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Publisher's Note

This note will explain the overall approach to the book, the methodology used to gather the contributions for it, and the structure of it.

In our work with Judea and Ruth Pearl on this project in honor of their son, Daniel, the goal was to create an inspirational book that would encourage people to reflect on Danny's words, "I am Jewish," and the meaning of these words in their own lives.

Many Jews were particularly moved by Danny's words in which he affirmed his Jewish identity. Many were inspired to reflect on or analyze their feelings toward their lives as Jews.

The saying "two Jews, three opinions" well reflects the Jewish community's broad range of views on any topic. This book is an attempt to capture this richness of interpretation and to further inspire Jewish people to reflect upon and take pride in their identity. We began the project with confidence that, despite the diversity, common denominators would shine through clearly and distinctly—and they did.

In order to achieve our goals, we decided it was important to include input from highly respected leaders in all fields throughout the world. The invited contributors include top scholars, artists, entertainers, government officials, authors, media personalities, scientists, community leaders, rabbis, and others covering the entire religious, professional, and political spectrum.

We began by developing, in consultation with many people, comprehensive lists of potential contributors by geographic, occupational, and religious categories. After a careful analytical process, we invited several hundred people to contribute their thoughts to the book, keeping in mind that the interpretation of the words "I am Jewish" would vary widely with one's background, experience, and beliefs.

Although comprehensive in its coverage, this book was not intended to be a scientifically designed survey of Jewish thought and views, and we recognize that while our design was broadly inclusive, individual decisions on participation make for an idiosyncratic selection of people and their ideas. We wish we

had been more successful in reaching people in Latin America and some other parts of the Sephardic world in particular.

Contributions range from major essays to a paragraph or a sentence, and they come from adults as well as youngsters. They are in the form of personal feelings, statements of theology, life stories, and historical reflections. Almost all contributions are original. A few have been previously published but were carefully selected by their contributors to represent their thinking on the question: What do you mean when you say, "I am Jewish"?

As you will see, clear themes did emerge. While many contributions contained more than one theme, we have organized the responses into five broad categories, reflecting what appeared to the editors to be the major theme of each statement. They have been integrated to provide a thought-provoking and inspiring diversity of opinion that we hope will lead to further discussion in the Jewish community in the United States and elsewhere.

The categories in which the responses have been organized reflect the major relationships of our lives.

- **Identity**—Our relationship to ourselves, how we define who we are in the most fundamental way.
- **Heritage**—Our relationship to family, community, culture, tradition, and our collective history.
- **Covenant, Chosenness, and Faith**—Our relationship to God, our understanding of the relationship between God and the Jewish people, and our understanding of Judaism as a religion.
- **Humanity and Ethnicity**—Our relationship to others who are not part of the Jewish people. How does a sense of particularism relate to the universal themes and teachings of Judaism?
- **Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World) and Justice**—Our relationship to the larger world, and what "I am Jewish" means for what we do with our lives as we address our responsibilities in the world.

We hope this book will motivate people throughout the Jewish community to think more about their lives as Jews and, in particular, have a profound effect on the way Jewish youngsters shape their identity in years to come.

S. M. M.

PREFACE

BACKGROUND

It took a few endless minutes for me to comprehend the meaning of the words the United States Consul General in Karachi was reading to me over the phone. It was a transcript of the videotape the Consulate had received a day earlier; it was taken in the last hours of our son's life, and the words were Danny's: "My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish, I am Jewish."

It hit me right away that this sentence would strike an especially deep chord for Jews everywhere, though I could not fully grasp its scope or significance.

It was only a few weeks later that I came to realize that Danny left us a precious gift in those words—a faithful mirror in which we, Jews, can see ourselves. Danny had that mirror too; he was not alone on that fateful day.

Danny never concealed his Jewishness in his world journeys, and after he was abducted, we knew this might determine his fate. This awareness, however, did not prepare me for the brutality and the brazenness of his killers. I was especially repulsed by how those murderers, instead of hiding their anti-Semitic perversion, proudly displayed their motives in public, boasting in their deformity. But over time, steadily emerging from rage and pain there came for me a sense of pride at Danny's unyielding dignity in those critical moments. His dignity signified so vividly the victory of the eternal Jew over his perennial enemies, the victory of Danny over his killers.

It also became obvious to me that, with all their technical sophistication, the murderers made one essential miscalculation: making a spectacle of their contemptuous act would backfire and result in the opposite of whatever they sought to achieve. In particular,

highlighting Daniel's identity as a Jew in front of millions of people around the world would forever associate Jews with the admirable qualities of Danny's character and Jewishness with his missions of peace-seeking and bridge-building.

Nonetheless, I did not deem that sort of victory satisfactory for my grandson, Adam, and his generation.

The burning question in my mind was how Adam would view his Jewish lineage. Would he take it as a genetic accident that may lead to tragedies like the one that befell his father, or would he embrace it as the fountain of his father's spirit, from which he, too, could draw strength, comfort, and direction?

Over the months following, we received ample indications that strength and mission would be the dominant elements of Danny's Jewish legacy.

Letters from Jewish children around the world invariably expressed a sense of pride and commitment, with no trace of fear or victimhood. For example, eight-year-old Evan from Berkeley, California, wrote to our daughter Michelle: "I read this poem 'I am a Jew' at my sister's Bat Mitzvah because Daniel Pearl was courageous when he said, 'I am a Jew, my father is a Jew, my mother is a Jew.' I think he was really brave to say that knowing he will probably be killed for it. I can't believe that this happened in my life and I even know his sister."

Another letter from Temple B'nai Shalom in East Brunswick, New Jersey, asked our permission to name their religious school after Danny. When we explained that Danny was not "religious" in the conventional sense, the rabbi insisted, "We want our children to have a model of what it means to be Jewish, and every mother I speak to says that she wants her son to be a Jew like Daniel Pearl."

We realized then that modern Jewish identity, as it is forged in homes and schools, is in dire need of a role model and a human face to give life to Jewish values and teachings, and to connect these to relevant events in our turbulent world. We came to realize that Daniel's face, coupled with the broad impact of his last words, could help fortify Jewish identity with the resilience needed to counter its adversaries' attacks. We saw in this potential yet another part of Danny's victory over his murderers: while they tried to sow fear and humiliation

among Jews, Danny's words would lead to empowerment and pride and, eventually, to a stronger, more united Jewish people. We began to view the building of Jewish pride as a debt we owe our people for endowing us with the heritage, education, and support that has kept us strong in times of hardship and which helped shape Danny's spirit and personality, both heart and might.

THE BOOK PROJECT

We knew, however, that the commitment to strengthen Jewish identity is not shared by all fellow Jews. Many Jewish parents, especially in the secular section of the community, question both the meaning of their Jewishness and whether it is something worth preserving in a world where ethnicity is often considered a divisive relic of a bygone age.

An idea germinated. Danny's last words could also serve as a catalyst for fellow Jews to reflect upon, question, ponder, discuss, analyze, and hopefully clarify their own feelings about their Jewishness.

The seed of this idea was sewn by then twelve-year-old Alana Frey (see her contribution, page 73), who came up with an inspiring project for her Bat Mitzvah: to ask friends and relatives what being Jewish means to them, compile the answers in booklet form, and send the booklet to Adam Pearl, so that "he would have an understanding of his heritage and his father's words would always comfort him."

I was instantly intrigued by the power of Alana's idea. I first thought of continuing this theme on an ongoing basis through a series of Bar and Bat Mitzvah projects and then, when Adam becomes Bar Mitzvah age himself, we would edit and publish the contributions in book form. It later dawned on me that the theme was so powerful and timely that it could inspire contributions from a wide range of Jews from all walks of life and be of immediate benefit to the community as a whole. Such a book would provide both a valuable picture of how Jews define themselves and insightful new answers to the difficult question, "What does being Jewish mean to me?"

The question is not trivial. Is "being Jewish" some sort of a birthmark with which one is burdened or blessed for life? A genetic incident? How can one be proud of a genetic incident? Is it a religious belief? An ethnic loyalty? A commitment to a certain behavior or perspective?

An attitude? A collection of sweet childhood memories? A language to communicate with one's ancestors and decode their wisdom and experience? A key to the literary or ethical force of Bible stories? Most importantly, could a coherent, meaningful answer ever emerge from a community whose members view the question through such diverse prisms?

I sought the advice of Rabbi Harold Schulweis, and he not only endorsed the idea as timely and of great value, but also put me in touch with Stuart Matlins of Jewish Lights Publishing. Stuart received the idea with enthusiasm, and the result of our collaboration is told in the Publisher's Note.

To adhere to the central mission of this volume, we asked authors to minimize references to Danny's tragedy and to focus on the main question: "What does being Jewish mean to you?" I thought it would be appropriate, however, to make one exception to this rule by including my perception of what being Jewish meant to Daniel. This question was discussed in the remarks I made at a multi-faith memorial service at Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in New York City on Danny's first Yahrzeit, February 24, 2002. With the encouragement of the publisher, I include these remarks (slightly edited) in their entirety.



I AM JEWISH

History will record a tide of horror and madness that swept our planet in the beginning of the third millennium. The basic rules of civilization were violated, and all theories of cognition, common sense, and human values laid shattered and betrayed.

History will also record that, in the midst of this chaos, there was a young man who, in a moment of extreme crisis, looked straight in the eye of evil, and said: "My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish, I am Jewish."

He did not say it under duress, nor did he say it with defiance or with gallantry. He said it in his usual matter-of-fact way, slightly irritated, as if saying: "How many times do I have to repeat myself? Two plus two equals four, and I am Jewish!"

He was not so naive as to ignore the venom that drooled from his captors' mouths each time he uttered the word "Jewish." Still, he repeated: "My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish, I am Jewish." What did he mean by those eleven words?

The Challenge of Understanding

Danny was not a religious Jew. Judaism for him was the language of his extended family—a source of strength, commitment, and historical identity.

To Danny, "I am Jewish" meant "I must understand." Or in other words: "I am possessed with a historically-baked obsession to understand and repair things, because my wandering ancestors, hardened by centuries of persecution and discrimination, have taught me to mistrust all dogmas and ideologies and to question authority and the status quo and conventional wisdom. So, as a Jew, I have inherited no other mental tranquilizer except that chronic urge to question and to understand.

"I understand suffering, because the suffering of my ancestors is etched on my consciousness.

"I understand justice, because I was distilled by injustice.

"I understand Muslims' suffering as well, for I have seen your people in Kosovo, I have worked with your carpet weavers in Iran, and I have sung with your pearl divers in Qatar.

"I am Jewish' means I am reminding you of the challenge of understanding. So, let's come to our senses."

Humanity in Diversity

I tried to explain all this to the people of Pakistan in an open letter published a few months ago in Karachi.

When Danny said "I am Jewish," I wrote, what he meant in fact was: "I respect Islam precisely because I am Jewish, and I expect you to respect me and my faith precisely because you are, or claim to be, good Muslims."

In other words, "I come from a place where one's heritage is the source of one's strength, and strength is measured by one's capacity to accommodate diversity. Because it is only through diversity that we recognize common humanity.

"Look at our patriarch, Abraham! The first thing he does after

his circumcision is to invite three strangers to sit down and have a chat. Remember?

“So let’s have a chat. ‘I am Jewish’ means I am the litmus test of your faith and the fire test of your strength. Let’s come to our senses.”

The Founders of the Town

What I did not explain to readers in Pakistan was Danny’s next sentence, the very last that he spoke freely: “Back in the town of Bnei Brak, there is a street named after my great-grandfather, Chayim Pearl, who was one of the founders of the town.”

Why is he telling us this strange story about his great-grandfather from Bnei Brak? In that frantic race for nanoseconds, why does his mind stumble on this anecdotal, almost-forgotten story from our family archive?

As you can imagine, I have asked myself this question millions of times in the past year, and I would like to share my theory.

He chose this story because it carried three different messages simultaneously to three different audiences: First, to his family; second, to his captors; and third, to everyone in the free world.

To his family he said: “Behold, I am volunteering information that no one else knows. Why? Because I want to assure you that I am well, I am speaking freely, and I am not defeated.”

To his captors he said: “Look, guys! I come from a place where a person is judged by the towns that he builds, by the trees that he plants, and by the wells that he digs. Not by the death and destruction that he brings to the world. So come to your senses.”

At times I theorize that Danny had an even deeper message here, and that he tried to tell his captors something like this: “You know, my great-grandfather was angry, too; in fact, he had as many grievances in the Europe of 1924 as you have today in Pakistan. Yet, when he was struck on the head with an iron bar by a Polish peasant, and called ‘dirty Jew,’ he did not strap himself with explosives and go blow up a church. Instead, he crawled home, wiped his blood, and told his wife and four children, ‘Start packing! We are going home!’ And he sold everything he had, bought a piece of sandy land in then British Palestine, and traveled to build a better life for his family and for their neighbors.”

And I can almost hear Danny inviting his captors to come and

have a look at Bnei Brak today, and saying: “Judge for yourself if such a miracle cannot happen in your part of the world. So come to your senses.”

Finally, to the people of the free world, Danny said: “You know what? Despite all the protests and criticism that we hear around us, we are still the town builders in this world, not our critics.

“With all the images of the ‘ugly West’ and ‘ugly America’ and ‘ugly Israel’ that my captors and their intellectual supporters have labored to paint in the past few decades, we can be mighty proud of who we are: We are the town builders in the world.

“True, we have not been perfect. And our actions are occasionally stained with materialism, arrogance, selfishness, unilateralism, and other ills and maladies that we are constantly accused of practicing, but we are still the world’s largest exporters of hope, pluralism, tolerance, equality, and basic freedoms; and our heritage is still the most reliable source of values, values to which there are no alternatives anywhere.

“So, let us continue to reach out for dialogue. But at the same time we must continue to demand unequivocally: Come to your senses.”

Modern Jews of Courage

People ask us whether Danny was a hero or a martyr.

Danny loved life; he did not court death. Rejecting the shadow of death, he tried to sanctify life with the only weapon he had: “Come to your senses.”

No! Modern Jews of courage do not accept martyrdom as an inevitable pattern of Jewish history. Modern Jews of courage see their duty in looking in the eyes of hate-carriers in the world, and reminding them that civilized society is founded upon certain principles, and repeating to them, again and again: “Come to your senses!”

Oh, Danny, Danny, where did you get the strength to demand so stubbornly that those thugs come to their senses? Could it be the stubbornness of your ancestors, carrying the torch of inquiry and compassion through centuries of dogma and estrangement? Could it possibly be that little street in Bnei Brak, named after your great-grandfather?

No! For us, Jews, the story of Daniel Pearl represents not a saga

of martyrdom, nor a claim on victimhood, but a proud reminder of who we are and what we stand for, as well as a subtle reminder of who our adversaries are and what they stand for.

The Galvanic Effect of Betrayal

History will record that on February 21, 2002, another rule of common sense was shattered. The young man who kept on insisting “Come to your senses” was silenced—silenced by senselessness itself.

Many ask why the death of Daniel Pearl has touched and united so many people. After all, there were hundreds who lost their lives in terrorism-related violence in 2001, among them nineteen journalists.

Indeed, the special significance of Danny’s death lies not in the fact that he was an innocent journalist and expectant father, killed in cold blood. The significance lies in the reasons for which he was murdered. Danny was killed for what he represented, and what he represented was each one of us. To his killers, he represented the ideals that every person in every civilized society aspires to uphold—openness, pluralism, understanding, freedom of inquiry, truth, respect for people.

And that galvanizes people into one community.

If you are an American, or a citizen of any democracy, it was your values and your freedoms that were targeted and abducted on that fateful night of January 23, 2002.

If you are a journalist, it was your hands that were chained in Karachi on that terrible night.

If you are a Muslim who struggles to lift his countrymen to new opportunities, it was your head that came under the gun in Karachi in January 2002.

If you are a Jew, it was your voice that reverberated from that dungeon in Karachi and blended with the voice of your ancestry in that ultimate affirmation of identity: “My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish, I am Jewish.”

If you are a decent person anywhere, it was your decency that was betrayed on February 21, 2002.

The Ultimate Revenge

People ask us if we do not seek revenge.

Yes, we do! Hatred killed our son, and hatred we will fight for the rest of our lives, with vengeance and tenacity.

In my letter to the people of Pakistan I made it quite clear: “The loss of Danny will forever tear my heart, but I cannot think of a greater consolation than seeing your children [in Pakistan] pointing at Danny’s picture one day and saying, ‘This is the kind of person I want to be. Like him, I want to be truthful and friendly, open-minded, and respectful of others.’”

This is our vision of revenge: fighting the hatred that took Danny’s life. And the Daniel Pearl Foundation was created to support this vision. It may seem overly ambitious, I know, but it is not totally unrealistic, because the hatred that killed Danny also opened unique opportunities to fight hatred.

One opportunity is to take the legacy of a person who earned respect on both sides of the East/West divide and use it to lower the walls of ignorance that have allowed hatred to ferment to such heights. It is a unique opportunity because there are not many such legacies around. In other words, there aren’t many faces which both a Muslim and a Westerner can point to and agree: “Here is a man of peace, an emissary of goodwill.”

Coalition of the Decent

To utilize this opportunity we must galvanize people along a new frontier, one defined not along national or religious lines but along lines of decency and understanding. By building respect for diverse cultures and values, this “Coalition of the Decent” will strengthen its ranks and will stand up to rising cultures of hate, accusation, and deceit.

We have found an ocean of decency and goodwill all over the world to help us in this endeavor.

For example, on October 10, 2002, we celebrated Danny’s thirty-ninth birthday in the form of a global concert called Daniel Pearl Music Day. Thousands of musicians in over one hundred concerts and eighteen countries around the world played for world harmony and took a stand for tolerance and humanity. This was a modest but significant beginning.

Among the many participants was Pakistan’s number-one rock group, Junoon, who dedicated their performance in the United States

to Danny. By this dedication, the Pakistani rock group has sent a symbolic message to their countrymen, which I read as follows:

“Here we come from Pakistan, a country where, to many people, the word ‘Jewish’ implies contempt (if not a license to kill), and here we are celebrating the life of a Jewish boy from Los Angeles, California, a descendant of a Hasidic Jew from Bnei Brak, Israel. Ask yourself why we do that! We do it because Daniel Pearl is a symbol of the new alignment, the ‘Coalition of the Decent,’ to which we belong and toward which we wish our country to develop.”

It was merely a symbolic gesture, true, but lo and behold, when they returned to Pakistan, they were interviewed about their trip to the United States, and their participation in the Daniel Pearl Music Day was all over the news. If this jolted music fans in Pakistan to find out what Jews and Judaism are all about, then the world has gotten rid of another ounce of hate, and our vision has advanced one step closer toward realization.

The Troops of Peace

And this brings me to discuss a second component in the battle over hatred. Military battles are won in two parallel ways: by making your enemy weaker, and by making your troops stronger. The same applies to battles against hatred. In addition to curtailing ignorance in the world at large, we must empower the troops of peace here at home, and I consider your children and grandchildren to be the elite forces of these troops.

I consider these youngsters semiclones of Danny—talented, curious, principled, and friendly—and I tell myself: Look at the kind of hatred they will be facing when they grow up. They deserve encouragement. They deserve to be told, “You are OK. You are not the bloodthirsty baby-killing money-hungry imperialists that Danny’s killers and their intellectual sympathizers on college campuses try to portray you as. No. You are Daniel Pearl’s kin.

“Like him you will be traveling the world with a pen and a fiddle trying to make sense of what you see; like him you will make friends with thousands of strangers, Jews and non-Jews, and enrich their lives with humor, music, and new insights; and like him you will offer your humble contribution to *tikkun olam* by insisting, with all

the stubbornness of your ancestors, ‘I am Jewish! Come to your senses!’

“So, go ahead and repair the world. You can do it!”



A FACE OF AN ERA

History recalls another Jewish person whose face and tragic end personified the horrors of an era. The name of that person was Anne Frank. Paralleling the impact of Anne Frank’s diary in the early 1950s, the story of Daniel Pearl now inspires Jews and non-Jews alike to re-study the anatomy of anti-Semitism, to reflect on the consequences of fanaticism, to take pride in their heritage, and to stand up for tolerance and understanding everywhere.

The difference, however, is that the diary of Anne Frank was discovered after the Holocaust, while Danny’s story came to public attention in time to prevent another one. This gives us the hope that, some day, I will be able to tell my grandson: “You see, Adam? Your father’s legacy helped us win that battle! Humanity has triumphed!”

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