Asia with each Asian onion you're like you know a story you see a video you see this you get her email you get her handwritten note it's a connection and their prices have risen incrementally. Since then you know that the first biggest jump was a big jump and if it's raised if its rate if it's risen since then it's been an incremental step but I know sometimes like at least local friends and customers will say you know your prices are expensive.

I'm like I actually think my prices are way cheap like I buy should be charging way more money like and you can't you don't have to know like what you can really get for your product right do you feel like you have to defend yourself when people come to you and say your products are really expensive or do you think it's almost like praising you for having such a high quality product with a with a high price not anymore also it is an aspirational luxury brand here it's made in America it's from recycled goods it's these are from real people that are really
they care there's a whole chain of that. And if I'm speaking a million units like the gap
I can charge $30 like you can get it at Target. It's a different quality I'm sorry and I didn't it was a lot about believing in yourself and believing in your number
and we don't do that a lot of times.
And also as women we have a hard time doing that we do we have a hard time saying hey no this is it and then not like pedaling back and being like oh my gosh I'll just I'll okay
I'll give you this. Also when you sign up for my email you're getting 15% off there's always something there. Like you're on my email list you're gonna get something else like I feel like if I am charging this you're a lot of people do pay the full price
which thank God.

You got a lot to talk about because it's so you know usually you don't talk about these things I guess with your customers but it is good and I like that they are gonna get something else and they're not over. I'm not in the market to for over buying or that's constant like shop we are a sustainable brand and I sometimes do have to keep that in check if she hasn't bought in over 90 days why isn't she bought well then you know customers will say it's lasted for so long it washes them I'm like my husband's like you're doing a good job but that maybe you've got to like some put some irregularities into your brand but then it's a matter of like increasing your offers right like your products and like when you talked about accessories
so you can take it
.
I don't I haven't looked at to see if you have accessories on your website

#176: How to Build a Values-Driven Fashion Brand as a Jewish Mom with Aja Cohen

but if you have the you know the athletic where the people are the leisure people are gonna wear all day then you can start adding accessories and things like that that they can mix and match and you make them customers that are gonna return over and over again.

Yes well we started with one item our mesh all the active skirts okay
and then added the quarter sleeve top then I added the legging and then I added
I forgot what I would the not dress hello and I have it on right now in a 4 piece collection
and my friend who also she does the technical design like all of the measurements
We used to work together in corporate and she was the first one to say you need to add another few items for the collection. They really love it, they want more, let's give them more and she's not Jewish. And then she said we need to do a long skirt and I was like Tina. I can't have like I'm feeling like the my Orthodox conversion againI have the stigma long black skirt
are you kidding me I can't do that and she's like let's do it in a cool way do the skirt
the things that I've designed that quote unquote My former items are my favorite items
It's so funny to hear everybody needs their slinky black skirt. You really do need to make your slinky black skirt at.

It's gonna be the best seller then if you make in a bunch of colors who knows
but but do you actually see yourself branching out like like big because if you have like modest leisure whether it's modest or not modest but like leisure where that's comfortable that sustainable do you see your impact going beyond the Jewish community my customer base is the core customer base is Jewish right but more and more women that are not
at least judging by their name and their location and they write the most amazing reviews.I had a woman last week from some small town in Ohio I I we got her from Google I have no idea who she is, she bought last month and then she just bought again and wrote this stellar review saying
this is the best clothing I've ever worn and I thought Angela
thank you I love you like that's amazing so we've definitely branched out. Since I didn't grow up Jewish and then I have my mom who's very fashionable and wears everything from transcendent she's like I don't want it to be too religious. I can't have it to be too modest like you're not what are you wearing here she's not wearing like modest things
but it's funny when she says that social so I knew I needed to also cater to
also who I was or my family or other women and she's like don't just
you can't just show just one one type of person and, I never wanted to do that because also I'm an inclusive person just by nature. I show all types of people all types of women and I think that people see that and they see themselves in that and it's important.

Because you can't just have that one stereotype or one look of a customer
it could be on you on your mood board but it can't be for everyone so that's actually interesting.

Because in business we talk about your target market or your target audience, your dream buyers, so if you're focusing on and as a mom with younger kids right in your stage of life is

different from mine. You can be focusing on the moms and the moms who were doing the carpools and running in and out and jumping into yoga or Pilates.

You know class in between , but then what about the grandmas like me and the midlife women and things like that and that's your mom also how do you sort of like you know balance this target audience in this target audience in your in your brand in your marketing.

I have a lot of those customers and they at a pop up they always are coming over and they shop I really love a young customer because I think of myself as very young and the colors are bright and then you know and this is fun and I'm making videos and they relate to me like
The Gen Z kind of girl relates to me on a lot of different things.

But the Gen Z girl does not have the kind of income that a regular woman has or
you know so I like that kind of girl but these other women are the ones that are spending the money.I have to make sure that the older lady is understanding the Gen Z
not that I'm all Gen Z mindset especially in my marketing but they're understanding maybe brighter or hipper or anything kind of vision.

A lot of the time the older lady might be even related to that younger girl.
I have this one customer where she bought for her daughter and then she buys for the granddaughter who was my intern one year just randomly I met her on TikTok and then I post the picture of the granddaughter and then the Bobby is like I love it tally is amazing I think that sometimes they're not as far removed as we might think like if I'm speaking to a customer
a woman in this is gonna be easy this is gonna travel great it packs well
you can do all of the things in it like you're active because it's not like the young girls
the active one all the time.

I have these other ladies they're climbing all these mountains doing all these yeah like oh yeah that's me they're doing things that these other girls are not even dreaming of doing
I learned a lot even from those ladies or they're traveling and it's really amazing people are getting younger these girls are getting older they wanna be a little older these girls wanna be younger. I think that sometimes there is it can they do relate in the marketing or the voice
if that was the question.

No it's just like sometimes you have to really think about who is this for
right I know right it's always your and from your point of view is who is this for
but it's also and this is what you said who's going to buy this
so the woman who is maybe 50 or 60 years old who she's not buying diapers she has a little bit more to and she's been working for another 10 20 30 years so if she's a career woman or she went back to work or something she now has disposable income

that she can actually use to buy herself some athleisure wear. It could also not even just be about disposable income. It is a lot about which I shifted early on just in my shopping mindset.

I do not want to buy crap and there's a shift in a woman's life. Maybe I was 27 like towards the end of my 20s. It could be later younger there's a whole bunch of young girls that also feel that way it could be way older maybe when you hit 60 that you finally realized you know I'm not gonna just buy junk you buy junk and junk and junk and the 20 and the 30 and the 50 it ends up when you buy all this junk that it doesn't last so instead and then you have a closet full of all this stuff that you're like what the hell am I gonna wear today, because I it's so overloaded that you just close the closet and you're like I can't be bothered it's too cluttered.

I don't even know what to put on and then you still wear the same schemata that you've been wearing for 30 years beautiful closet of stuff but you can't deal with it that's like a part of the sustainable fashion journey and the premise of the brand of like.

You're not gonna go to my website and see 100 million things like it might look it because each color is now its own little style make sure it's visible for you 20 pieces in total, maybe that's it and you can mix and match and you can do and we can buy better and it lasts longer.

If we are spending more money on an item of clothing but we know where it comes from and who it was made by and how short of a distance it travels here and how long of a time it's gonna last sure I'll buy it like I don't I don't have time I don't I don't have the energy like the physical time the mental time to deal with these things like it's too much it it's also true like when you buy something sustainable that will last longer you have probably saved money over time, cause you're not gonna buy something for 20 bucks that you're gonna throw away and and replace the $20 as I have a daughter who her husband is is learning he's in close she says Mommy were too poor to buy cheap so right you buy you spend a little bit more money and it will last you for longer but you also save time cause you're not shopping all the time you know you've got what you need all of the stuff like you're clouding your closet it's good for that and that's you should be really proud of your daughter.Because she's like light years ahead of maybe some other age or sometimes like speaking back on money you're so tied to this like number thing of like .I have $20 like you know or whatever you have like that that's it. It could also be expensive like you might. I don't have a lot and now I'm limited. Maybe I don't have a lot but I can get this thing that's going to open up something else like it doesn't have to just feel that way it's a review.

I guess on I love that so we're gonna put in the show notes we're gonna put links to your website and maybe I know you have your five year anniversary like Celebration coming up if you have anything for the audience that you can share with them we'll put that in the show notes as well and I wanna make sure that everybody knows where to find you will put

your Instagram and TikTok handles are also there. And just what's one last thing that you wanna share with all the women and men who are listening to this episode.

Who are thinking of building their own business or they're already a year to five years into their business. What is your wisdom for the day that you wanna make sure that everybody leaves with.

If you're newly starting a business or you have an idea you have to start somewhere and the product whatever you're putting out there does not need to be 1,000,000% perfect put it out there and let your customer tell you this needs to change and this and I need this.

I would love that let's do this a little different and just put it out there we can always tweak and reiterate and make it better after but if you don't do it and you limit yourself to all the thoughts in your brain that everyone has it's completely normal and natural we're never gonna get there so put it out there be proud of it don't put out a you know a half ass product but put out a product that you're really proud of and that you'll build with your customer to make it even better that would be for someone that's new for someone who's been in the business which I am and I see the UPS and downs which it is very stressful and some days or most days think bigger picture you know even when it's hard even when it's really trying and you're exhausted
The bigger picture here is that I really believe in this. I know that I'm doing something for a reason. I wasn't just put here to just sit in a cubicle and make a bunch of rap in China and tell you to buy buy buy. I'm here for a specific reason and that we're living the dream like we created the business we're doing this like be proud of everything it's not just like I do not make a million dollars if I make $1 million that would be awesome if I don't make $1 million but I'm like feeling amazing about it and I'm proud of this whole endeavor that's like making $1 million too there's there's other ways of feeling satisfied and grateful for it it's not we've always been taught this whole thing about working and just like being a woman like how we were talking about before like work more hours more this like the world shifted like that's important but
What about the other things that we really value in life? Am I just here to just produce like what I am.

I know that as a business owner that we're doing something special even when we don't see the end of the tunnel like we are and we have to keep believing in ourselves because no one else is gonna believe in you like the way you believe in you gotta keep believing all right.

Thank you so much Asia it has been such a pleasure like hearing more about your story and I can't wait for everybody to jump onto your website and treat themselves to some new athleisure wear. Thank you so much alright thanks everybody for listening to this episode and I'll see you next week on the Jewish Entrepreneur podcast.