

was born in London in 1973, a member of a wealthy liberal family that arrived in England in 1968 from Lahore, Pakistan, a graduate of the London School of Economics, a British citizen who still holds a British passport. In the story of his life, in the mixture of ideology, culture and unbridled brutality that characterize him, he reminds Levy of Carlos, the murderous terrorist of the 1970s. The abduction of Pearl was not his first: Sheikh kidnapped four British citizens and one American, and threatened to decapitate them if his spiritual guide, Maulana Azhar Masud, a fanatic ideologue who had been arrested eight years earlier in India for terrorist activity in the area of Kashmir, was not released.

After their release by the Indian police, the hostages said in interviews that Sheikh is a paradoxical personality, a mixture of inner calm and bestial cruelty. He played chess, read "Mein Kampf," cursed the Jews and the Shi'ites, but made sure to apologize to the hostages when he nonchalantly described to them what would happen to them. Omar Sheikh was arrested in India, and sentenced to eight years in prison. He was released, together with Azhar Masud, on December 13, 1999, after his partners in the extremist organization Jaish-e- Mohammed (Army of Mohammed, or JEM), hijacked an Indian Airlines plane, decapitated one of the passengers, and threatened the other 155 passengers with a similar fate. During the years 2000-2001 Sheikh visited Afghanistan several times, met with Osama bin Laden, and even offered his financial talents to Al-Qaida in order to help with the planning of the September 11 attack. According to Levy's investigation, Sheikh's connection with the Pakistani secret service began already during the period of his arrest in India, and it was they who helped Al-Qaida with the hijacking that led to his release.

With the aid of forged diplomatic papers, Levy even managed to penetrate Binori-Town, the Islamic study institute in Karachi where well-known fundamentalists have been educated, including Sheikh himself, and where Sheikh spent the last night before Pearl's execution. In Binori-Town, Azhar Masud announced the establishment of the JEM brigades, which supplied the best soldiers to Al-Qaida. After the fall of Kabul, many of the fighters who had escaped to Pakistan found refuge there. There is a theory that bin Laden himself recovered from an injury in Binori-Town, under the nose of the Pakistani police, and there he also filmed the videotape of November 12, 2002, in which he mentioned the attacks in Djerba, Bali and Moscow.

Levy writes of Binori-Town: "I know, I feel that there is a kind of central furnace here, the engine room of the organization: In the middle of Pakistan, a few hundred meters from the American consulate, a Taliban or post-Taliban pocket to which bin-Ladenists retreated; the worst of Afghanistan."

Levy's thesis is that Daniel Pearl was murdered because he was about to reveal the fact that Pakistani scientists with radical Islamic views were about to supply weapons of mass destruction to Al-Qaida.

According to Levy, Pakistan is "the most thuggish of all the thuggish countries in the world." He claims that a kind of "black hole" has been created between Islamabad and Karachi, compared to which Saddam Hussein's Baghdad is nothing but an outdated weapons arsenal.

Pearl apparently was on the track of 61-year-old Dr. Sultan Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud, a famous Pakistani scientist, who built the plant for the production of plutonium, and headed the Pakistani Nuclear Energy Commission until 1999. He was in close contact with Al-Qaida, and even met with bin Laden in Kandahar in early August, 2001. Together with Hamid Gul, the chief of the Pakistani secret service, who claims that the Pakistani nuclear bomb belongs to all of Islam, Mahmud continues to cooperate with Al-Qaida. Daniel Pearl discovered that the two of them, the scientist and the general, were in Kabul in late August 2001, and that these trips apparently did not take place without the knowledge of the Pakistani government. Pearl was about to reveal all these connections, and paid with his life.

"In these cities there is an atmosphere of apocalypse, and I am convinced that Danny sensed it," writes Levy.

The preface to the book was written in April, 2003, at the conclusion of the fighting in Iraq. "I could not, and still cannot, think about anything except the fact that the Iraqi war, beyond the political and human price that it is exacting, beyond the dead civilians, ... testifies to a unique mistake in historical calculation. The government was disarmed, while in the remote neighborhoods of Pakistan, trade in nuclear secrets is being conducted," writes Levy.

Levy considers Pearl's murder, along with the events of 9/11 and the murder of General Masud, one of the most significant and influential events affecting the future of the century. But the murder also apparently enables him to see his own life as a Jew in Europe in a different perspective. In a speech he made here a year ago, when he received an honorary doctorate from Tel Aviv University, he defined himself as "a European Jewish intellectual, anchored in European values, who - as Stefan Zweig wrote in a famous letter to Martin Buber - has always believed in 'the painful and praiseworthy view of the Diaspora,' and never saw in this situation, of being-a-Jew in the Diaspora, a bitter fate or strangeness."

Like Daniel Pearl, who was forced to admit in front of the murderers' cameras that his father is Jewish, his mother is Jewish and he himself is Jewish, Levy was also asked in the course of the investigation he conducted all over Pakistan to which religion he belongs.

"I'm an atheist," replied Levy, in the hornets' nest of Binori-Town. He doesn't expand on his true feeling during those moments, as a Jew whose life was at risk because of his Jewishness. Because the book, aside from the very important factual revelations it contains, actually deals with a subject that has