I Am Jewish
By Andrew Lustig, ©2011

Performance Transcript*

1:05 I am the collective pride and excitement that is felt when we find out that that new actor, that great athlete, his chief of staff ... is Jewish

1:15 And I am the collective guilt and shame that is felt when we find out that that serial killer, that Ponzi schemer, that wife beater ... is Jewish

1:25 I am the Jewish star tattooed on the chest of the teenager who chooses to rebel against his parents' and grandparents' warnings of a lonely goyim cemetery by embracing that same Judaism and making permanent his Jewish identity

1:40 I am all the words in Yiddish I've been called all my life that I still don't understand

1:44 I am going to all three Phish shows this weekend

1:48 I am my melody of Adon Olam. I am my melody of Adon Olam. The words may be the same, but I am my melody of Adon Olam

1:56 I am not getting Bar Mitzvahed ... I am a Bar Mitzvah

2:00 I am a concept foreign to the rest of the world. I am not Judaism. I am sleep-away camp

2:05 I am your grandmother who's seen Chortkov and Auschwitz, who's seen '49, '67 and '73 and who's tired of trying to make peace with those people who just want to blow up buses and destroy her people

2:18 I am the nineteen-year-old who's seen Budrus, Don't Mess with the Zohan, and Waltz with Bashir and who thinks -- who knows -- peace is possible

2:26 I am the complicated reason you take the cheese off the burger you eat at the Saturday morning tailgate

2:32 I am constantly struggling to understand my Jewish identity outside of religion

2:39 I am the Torah and not the Old Testament

2:42 I am a Kippah and not a Skullcap

2:44 I am a Jew and not an Israeli ... 5,000 years old, not 60 ... a religion, not a country

continued
I'm never asked if I have horns or a pot of gold, if I rule the world or why I killed Jesus. I am asked where my black hat is, if I really get eight presents on my Christmas, why my sideburns aren't super long, and if I've really never tried bacon.

I'm asked what a Gefilte Fish is. I say, "I don't know. I don't like it. Nobody does. But we eat it because it's what we do."

I'm asked if my dad's a lawyer. I say "No ... my mom is ... my dad's an accountant."

I am asked if my grandparents were in the Holocaust, as if it was a movie. "Yeah, they were. But luckily they were also on Schindler's List."

I am on JDate and not Match.com because, well ... it's just easier that way.

I'm that feeling of obligation to buy the Dead Sea salt at the mall kiosk because you know the woman's Israeli.

I'm an IDF sweatshirt and the Chai around your neck.

I'm a hundred-dollar challah cover that you will never use and a five-shekel piece of red string that you will wear until it withers away.

I am your Hebrew name.

I am your Israeli cousins.

I am your Torah portion and your thirteen candles.

I am your Bat Mitzvah dress and the cute Israeli soldier on your Birthright trip.

I am eighteen when I discover that Israel is not actually a Garden of Eden, of milk and honey where Jews of all backgrounds, ethnicities, and styles of worship come together, eternally happy and appreciative, to do a constant Hora in the streets of the Holy Land ... I am still confident that it will be.

I am the way your stomach forgets to be hungry and your lungs forget to breathe when the Rabbi commands the final Tekiah Gedolah and an entire congregation -- a congregation that is not any one synagogue but an entire people -- listens to what on January first is a ball dropping in Times Square, but today -- any day in late September or early October for the 5,770th time is a Ram's horn being blown into for what seems like ten minutes, like the eight days the oil burned, and how David defeated Goliath, and how Moses parted the seas ... it would have been enough, Dayenu. How we won the war, and how your grandparents survived, Nes Gadol Hayah Sham, Shana Tova. Time for bagels and lox because I am Jewish. [5:02]