

# Giving Up America

by Pearl Abraham

---



## About the Book

With her highly praised debut novel, *The Romance Reader*, **Pearl Abraham** gave readers their first insider's glimpse of the Hasidic world from a female perspective and sensitively depicted the inner life of a young woman entering adulthood. In **Giving Up America**, Abraham directs her unerring and compassionate understanding of character to the subject of marriage, as she takes us further in exploring the differences in cultures and values of Hasidic and secular American life.

When Deena decides to marry Daniel, who is an Orthodox Jew, Deena's father, a Hasidic scholar, opposes the marriage for Kabbalistic reasons: the numbers assigned to the Hebrew letters in their names add up to form the word "pain." Yet their marriage appears to be blessed. Together, they are restoring an old house, their dream house. Then Daniel brings home from work a young Southerner, who is training for the Miss America pageant, and her best friend. Soon cracks in the foundation of their marriage appear, throwing into question the values Deena grew up with and the notion of what "home" means.

Elle described *The Romance Reader* as "that rare work of fiction, both a coming-of-age story and a brave, beautifully rendered exposé of a hidden, insular world." With her new novel, Pearl Abraham makes good on Kirkus Reviews' promise that she is "a writer to watch": **Giving Up America** is a novel that puts her on the map as a writer who has arrived.

## Discussion Guide

1. In what ways are Daniel and Deena well suited to each other despite their religious differences? What are those differences? Does Judaism provide them a common ground for them or are their beliefs more dissimilar than similar?
2. How does the prophecy with which the book opens influence your reading of **Giving Up America**? Compare it to the

influence it has on the marriage.

3. Does the epigraph of the novel—"And God said to Avram: Go to yourself from your land, from the country of your birth, and from the house of your father, to a land that I will show you"—relate to Deena's experience? What purpose does Abraham's journey away from his family have? Can it be compared to Deena's journey? Can you think of other literary journeys with similar purposes? Discuss the personal journeys of the other characters and whether they are successful or not.
4. Do you think Deena should have confronted Daniel earlier, when she first noticed signs of his interest in Jill? Did Deena's continued support of Daniel's friendship with Jill suggest to you that she may have wanted something to happen?
5. How do the quotes from *Miracle at Philadelphia* inform *Giving Up America*? Why is Paul Herz's story of interest to Deena?
6. Going home after having been away for several years, at college, for example, is a formative experience for many people. How is Deena's visit similar to such visits? How is it different?
7. Discuss the various metaphors in the novel—running, renovating a house, America—and how they function.
8. What does the book's title, "**Giving Up America**," mean in the context of the novel? What might "America" represent? In what ways does Deena give up America?
9. Daniel doesn't have a voice in the story until almost the last third of the novel. How does his voice affect you as a reader? Is his experience a formative journey too?
10. Deena's father claims that "Orthodoxy without the delight of Hasidism . . . is a very dry thing" (p. 38). Can you find instances in the book that prove or disprove his claim?

## Author Bio

Pearl Abraham grew up in a Hasidic family, with Yiddish her primary language. She is the author of *The Romance Reader*, an international bestseller, and now teaches creative writing at New York University. She lives in New York City.

---

## Giving Up America

by Pearl Abraham

**Publication Date:** September 1, 1999

**Mass Market Paperback:** 320 pages

**Publisher:** Riverhead Trade

**ISBN-10:** 1573227528

**ISBN-13:** 9781573227520