

Questions and Answers with Miranda Portnoy,
Author of *Making Meaning Out of Madness: A Jewish Journey* and
Cinder Oy-la! How a Jewish Scapegoat Becomes a Princess

Q 1) Why did you publish essays along with your memoir in *Making Meaning Out of Madness: A Jewish Journey*?

The essay “Solving the Jewish Mystery” makes a persuasive case for the truth of the Torah, written by and for the non-scholar of Torah. The second essay “Two Orthodox Jews, Three Opinions” reinforces the arguments. These essays are crucial elements of my message. However, I knew that no one would read such pieces by a debut author unless I first captivated them with a story. Therefore, I chose to bare my own journey to Torah, though it sacrificed my dignity somewhat, in order to help my fellow Jews recognize the truth.

My life is a snapshot, if you will, of the journey of the Jewish people: get knocked silly, return to my God, receive transcendental blessing. I desperately wanted to both beckon and warn my Jewish brothers and sisters in the West of the danger that lies ahead of pursuing their route of utopianism without God. We have seen it over and over again in history, most recently in the Shoah. Read *Why the Jews? The Reason for Anti-Semitism* by Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin (2003 Touchstone edition), pp. 42-52, for a painfully sharp analysis of the phenomenon. By sharing my story, I’m inviting my fellow Jews to follow in my footsteps, for their own good, out of my helpless love for them.

My Jewish sisters and brothers are victims of the worldwide conspiracy to rob the Jewish people of its legacy. In truth, they are unwitting partners to this conspiracy because passively accepting its premises (that there is no God and the Torah is a book of myth or that Christians have replaced Jews in the biblical covenant) relieves them of responsibility.

I am here to say that self-empowerment comes from embracing the duties of the covenant and its privileges. Honestly, our *privileges* in this life are primarily personal and spiritual. Yet poll after poll reveals that the Jews who are fulfilling the biblical covenant are the happiest in the world, no matter their socioeconomic circumstances. There is no greater joy than knowing you are manifesting your purpose in the world.

Ultimately, this is the sole route that will protect Jews from antisemitism. Antisemitism is just one tool by which God awakens the Jewish people to their identity, duty, and destiny in the world. We ignore these signs of increasing antisemitism at our own peril.

Q 2) Why are you releasing two books based on your memoir?

I wanted the widest possible distribution of my story among the Jewish people. I felt the memoir alone (*Cinder Oy-la!*) would speak to young women who face diminished choices for the fulfillment of their deepest desires today. Owing to the deterioration of trust between the sexes amid the “hookup” culture, statistically, *most* young women can look forward to loneliness and, at best, single-motherhood. What a tragedy!

In addition to stimulating careers, most women still want marriage and motherhood, the most durably fulfilling roles. My story teaches them there is another way to achieve the satisfaction in love and life they are looking for. It involves abandoning the

premises and practices of the sexual revolution, and instead, cultivating self-respect, self-restraint, and fidelity to one's values. These allow one to find that ultimate partner in life with whom to forge an enduring commitment and lasting love.

In *Making Meaning Out of Madness: A Jewish Journey*, I chose to pair my story with essays to give food for thought to adult Jews of every age. The essays expand the purview of my story to include the most fundamental questions of any era: Is there a God? Are the Jews bound by the biblical covenant? What is the evidence for these premises? What puzzling contemporary worldwide political activities can be explained by the Jews' relationship to that eternal covenant?

Q 3) What drives you to engage in this effort?

I am broken-hearted for most of my fellow Jews who don't realize that they're more than just *muggles*. They have the power to heal this troubled world, which is unraveling daily, by starting with themselves. They are the key to turning the whole deterioration around.

They also don't realize how satisfying and enjoyable it is. Given the time, energy, and resources, who wouldn't want to get dressed up and host a dinner party every week for enjoyment of delicious food, stimulating company, and deep, meaningful talks? Who wouldn't want to return to an island of peaceful restoration every week, from this dizzyingly disorienting world of ours? Who wouldn't want to forge closer relationships with his or her loved ones and friends, and have the time and opportunity to do so? That is Shabbat.

Furthermore, who wouldn't want to receive the wisest guidance for navigating our increasingly treacherous world and enjoy the support, pleasure, and comfort of a personal relationship with a Creator Who forged us in love? And finally, who wouldn't relish the opportunity to create that utopian world we all long for, within our families, our community, and ourselves? This personal utopia, paradoxically, is what will bring the worldwide peace and harmony my fellow nonobservant Jews are striving to bring with all their hearts.

Q 4) What was the impetus for starting this project?

As soon as my husband and I became engaged, I felt sure my story would inspire others. My husband is a wonderful man from a prestigious, learned Orthodox family, while I am a survivor of postmodern secular chaos. My story proves there is a God, because I only merited marrying him and building a Jewish home and family together for the good that I did in secret, with God as my only witness. That ought to give people hope! None of the good that we do goes unnoticed.

Q 5) What was it like to write down your life story and then see it in print?

Enduring years of disorienting ADD, I gravitated to compulsive note taking to cope. It was gratifying to see those voluminous notes serve my manuscript, as I carefully reconstructed my past from those records.

As anyone who has weathered serious adversity can tell you, it is sublimely satisfying to be able to help others and prevent the suffering that we ourselves might have

experienced. I hope and pray that indeed my story saves others from heartache and pain. I rebuilt myself through writing my memoir and fulfilled what I felt was my duty. That is so rewarding. Moreover, if I succeed in attracting one Jew back to his or her tradition, I will be happy for the rest of my life.

Q 6) Why are you publishing under a pseudonym?

While I may not be completely free of residual bitterness about my past, I do not seek to hurt or get back at the villains in my story, including members of my own family. I treasure my privacy and now, thank God, have children to protect. None of these considerations dissuaded me, however, from honoring my responsibility to my fellow Jew.

When I was first a student of Torah, more than two decades ago, I learned that one interpretation of the commandment to love your fellow Jew as you love yourself (Lev. 19:18) involves helping other Jews achieve the same satisfaction and success in life as we ourselves have achieved. That is, we are required to go out of our way to enable other Jews to enjoy our own blessings. These works are my labor of love for my fellow Jew.

Q 7) What makes you qualified to teach anyone about Torah if you have no formal credentials?

A good question. I have only my common sense, my passion, and my will to help my fellow Jew. I do seek supervision from those with far greater authority than I have before I assert anything that is not patently obvious from two decades plus of living as a mitzvah-observant Jew in Israel.

There is a Hassidic teaching that when you know “aleph,” the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and your fellow Jew doesn’t know “aleph,” you must teach “aleph.” I am teaching what I can, to beginners. My website resource page has links for Jewish beginners and intermediates to locate classes given by learned teachers as well as free peer Torah learning partners. Go and learn, and may the whole world open up before you!