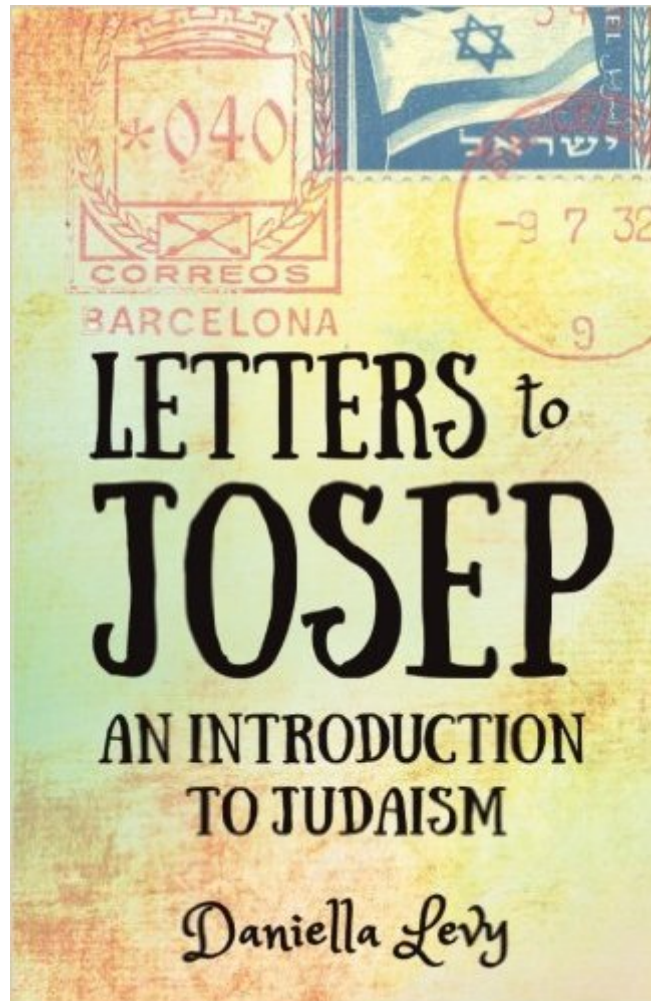


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Letters To Josep: An Introduction To Judaism



Synopsis

"You are about to embark on something more than a book. You are about to participate in a quest for friendship, understanding, and love, beyond language, religion, and borders..."--from Josep's foreword
It began as an extraordinary correspondence across the Mediterranean. Josep, a secular Catholic from Barcelona, wanted to learn about Daniella's life as an American-Israeli Orthodox Jew. Her enthusiastic response to his curiosity resulted in this collection of entertaining and enlightening letters. With nuance, candor, and warmth "and a liberal dash of humor" Daniella paints a vivid picture of observant Jewish life. She explains complex concepts in a manner so unassuming and accessible that even the most uninitiated can relate "but with enough depth that the knowledgeable will find new insight, too. Whether you're a curious non-Jew or a Jew hoping to expand your knowledge, Letters to Josep will charm, inform, and inspire you.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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. I was curious though what an introductory book about Judaism would say. To my surprise and delight, I learned a lot. In each chapter Daniella Levy tackles a different area of what it is to do Jewish: how and why Jews observe a weekly day of rest, family and spiritual endeavors; the rules of keeping Kosher, several of which I'd never heard of before; the holidays and their meanings as well as their ritual practices; , prayer, and more. In each chapter, Levy sprinkles gentle humor plus insightful pithy, wisdom 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. Bravo Daniella Levy on a brilliant contribution, a short book that every Jew should read, as well as every non-Jew who wants an insiders' glimpse into what Jewish is about.

I really enjoyed this book. Not only because I feel strongly related to that lazy-crazy-Catalan character of Josep (by the way, he looks pretty real to me!), but because it is SO engaging. Daniella writing is full of details and wit. You cannot stop smiling, even though when she is talking about terror attacks at his town and against their neighbors. The book is about two friends that live in opposite sides of the Mediterranean and have two different backgrounds, but despite that, they establish a friendship that lasts for years, and discuss many topics, mainly related to Josep's interests in Judaism, from a Catholic and secular point of view. It is a well written book, full of wit, sarcasm, history, love, intrigue and describes a lovely friendship between two people of a totally different background. Please make my words: You will not regret buying this book.

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? Levi 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.

Imagine you're a young, attractive, Orthodox Israeli journalist and during a visit to Spain you meet a tall, handsome descendant of the Conversos or New Christians, Spanish Jews who were forced to convert to Catholicism during the 14th & 15th centuries rather than being tortured to death. This man, Josep confides to you that he has never met a Jewish person before but is fascinated by all things Jewish. Let the intrigue begin. This is a love story - not a story of romance or fiction - but of a shared, unbroken connection through the centuries, Judaism. Daniella is the teacher. Josep is the student. They correspond, first through letters, then eventually through email. Eventually she marries an Israeli American, has 3 sons, but the lessons continue over the years. A book is born. This is a book of lessons; lessons in Judaism expressed with enlightenment, sensitivity, humor, perplexity and love. Whether you are Jewish, Christian or any other religion, let the learning begin.

This book provides clear insights into the life of Torah-observant Judaism. The author's conversational, friendly tone presents both academic and experiential knowledge in an easy, yet very informative, read. Letters to Josep is a superb book for anyone interested in Jewish life - both Jews and non-Jews alike. I wish I'd had such a book myself when I was beginning my journey of observant Judaism.

The back of the book suggests this is a book for "a curious non-Jew or a Jew hoping to expand your knowledge." I would contend that this is indeed a book for those readers -- but it is something more. One of the nicest experiences for someone who has lived in Israel for a long time is meeting a new immigrant, or even spending time with someone who is visiting, who sees the country with fresh eyes. One of the nicest experiences for a person who has always been religious, or has been religious for a long time, is meeting someone new to Jewish practice, whose eyes are alight with love and fascination for all things Jewish. All of the things that made us fall in love with this place, with this people, with this life -- all is refreshed, like dew on roses, through the love of someone showing it to us again, through new eyes. I have been living a Torah life for nearly 30 years. I love my life -- yet I feel that I am permitted to see Judaism freshly and to love it anew through the prose, humor and wisdom of Daniella Levy, as she explains it to her non-Jewish friend. And -- after thousands of years of knowledge -- there are always new things to learn, which even a seasoned observant Jew might find fascinating. Here is a sample of Daniella's wisdom with wit, explaining a certain practice during the havdalah ceremony that separates the Sabbath from the new week: "...we use the light of the candle to examine our fingernails." No, this is not because we're bored teenage girls. It's because our nails are the only reflective surface on our bodies, and with the flame representing the Divine, we're meant to reflect that light, like the moon reflects the sun. "Curious non-Jews, Jews hoping to expand their knowledge, and Jews who delight in finding ways to rekindle their love affair with their heritage will find this book a wonderful educational tool. Highly recommended reading!

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