

“ON BEING EXTRAORDINARY”

Somerset Maugham trained as a Doctor before he became a writer. He used to quote one of his medical professors who told him that the diagrams in anatomy books misled people because normal was the rarest thing in the world.

These days medical imaging can map the individual body, which is fortunate because we are all different. My tailor, said George Bernard Shaw, is the only one who understands me, because he measures me anew each time he meets me. Too often people rely on practiced responses, expecting others to be "normal." But to be a normal human being means to be exceptional.

Ordinary is a category broken by the force of individuality. In each person there is something special, a story, a spark, an ineffable core that distinguishes that person from all who have ever been, or who will ever be. Slavish imitation of another is fatal -- for it is always false. As the Kotzker Rebbe said: "If I spend my life trying to be someone else, who will be me?" One need not be extravagant to be extraordinary. Singularity, specialness, is the condition of each "ordinary" human being. All the same, and all different, God's children should cherish the blessing of shared uniqueness.