

JUDAISM MADE SIMPLE.

(...and highly entertaining.)

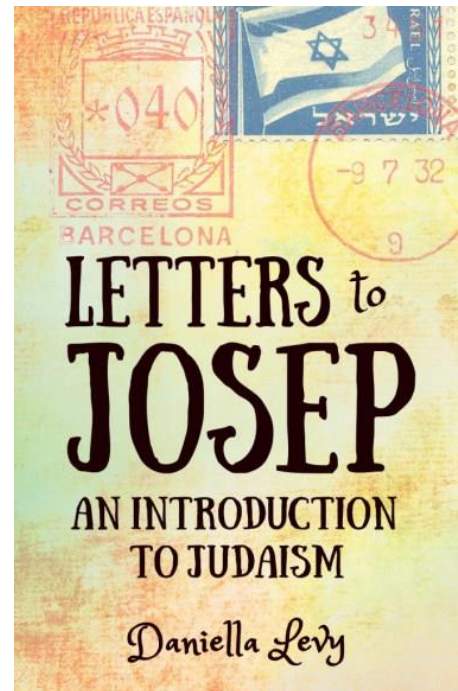
How does it look and feel to live as an Orthodox Jew?

Josep, a secular Catholic from Barcelona, wondered exactly that. And when he met Daniella, an American-Israeli Orthodox Jew, he had more questions than he knew how to ask.

Inspired by his curiosity, Daniella began to describe her faith and her life to Josep: from celebrating the Sabbath to keeping kosher, from the Hebrew calendar to the Jewish concept of the afterlife.

The result? This collection of amusing and enlightening letters. Daniella untangles the threads of a highly complex religion so accessibly that even the most uninitiated can relate. But she addresses difficult concepts with enough depth that the knowledgeable will find new insight, too. Every page resonates with the warmth, candor, and respect that characterize this unlikely friendship... served up with a liberal dash of humor.

Whether you're a curious non-Jew or a Jew hoping to expand your knowledge, *Letters to Josep: An Introduction to Judaism* will charm, inform, and inspire you.



LETTERS TO JOSEP

GUIDING LIGHT PRESS

AN INTRODUCTION TO JUDAISM

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DANIELLA LEVY

292 PAGES

MORE INFORMATION AT LETTERSTOJOSEP.COM/THE-BOOK

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DANIELLA LEVY is an Orthodox Jewish writer, translator, and educator living in Tekoa, Israel, with her husband, Rabbi Eitan Levy, and their three sons. Her debut novel, *By Light of Hidden Candles*, is forthcoming from Kasva Press.

Her articles, short fiction, and poetry have been published by popular and literary magazines such as *Writer's Digest*, *Pnima Magazine*, *Reckoning*, *Newfound*, the *Rathalla Review*, and the *Jewish Literary Journal*, as well as online platforms such as Kveller, Aish.com, Jwire, Ynet News, and Hevria. She has also translated materials and written content for a wide range of organizations and individuals.

Born in New York, Daniella immigrated to Israel with her family as a child. Her formal education in English ended at that point, but her love of reading and writing did not. She wrote her first book at age ten, and by fifteen had completed two full-length novels. Her Talmud studies notes from high school consisted of a series of silly dramatizations of Jewish sages yelling at each other. She's pretty sure her teacher would have been horrified.

Daniella briefly studied Jewish studies, theater, and education at Emunah College in Jerusalem. A black belt in Shorin-Ryu Matsubayashi karate, she is certified as a self-defense instructor by IMPACT International, El Halev, and the Israeli Ministry of Education and Sports. She is also certified as a bridal counselor by Nishmat and the Religious Council of Gush Etzion.



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REVIEWS & TESTIMONIALS

“While for the most part, the book is **light-hearted and entertaining**, parts are also **poignant and personal**... Her vivid description of singing Jewish songs together with Israeli school kids in the forests of Poland brought tears to my eyes. *Letters to Josep* is indeed, as its title promises, an introduction to Judaism... But more than [that]... it is **a delightfully entertaining glimpse into a deep friendship** between two people of different faiths.”

—Yael Shahar, author of *A Damaged Mirror*

“I thought I knew a lot about my Jewish religion having grown up within the faith and continuing to be an active participant in my Jewish community... To my surprise and delight, I learned a lot... In each chapter, Levy sprinkles gentle humor plus insightful, pithy, [wise] comments to convey easily and yet in depth the essence of being and doing Jewish. By the end, my own sense of what it means to be and to do Jewish felt clarified and justified... **a short book that every Jew should read**, as well as every non-Jew who wants an insiders' glimpse into what [being] Jewish is about.”

—Susan Heitler, Ph.D., author of *The Power of Two*

“Although I have been observant for over thirty years and I’ve been teaching Torah for at least twenty, I was impressed with [Daniella’s] skillful, conversational method of explaining even the most basic of areas of Judaism... so straightforward, even simple, that it’s beautiful and enlightening. **I can see myself recommending [this] book to many people.**”

—Sari Horovitz Hoffman, Jewish educator

“Before I picked up *Letters to Josep*, I knew very little about Judaism. How do you form a complete understanding of a culture that has not only been around for thousands of years, but also has such a tumultuous history? **Levy makes the complex and rich traditions completely approachable, a pleasure to read.** The conversational tone she strikes is friendly and put me at ease, but at the same time her faith in and love of her roots shines through. She is just as honest about the flaws of the Jewish tradition as she is about its glories.”

—Kate Kearns, writer, poet, and editor

“I wish I’d had such a book myself when I was beginning my journey of observant Judaism.”

—Karyn, Amazon reviewer

“Daniella has a remarkable gift of ‘telling’ and explaining rather than ‘preaching.’ She is witty, informative, warm, honest, intelligent, and incredibly well learned... Your life and your soul will be enriched by the letters in this book.”

—Miryam Heiliczer, RN, CM

SAMPLE Q&A

Is Josep a real person?

He and I have a running joke now about the questionability of his existence. Many people seem to find it easier to believe that I invented him as a literary device than that I actually have a Catholic friend in Barcelona. I guess that just demonstrates how unusual a friendship it is!

Yes, he is a real person. The picture to the right is of him. “Josep” is a pseudonym, though he is not particularly secretive about his identity. He wrote a foreword for the book.



How do you know each other?

The short version is that we served together on the press team for a youth conference in Barcelona. The long version—a tale of my distressing experiences as a religious Jew there and Josep’s attempts to set things right—can be found in the introduction (or on the blog: letterstojosep.com/how-it-all-began).

Why did you write him these letters?

Before we met, he had harbored an odd interest in Jews and Judaism, but had never met an actual Jew. He was a pro-Israel political science student—quite a lonely position!—but he had never met an actual Israeli before. Furthermore, around the time we met, he had been doing some research about his genealogy and discovered that some of his family’s surnames are converso surnames. He had wanted to look further into this, but didn’t know how.

And then I turned up! Aside from being an Israeli and an Orthodox Jew, it just so happened that I had a few excellent contacts for him, one of whom was Gloria Mound, director of the Casa Shalom

This was the first time I’d had an opportunity to share my enthusiasm with someone who was interested, but knew very little about [Judaism]. And it was so much fun, I just couldn’t stop!

Institute of Marrano-Anusim studies. So after I returned to Israel, I got in touch with him and connected them. In the meantime, he expressed interest in learning more about Judaism, so I started to write these e-mails explaining various aspects of my life as a Jew.

I love being Jewish, and have practiced my religion with a great sense of joy and connection since my teens. This was the first time I’d had an

opportunity to share my enthusiasm with someone who was interested, but knew very little about it. And it was so much fun, I just couldn't stop!

What made you decide to turn them into a book?

It was an idea I had in the first year or so, when our correspondence was most intense. I figured there were probably many more people like him who would have liked to learn about Judaism but didn't know where to start and didn't have the fortune of meeting someone as expressive about it as I am. But as our correspondence waned and we both moved on to other things, the idea for the book faded too. Years later, we picked things up again, but he has always had trouble keeping up with my e-mails, and was going through a particularly difficult period at the time. I didn't want to overwhelm him, so I had the idea to start a blog, where I could post those letters whenever I felt like writing them, and he could visit and read them whenever he was able. That's how LetterstoJosep.com was born. The blog was well-received, and readers began to encourage me to turn it into a book. So I did!

How is *Letters to Josep* different from other books about Judaism?

I would say there are three things that make *Letters to Josep* unique.

The first is the tone. These letters were written to a real friend, and they reflect the warmth, respect, honesty, and sense of humor that characterize that friendship. *I don't shy away from asking tough questions, and I don't settle for apologetics and feel-good, contrived answers.* They are also quite personal, sometimes divulging my own struggles with various aspects of Judaism or theology. Judaism is obviously portrayed in a positive light, but I don't shy away from asking tough questions, and I don't settle for apologetics and feel-good, contrived answers.

The second is the goal of the book. It's not meant to guide people closer to Judaism, nor to persuade anyone to become Jewish or observant. Josep still identifies as a non-practicing Catholic, and it was never my intention to change that about him. The sole purpose of the book is to *describe.*

[The book is] not meant... to persuade anyone to become Jewish or observant. Josep still identifies as a non-practicing Catholic, and it was never my intention to change that about him.

Which brings us to the third difference: while many books about Judaism consist of instructions for keeping Jewish law or abstract discussion of spiritual concepts, *Letters to Josep* tells the reader how it *looks and feels* to live as an Orthodox Jew. I'm not an authority on Jewish law. The only authority on which I wrote this book is that I'm an Orthodox Jew, I'm good at explaining things, and I'm Josep's friend. And that's really what the book is about—sharing an experience.

How are the letters organized?

I think one of the book's selling points is its clear structure. Jewish law is so complex and full of intricate detail, it's very easy to lose the forest for the trees.

Letters to Josep is a map of the forest.

Jewish law is so complex and full of intricate detail, it's very easy to lose the forest for the trees. Letters to Josep is a map of the forest.

The letters are organized into three categories: Observant Jewish Life, the Jewish Year, and Jewish Concepts. The first section contains explanations of the basic day-to-day observances: keeping kosher, Shabbat, prayer, customs around the Jewish lifecycle, etc. The second section takes the reader chronologically through the Hebrew calendar and all the Jewish holidays. The third section discusses more abstract ideas and issues: Jewish identity, education, the Jewish concepts of the Messianic Age and the afterlife, and so on.

Who might benefit from reading your book?

The book has two primary potential audiences. The first is, of course, people like Josep—non-Jews, or Jews raised with no connection to traditional Judaism, who are curious about what it's like to live as an Orthodox Jew. The second is secular friends and family members of Orthodox Jews who want to better understand what all this crazy stuff they do is about.

I think, especially in the case of family members of a person who recently became observant, a book

People have a tendency to take other people's religious or ideological shifts personally... [The nonthreatening tone of the book] can help bring understanding and harmony to those tense relationships.

like *Letters to Josep* might be particularly welcome. My mother grew up secular, and when she decided to be observant, her parents took it pretty hard. How do you tell your own mother that you can't eat in her kitchen anymore? How do you explain to your best friend that you can't attend his wedding because it's on a Saturday? People have a tendency to take other people's religious or ideological shifts personally, as

though choosing a different path is a statement about *their* choices. It's so hard to navigate these things without someone getting offended or hurt.

Handing someone a copy of *Letters to Josep* is like inviting them to chill out with me over a cup of tea. I'll give it to them straight and clear, no personal tensions, no judgement. The book doesn't say, "This is what I think you should do." It says, "This is who I am and how I see things." It's very nonthreatening, and I think this can help bring understanding and harmony to those tense relationships.

By the way, my grandfather—the staunch atheist who was so upset when my mother became religious—absolutely loves the book. So I must be doing something right!