



Faces of Jewish American Diversity

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

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PERSONAL REFLECTION OF: <i>Douglas Rushkoff</i>	ANALYSIS AREA: <i>*Be sure to provide complete sentences and unbold your responses.</i>
<p>Douglas Rushkoff is a writer, journalist, and professor of media studies.</p> <p>"Jews are not a tribe but an amalgamation of tribes around a single premise that human beings have a role. Judaism dared to make human beings responsible for this realm. Instead of depending on the gods for food and protection, we decided to enact God, ourselves, and to depend on one another.</p> <p>So out of the death cults of Mitzrayim [Egypt] came a repudiation of idolatry and a way of living that celebrated life itself. To say "I'chaim [to life]" was new, revolutionary, even naughty. It overturned sacred truths in favor of sacred living....</p> <p>It's important to me that those, who throughout our history, have attacked the Jews on the basis of blood not be allowed to redefine our indescribable process or our internally evolving civilization. We are attacked for our refusal to accept the boundaries, yet sometimes we incorporate these very attacks into our thinking and beliefs.</p> <p>It was Pharaoh who first used the term Am Yisrael [People of Israel] in Torah, fearing a people who might replicate like bugs and not</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Highlight or bold/underline a sentence or phrase from the excerpt that leaves a lasting impression on you. Explain your selection. 2. What elements of their identity does the author stress (culture, family, ancestry, history, religion, social justice, community, etc.)? 3. What do you think being Jewish means to the person in the excerpt? 4. Why do Jewish Americans not fit neatly into racial and religious categories?



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support him in a war. It was the Spanish of the Inquisition who invented the notion of Jewish blood, looking for a new reason to murder those who had converted to Catholicism. It was Hitler, via Jung, who spread the idea of a Jewish “genetic memory” capable of instilling an uncooperative nature in even those with partial Jewish ancestry. And it was Danny Pearl’s killers who defined his Judaism as a sin of birth.

I refuse these definitions.

Yes, our parents pass our Judaism on to us, but not through their race, blood, or genes — it is through their teaching, their love, and their spirit. Judaism is not bestowed; it is enacted. Judaism is not a boundary; it is the force that breaks down boundaries. And Judaism is the refusal to let anyone tell us otherwise.”

(pages 90–91)

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PERSONAL REFLECTION OF: <i>Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg</i>	ANALYSIS AREA: <i>*Be sure to provide complete sentences and unbold your responses.</i>
<p>Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was a Justice of the U. S. Supreme Court from 1993 to 2020 and advocate for women's rights.</p> <p>"I say who I am in certain visible signs. The command from Deuteronomy appears in artworks, in Hebrew letters, on three walls and a table in my chambers. "Zedek, zedek, tirdof," Justice, Justice shalt thou pursue," these artworks proclaim; they are ever-present reminders to me what judges must do "that they may thrive." There is also a large silver mezuzah [Torah verses in a small case] on my door post...</p> <p>I am a judge, born, raised, and proud of being a Jew. The demand for justice runs through the entirety of Jewish history and Jewish tradition. I hope, in all the years I have the good fortune to serve on the bench of the Supreme Court of the United States, I will have the strength and courage to remain steadfast in the service of that demand." (pages 201–202)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Highlight or bold/underline a sentence or phrase from the excerpt that leaves a lasting impression on you. Explain your selection. 2. What elements of their identity does the author stress (culture, family, ancestry, history, religion, social justice, community, etc.)? 3. What do you think being Jewish means to the person in the excerpt? 4. Why do Jewish Americans not fit neatly into racial and religious categories?

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PERSONAL REFLECTION OF: <i>Naim Dangoor</i>	ANALYSIS AREA: <i>*Be sure to provide complete sentences and unbold your responses.</i>
<p>Naim Dangoor was a leader of Iraqi Jewry outside Iraq. The location of Babylonia is primarily modern-day Iraq.</p> <p>"When I was a young boy a teacher at school asked me, "Why are you a Jew?" I, with all the practicality of youth, replied, because I was born one!"</p> <p>There is, however, something in this sentiment that rings truer than one might think Judaism is a birthright, a glorious gift from one's forefathers of faith, culture, and heritage.</p> <p>For me, it is this: my strong Babylonian heritage, the heritage that Daniel Pearl also shared, his mother having been born in Baghdad, that makes me so proud to be a Jew. Babylonia was one of the main birthplaces of the Jewish people, from where Abraham emerged as a founder, and later from where the Babylonian Talmud, forming the framework for Rabbinic Judaism, was created. Its glorious Jewish intellectual eminence fanned out across the known world for more than a thousand years. Currently the descendants of this tradition are spread throughout the globe." (pages 97–98)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Highlight or bold/underline a sentence or phrase from the excerpt that leaves a lasting impression on you. Explain your selection. 2. What elements of their identity does the author stress (culture, family, ancestry, history, religion, social justice, community, etc.)? 3. What do you think being Jewish means to the person in the excerpt? 4. Why do Jewish Americans not fit neatly into racial and religious categories?

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PERSONAL REFLECTION OF: <i>Norman Lear</i>	ANALYSIS AREA: <i>*Be sure to provide complete sentences and unbold your responses.</i>
<p>Norman Lear is a writer, producer, and social activist.</p> <p>"I identify with everything in life as a Jew. The Jewish contribution over the centuries to literature, art, science, theater, music, philosophy, the humanities, public policy, and the field of philanthropy awes me and fills me with pride and inspiration. As to Judaism, the religion: I love the congregation and find myself less interested in the ritual. If that describes me to others as a "cultural Jew," I have failed. My description, as I feel it, would be: total Jew." (page 34)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Highlight or bold/underline a sentence or phrase from the excerpt that leaves a lasting impression on you. Explain your selection. 2. What elements of their identity does the author stress (culture, family, ancestry, history, religion, social justice, community, etc.)? 3. What do you think being Jewish means to the person in the excerpt? 4. Why do Jewish Americans not fit neatly into racial and religious categories?



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PERSONAL REFLECTION OF: <i>Rabbi Angela Warnick Buchdahl</i>	ANALYSIS AREA: <i>*Be sure to provide complete sentences and unbold your responses.</i>
<p>Rabbi Angela Warnick Buchdahl is an Asian American Rabbi ordained by Hebrew Union College. She spent her college summers working as head song leader at Camp Swig, a Reform Jewish camp in Saratoga, California.</p> <p>My father is a Jew and my mother is a Korean Buddhist. As the child of a mother who carried her own distinct ethnic and cultural traditions — and wore them on her face — I internalized the belief that I can never be “fully Jewish” because I could never be “purely” Jewish. My daily reminders included strangers’ comments “Funny you don’t look Jewish”), other Jews’ challenges to my halakhic [Jewish law] status, and every look in the mirror.</p> <p>Jewish identity is not solely a religious identification, but also a cultural and ethnic marker. While we have been a “mixed multitude” since Biblical times, over the centuries the idea of a Jewish race became popularized. After all, Jews have their own language, foods, even genetic diseases. But what does the Jewish “race” mean to you if you are Black and Jewish? Or Arab and Jewish? Or even German and Jewish, for that matter? How should Jewish identity be understood, given that Am Yisrael [people of Israel] reflects the faces of so many nations?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Highlight or bold/underline a sentence or phrase from the excerpt that leaves a lasting impression on you. Explain your selection. 2. What elements of their identity does the author stress (culture, family, ancestry, history, religion, social justice, community, etc.)? 3. What do you think being Jewish means to the person in the excerpt? 4. Why do Jewish Americans not fit neatly into racial and religious categories?



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Years ago... I called my mother to declare that I no longer wanted to be Jewish. I did not look Jewish. I did not carry a Jewish name, and I no longer wanted the heavy burden of having to explain and prove myself every time I entered a new Jewish community. My Buddhist mother's response was profoundly simple: "Is that possible?" At that moment I realized I could no sooner stop being a Jew than I can stop being Korean, or female, or me. Judaism might not be my "race" but it is an internal identification as indestructible as my DNA.

Jewish identity remains a complicated and controversial issue in the Jewish community. Ultimately, Judaism cannot be about race, but must be a way of walking in this world that transcends racial lines. Only then will the "mixed multitude" truly be Am Yisrael." (pages 19-20)

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PERSONAL REFLECTION OF: <i>Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie</i>	ANALYSIS AREA: <i>*Be sure to provide complete sentences and unbold your responses.</i>
<p>Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie is President Emeritus of the Union for Reform Judaism who focuses on interfaith relations and social justice.</p> <p>"I am Jewish. This means, above all else, that I was present at Sinai and that when the Torah was given on that mountain, my DNA was to be found in the crowd...</p> <p>A people is usually defined by race, origin, language, territory or statehood, and none of these categories is an obvious common denominator for the worldwide Jewish people. Peoplehood is a puzzling concept for modern Jews, particularly the younger ones, who often cannot understand what connects them to other Jews in Moscow, Buenos Aires, and Tel Aviv. But I am convinced, to the depth of my being, that Jewish destiny is a collective destiny... It is the covenant at Sinai that links all Jews, including non-observant ones, in a bond of shared responsibility. And if we hope to strengthen the unity and interdependence of the Jewish people, we will have to revive the religious ideas on which these notions are based." (pages 114–115)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Highlight or bold/underline a sentence or phrase from the excerpt that leaves a lasting impression on you. Explain your selection. 2. What elements of their identity does the author stress (culture, family, ancestry, history, religion, social justice, community, etc.)? 3. What do you think being Jewish means to the person in the excerpt? 4. Why do Jewish Americans not fit neatly into racial and religious categories?

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PERSONAL REFLECTION OF: <i>Sarah Rosenbuam</i>	ANALYSIS AREA: <i>*Be sure to provide complete sentences and unbold your responses.</i>
<p>Sarah Rosenbuam is a 15 years old from Southern California.</p> <p>"When I say that I am Jewish, I am identifying myself as part of a tradition, connected to our foremothers and fathers, and carrying on to the future a culture, a religion, a way of life. I feel pride and am overwhelmed with joy when I declare that I am part of this incredible people, our people Israel." (page 54)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Highlight or bold/underline a sentence or phrase from the excerpt that leaves a lasting impression on you. Explain your selection. 2. What elements of their identity does the author stress (culture, family, ancestry, history, religion, social justice, community, etc.)? 3. What do you think being Jewish means to the person in the excerpt? 4. Why do Jewish Americans not fit neatly into racial and religious categories?



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PERSONAL REFLECTION OF: <i>Senator Dianne Feinstein</i>	ANALYSIS AREA: <i>*Be sure to provide complete sentences and unbold your responses.</i>
<p>Senator Dianne Feinstein is the senior US Senator from California since 1992.</p> <p>"I was born during the Holocaust. If I had lived in Russia or Poland — the birthplaces of my grandparents — I probably would not be alive today, and I certainly wouldn't have had the opportunities afforded to me here. When I think of the six million people who were murdered, and the horrors that can take hold of a society, it reinforces my commitment to social justice and progress, principles that have always been central to Jewish history and tradition.</p> <p>For those of us who hold elected office, governing in this complex country can often be difficult. My experience is that bigotry and prejudice in diverse societies ultimately leads to some form of violence, and we must be constantly vigilant against this. Our Jewish culture is one that values tolerance with an enduring spirit of democracy. If I've learned anything from the past and from my heritage, it's that it takes all of us who cherish beauty and humankind to be mindful and respectful of one another. Every day we're called upon to put aside our animosities, to search together for common ground, and to settle differences before they fester and become problems.</p>	<p>1. Highlight or bold/underline a sentence or phrase from the excerpt that leaves a lasting impression on you. Explain your selection.</p> <p>2. What elements of their identity does the author stress (culture, family, ancestry, history, religion, social justice, community, etc.)?</p> <p>3. What do you think being Jewish means to the person in the excerpt?</p> <p>4. Why do Jewish Americans not fit neatly into racial and religious categories?</p>



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Despite terrible events, so deeply etched in their souls, Jews continue to be taught to do their part in repairing the world. That is why I've dedicated my life to the pursuit of justice; sought equality for the underdog; and fought for the rights of every person regardless of their race, creed, color, sex, or sexual orientation, to live a safe, good life. For me that's what it means to be a Jew, and every day I rededicate myself to that ideal." (pages 228–229)

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PERSONAL REFLECTION OF: <i>Senator Joe Lieberman</i>	ANALYSIS AREA: <i>*Be sure to provide complete sentences and unbold your responses.</i>
<p>Senator Joe Lieberman is a former U.S. Senator from Connecticut from 1989 to 2013, and a Vice-Presidential candidate in 2000.</p> <p>“What does being Jewish mean to me? To me, being Jewish means having help in answering life's most fundamental questions. How did I come to this place? And, now that I am here, how should I live?</p> <p>My faith, which has anchored my life, begins with a joyful gratitude that there is a God who created the universe and then, because He continued to care for what He created, gave us laws and values to order and improve our lives. God also gave us a purpose and a destiny —to do justice and to protect, indeed to perfect, the human community and natural environment.</p> <p>Being Jewish in America also means feeling a special love for this country, which has provided such unprecedented freedom and opportunity to the millions who have come and lived here. My parents raised me to believe that I did not have to mute my religious faith or ethnic identity to be a good American, that, on the contrary, America invites all its people to be what they are and believe what they wish....</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Highlight or bold/underline a sentence or phrase from the excerpt that leaves a lasting impression on you. Explain your selection. 2. What elements of their identity does the author stress (culture, family, ancestry, history, religion, social justice, community, etc.)? 3. What do you think being Jewish means to the person in the excerpt? 4. Why do Jewish Americans not fit neatly into racial and religious categories?



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Jews around the world and all who love freedom— the freedom to think, to speak, to write, to question, to pray—will hold Daniel [Pearl] near to our hearts, and from his courage we will draw internal light and strength.” (pages 107-108)	
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