

**Tell Me Who You Are**  
**Rabbi Jay M. Stein**  
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When I was twelve years old I was walking with my three brothers and my father to services on Shabbat afternoon. On the way to the synagogue, there was an open field where children used to ride their bikes. On this particular Shabbat afternoon there was a group of children, who, upon seeing us, started throwing rocks and yelling anti-Semitic slurs at us. I was, of course, a little nervous and expected my father to say, "Ignore them and keep walking." To my surprise, my father said the opposite. On this particular afternoon my father said, "Boys, grab a rock and let's go." Now I was really afraid. However, we all followed him saying, "Let it go, forget about it. Leave it alone." but he would hear nothing of it. Well, they got away and we went off to shul. After services and *shabbos* was over, my father got in the car and drove around the neighborhood looking for these children and, guess what, he found one. When he finally caught him, he brought him home to his parents and told them of their son's actions and that they ought to be ashamed of him. Of course they weren't. They had raised this little anti-Semite. So, when he finally got back in the car I asked him, "So, what did you accomplish?" He knew he had not transformed an anti-Semite into a lover of our people. So, all he said was, "I made the statement loud and clear, I am a Jew and I am unafraid. I am child of the Most High, *B'nai Elyon Kulanu* we are children of the Almighty and we are unafraid." Maybe next time that child will think twice about throwing a rock at a Jew. Today I say the same,

"I am a Jew and I am unafraid. I am child of the Most High, *B'nai Elyon Kulanu* we are children of the Almighty and we are unafraid."

The Middle East summit held at Annapolis has now been over for about two weeks and we are beginning to get some perspective. The pundits have voiced their opinions and the editorials have been written. The photo ops have concluded and the parties have made their way home to try and explain what happened and what didn't happen. The most telling comment in all of this is what Israel's Foreign Minister, Tzipi Livni said at the meeting of foreign ministers on Wednesday. She called her Arab counterparts to task for their discriminatory treatment. "Why doesn't anyone want to shake my hand? Why doesn't anyone want to be seen speaking to me?" she asked pointedly - and it is tolerated. Is that an acceptable way to launch a peace process?

Essentially Tzipi Livni stood and said, "I am a Jew and I am unafraid. I am child of the Most High, *B'nai Elyon Kulanu*, we are children of the Almighty and we are unafraid."

The most controversial statement that came out of the conference at Annapolis was when President Bush said there would be a Jewish State alongside a Palestinian State. They are almost willing to tolerate an Israel, but it must stop short of being a Jewish state. As if to say, "Just don't use the word Jewish."

What is wrong with standing proud and saying, "I am Jewish?" Try it! First, under your breath so you can get a feel. But try it, say it. "I am Jewish." Now try the more bold statement. "I am a

Jew.” Try it at lunch in the safety of your home. Try it before you go sleep in the quiet of your bedroom. But either way, get used to saying it.

Joseph, the most successful of his brothers, keeps his Judaism hidden. However, Joseph is never able to express himself. He is so brilliant, so insightful - so insecure. In last week’s parasha, when his brothers ask him, “What do his dreams mean?” he can’t answer.” Clearly, they’re dreams of how great he would become –but why can’t he say it. Both he and his brothers know what they mean, why can’t he say it? In this week’s reading, when the cupbearer recommends Joseph for the task of interpreting Pharaoh’s dream, he says, “This young Jew can do it.” However, Joseph’s name is never said. Then, once Joseph makes his way to the top of Egyptian culture and Pharaoh gives Joseph a new Egyptian name, Joseph just says, “Thank you.” He doesn’t say, “I have a name. It is Joseph - I realize it’s a Jewish name, but I am Jewish.” There is not a single word in any commentary about this name change and how it sat with Joseph – and that is because our history is replete with examples of Jews taking whatever the rest of the world wants to dish out.

In the 70’s, Alex Haley brought to the small screen the groundbreaking mini series, “Roots”. In this depiction, LeVar Burton stars in a remarkable scene where a black slave is given an American name, Toby. He stands up, even to receiving an extraordinary beating, to say, “My name is Kunta Kinte.” You remember it. We sat glued to the TV set, praying he would just submit and go by this new name Toby, but he wouldn’t and the result is unbearable. Defiantly he stood and said, “My name is Kunta Kinte.” Why couldn’t Joseph? Why can’t we? The answer is simple. You see, Pharaoh gave Joseph something his family never gave him. Pharaoh said, “I value you. I see your talent, I see your gifts. I celebrate you.” - and that is enticing, that is attractive -- but it comes with a price tag. I wish he could have found it within himself. I wish we could do the same. I wish we could embrace who we are. I wish we could stand up and say our name. You see, we have nothing to be afraid of.

This week’s reading concludes amidst the interchange between Joseph and his brothers in which Joseph doesn’t refuse to tell his brother who he is. It concludes when Joseph can’t tell his brothers who he is. The story stops right here, because the rabbis want us to ask, “Why doesn’t he just tell them who he is?” To which I answer, “Because he can’t.” He can’t tell his brothers who he is, because he has never been able to get their attention. He has never been able to tell them who he is. Every time he tries to get their attention, they disregard him. They never listen long enough for Joseph to get his name out. So, he learns to hide, never getting his name out. “Just call me whatever you want.” This week’s story ends with us begging Joseph to reveal himself. We want him to tell his brothers and more, we want him to reveal himself to his co-workers. We want him to make the statement

“I am a Jew and I am unafraid. I am child of the Most High, *B’nai Elyon Kulanu* we are children of the Almighty and we are unafraid.”

We are now amidst the holiday of Hanukkah, the holiday that recalls the time when the Maccabees stood up and said, “We are Jewish and we are not going away.” A small band of warriors who stood up to the Greeks said, “We are not going to hide who we are. We are not going to blend into the fabric of Greek culture.” They said it to the outside world and they said it to their fellow Jews.

We don't have to hide in the shadows anymore. We light the candles this week, recalling the moment when the oil lasted longer than we thought it would. Then we place those candles in the window to publicize the miracle, to tell the world that this is a Jewish household. To tell the world," I am Jewish and I am not going to disappear no matter how convenient that might be." Hanukkah is about fighting assimilation. Hanukkah is about identity. It is about saying "I am a Jew and I am unafraid. I am child of the Most High, *B'nai Elyon Kulanu* we are children of the Almighty and we are unafraid."

How many of us hide who we are? How many of us follow the crowd deluding ourselves into thinking that at least we are part of the crowd? How many of us follow the latest fads and trends so that we can fit in. How many of us have the confidence to be who we are to embrace the gifts God has given us, to be unique. How many of us are afraid to become who God intends us to become choosing rather to be someone else. How many of us celebrate who we are? If we can't celebrate who we are yet, how many of us can just acknowledge who we are and appreciate it?

In a few weeks we will read of Joseph's death. When he is about to die he says, "Make sure to take my bones to Israel." While he's alive, he can't be Jewish so he makes his brothers promise that at least in his death he might find his *yiddishkeit*. "I can't be who I want to be while I am alive, it just won't work – but maybe after I am gone I can." Let's not let that happen to us. There is no point to expressing our Judaism after we are gone. Don't let the only mention of your Judaism be in your obituary. Say it now and say it loud.

"I am a Jew and I am unafraid. I am child of the Most High, *B'nai Elyon Kulanu* we are children of the Almighty and we are unafraid."

I have a dear friend who is a recovering alcoholic. The first time I met her I was attending an A.A. meeting that I began in my shul in New Jersey. I just wanted to see if anyone would show up in a synagogue for such a meeting. The first thing I heard Joni say was, "Hi, my name is Joni and I am an alcoholic." When I later asked her, "Why does everyone introduce themselves that way?" she explained that, "Sometimes we just have to say who we are so that we can know who we are."

So, today I ask you to say it. Figure out what we already know and say "I am a Jew and I am unafraid. I am child of the Most High.

I am a Jew and I am unafraid,  
I am a Jew and I am unafraid,  
I am a Jew and I am unafraid.

Conclusion: I am a Jew found in the back of our prayer books on page 392.