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I Am Jewish: Personal Reflections Inspired by the Last Words of Daniel Pearl

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Book Review

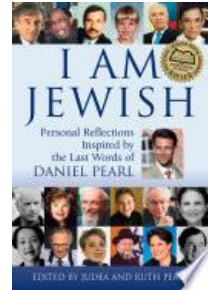
I Am Jewish: Personal Reflections Inspired by the Last Words of Daniel Pearl

Judea Pearl and Ruth Pearl

Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004.

On January 23, 2002, a young journalist was abducted and tortured by Muslim extremists in Karachi, Pakistan. They videotaped the last few minutes of Daniel Pearl's life, including his appeals to "come to your senses." His father says these appeals were silenced by senselessness itself. At gunpoint, his last words on the video were, "My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish, I am Jewish." Then his throat was slit, on camera.

Daniel's parents, Judea and Ruth, undertook a mission to promote cross-cultural understanding following Daniel's murder by asking Jews from around the world, "What does being Jewish mean to you?" The reflections of these artists, entertainers, government leaders, authors, media personalities, scientists, community organizers, scholars, rabbis and youth are compiled and presented in this inspirational volume.



The chilling rise of antisemitism in the decades since this event gives Jews and concerned Gentiles reason to reconsider what being Jewish means in 2020. The individual responses in this book reflect the vast rainbow of perspectives and experiences that are part of the collective "Jewish identity". While there can never be a conclusive definition of what it means to be Jewish, the following themes emerge.

Identity – Avraham Burg – Israeli Labor Party Member: "We are the first generation in history that has the option of choosing to be Jewish and to remain a Jew. . . I refuse to sever my link in the chain. Judaism has the responsibility of bringing peace to the world, and I am Jewish." (p. 4)

Heritage – Douglas Rushkoff, Professor of Media Theory and Digital Economics, City University of New York, Queens College: "We are not believers or even doubters, but wrestlers.... Judaism is not bestowed, it is enacted. Judaism is not a boundary; it is a force that breaks boundaries." (p. 90)

Covenant, Chosenness, and Faith – Harold Kushner, author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* and several other best sellers: "To say 'I am a Jew' is to proclaim that I live every moment of my life in God's presence, avoiding wrongdoing and seeking holiness, because of the spark of God within me." (p. 165)

Humanity and Ethnicity – Nadine Gordimer, Nobel Prize in Literature recipient, 1991: "Recognize yourself in others. That would be the end of racism, which we know in all its pain and despicable horror." (p. 187)

Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World) and Justice – Jonathan Freedland, columnist for *The Guardian of London*: "Wherever there is a revolutionary political movement, you will usually find Jews involved in it.... I am connected to my fellow Jews, human beings I will never have met. And if I can be connected to them, I can be connected to everyone." (p. 203)

Connection to Israel – Alan Dershowitz, Professor of Law, Harvard University: "Today Jews are hated because there is finally a Jewish state, with a fallible Jewish army and fallible Jewish political leaders. Although this imperfect Jewish state has behaved better than any

state in history facing comparable dangers, more is demanded. If the forces that would destroy us were allowed to succeed, it would be a terrible precedent for other vulnerable minorities. We have always been the 'miner's canary' – the litmus test for tolerance in the world." (p. 119)

Judea Pearl celebrates the Jewish heritage of "border-challengers and boat-rockers... permeated in our veins, partly from the Bible and Talmud in their persistent encouragement of curiosity, learning and debate, and by the travesties of history by which we were impelled to challenge conventional wisdoms and practices." (p. 191)

Sadly, this is what seems to underlie the antisemitism we face still today.

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