

I am a Jew Because.....

There is a beautiful poem in the Reform prayerbook that states beautifully what it means to be a Jew.

The poem, written by Edmond Fleg in 1927, called "Why I am a Jew" declares: "I am a Jew because the faith of Israel demands no abdication of my mind. I am a Jew because the faith of Israel asks every possible sacrifice of my soul. I am a Jew because in all places where there are tears and suffering the Jew weeps. I am a Jew because in every age when the cry of despair is heard the Jew hopes. I am a Jew because the message of Israel is the most ancient and the most modern. I am a Jew because Israel's promise is a universal promise. I am a Jew because for Israel the world is not finished; humanity will complete it. I am a Jew because for Israel humanity is not yet fully created; humanity is creating it. I am a Jew because Israel places humanity and its unity above nations and above Israel itself. I am a Jew because above humanity, image of the divine unity, Israel places the unity which is divine."

These statements weave together both ancient and modern aspects of Jewish tradition to paint a picture of Jewish meaning and purpose that resonates on many levels and is still as relevant today as it was when it was written. A few ideas stand out in particular:

I am a Jew because the message of Israel is the most ancient and the most modern - Judaism is, I would argue, the deepest and most comprehensive body of spiritual and ethical wisdom ever devised. Over the course of more than three thousand years our ancestors struggled with the intricacies of human existence and the mysteries of the divine through prayer, study and ritual. It is an incomparable source of wisdom and guidance on how to live a life of meaning and purpose that is grounded in millennia of tradition and yet continues to be creative and dynamic in adapting to the realities of our modern world.

I am a Jew because in every age when the cry of despair is heard the Jew hopes - Despite so much tragedy in our history we have always maintained a sense of hope, a commitment not just to be hopeful for ourselves but to be a light unto the nations. As a people we are an example to all people and individuals of how to keep hope alive in dark times, to maintain hope despite all that may be arrayed against us and thus inspire all to maintain a sense of purpose no matter the

challenges we face.

I am a Jew because above humanity, image of the divine unity, Israel places the unity which is divine. I am a Jew because for Israel the world is not finished; humanity will complete it – Our modern world can often be bereft of a sense of purpose and meaning. That is what so many yearn for, so many continue to search for, and so few find. Judaism reminds us that our existence is not selfish or bereft of meaning. There is meaning all around us, in every act we take, every blade of grass, every smile, and the more we learn of our tradition the more we will be open to that reality and that purpose. And for so many, searching for meaning, Judaism clearly and unequivocally gives an ultimate purpose for us all – to recognize the brokenness of the world and to be partners with G-d in the task of fixing it one act at a time.

Rabbi Ilan Emanuel