

## **A Jewish Girl Finds Jesus**

Submitted by Bobbie Dreier, February 2003

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Every year as far back as I can remember I went to the synagogue for the whole day with my dad on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. I sat in the back in the women’s gallery with my grandmother. Like Jews all over the world we went to pray for forgiveness from God for all our sins against him, to repent and be released from some unknown punishment. We prayed and we fasted all day long. If God was merciful we were inscribed in the Book of Life for another year. I never knew exactly what would happen if we weren’t inscribed, but I guessed that the people who died that year had not been forgiven.

Judaism is a religion that is based on the law, the law of God presented to Moses at Mount Sinai. Many Jewish people think of God as the Lord God of Israel. He is a just God and he expects his law to be followed. When God is disobeyed, he is fearful and punishing. Did he not banish Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and subject women forever after to pain in childbirth, turn Lot’s wife to a pillar of salt and destroy all life on the earth except for Noah’s family and an arkful of animals? And on Passover Jews praise God for sending devastating plagues on the Egyptians including the destruction of their first born sons. The Old Testament is filled with the stories of God’s laws and his wrath.

In Paper 96, “Yahweh-God of the Hebrews,” a Melchizedek of Nebadon tells us that in spite of Moses’s valiant efforts to assure the fleeing Hebrews that God loved them and would not forsake or destroy them, they were also told during a cataclysmic volcanic explosion of Mount Sinai that “their God was mighty, terrible, a devouring fire, and all-powerful.” (96:4.5,6) Although there is much evidence of a God who loves his people in the Old Testament, the idea of a just and powerful God is the one that persists. The Ten Commandments given to Moses at Mount Sinai are mostly “Thou shalt nots” and the Mosaic law consists of 613 laws that Orthodox Jews obey to this day. The traditions are very powerful and I grew up imagining a bearded king in the clouds who was watching me and waiting for me to slip up.

I always had a deep consciousness of my Jewishness. I was culturally conditioned and thought I was religious. My dad had an orthodox Jewish upbringing and a very strong Jewish identity. He wanted my mother to keep the orthodox religious traditions at home that he had grown up with. Some of those included “keeping the Sabbath holy,” lighting Sabbath candles and keeping a kosher home. “Keeping kosher” involves a strict set of dietary laws requiring separate silverware, dishes and cookware for meat meals and dairy meals. It is forbidden to eat milk products and meat together because of a Mosaic law which states: “Thou shalt not eat the flesh of a kid in its mothers milk.” There is also a long list of forbidden foods including pork products and shellfish. My mom didn’t light Sabbath candles or keep a kosher home but we ate no pork or shrimp, never had milk products and meat together, and I saw my dad get violently ill after he learned that a roasted chicken he had eaten was basted in butter. He believed with all his heart that he should spend the Sabbath at the synagogue (the Fifth Commandment says: “Remember

the Sabbath to keep it holy”) but he was employed as a retail merchant in a children’s clothing store, and Saturday was the busiest shopping day. The stores were closed on Sunday so Christians could go to church but Saturday was a work day. Like Matadormus and the Jews of old, he was raised to believe that wealth was the token of God’s favor. He believed he never prospered because he disobeyed God by not keeping the Sabbath.

My dad was sixteen when he came to America from Poland with his mother on a steamship in steerage with one bag. They had lived in a little village called Kowel. (I imagine it to be something like Tevya’s village.) His grandfather was a traveling rabbi and there was great joy in the village when he was home. He went to the synagogue schools, spoke Yiddish and Hebrew at home and Polish in public. He told me how he had been taunted and abused by soldiers who often rode through the village. He never knew if they were Polish, Russian or German, but he believed they were Christians. They shouted, “Christ-killer” “Jud de Palestina”(Jew – go to Palestine) as they passed, and they often cut off the beards of the old men with their swords. When he was very young he saw one of them cut off part of his grandfather’s chin with his sword. He learned to spit three times when he passed a church “tu-tu-tu.” He lived in fear of Christians.

He knew first hand of rampant anti-Semitism, he experienced the persecution generated by Jew-hating Poles, Russians and Germans, and continued hearing about the pogroms in Europe from relatives who managed to get out by the late 30s. Hitler’s “final solution” to the elimination of the Jews resulted in the horrors of the Holocaust and my dad and most of the people he knew lost many family members. It was very important to him that his children maintained the faith and survived as Jews.

When my parents were able to buy their first house it was in what they called a “non-Jewish” neighborhood. I was the only Jewish kid in the school. I knew so little about Christianity that I missed getting 100% on a language test because I answered that the gender of the word “monk” could be male or female. I thought “monk” was a short way of saying monkey. In class we celebrated Easter by decorating eggs to take home and Christmas by making decorations and gifts for our families. All my friends went to church on Sunday. Celebrating Christian holidays seemed perfectly normal to me. But not to my dad.

So he made sure I spent a lot of time at the synagogue. After school on Tuesdays and Thursdays I went to Hebrew School, on Friday nights we went to the Sabbath service, on Saturdays I went to “Junior Congregation” while the adults who were off on Saturday were in the synagogue, and on Sundays I went to Sunday School. I learned to read and write Hebrew phonetically so I could participate in the rituals of the synagogue service. They were conducted in Hebrew and I participated fully – without ever understanding a word. I also wrote “Merry Christmas” phonetically in Hebrew on the chalkboard when my third grade teacher was doing a lesson on how Christmas was celebrated in other lands. It didn’t occur to me that Jews in Israel didn’t say “Merry Christmas.” I engaged in many mindless rituals, which unlike Jesus, I didn’t question. As prescribed, I kissed the mezuzah (a religious object on the doorpost of Jewish homes) and said to myself: “The Lord shall preserve our going out and our coming in, from this time forth and even forevermore.” (124:4.7) I never wrote out the word God because it was forbidden. I wrote G-d. I wore a Jewish star around my neck and studied to become a “daughter

of the covenant” (a bat mitzvah) when I was thirteen. I learned all the Old Testament Bible Stories and believed they were true. I’m embarrassed that when I was in a ninth grade biology class and the teacher asked how life began I unhesitatingly said: “with Adam and Eve.”

At the time I thought that doing those things was my religion. I realize now, however, that my experience of being Jewish was more social, cultural and political than religious. My Hebrew School lessons were filled with politics. I was totally immersed in the excitement when Israel officially became the Jewish homeland. The Jews finally had a home, a land where they would be free from persecution. And my studies were filled with morality. I developed sense of righteousness and of guilt and duty. I was a good student because the high value Jews placed on education was always evident. My parents sacrificed many pleasures to save enough money to put three kids through college. I enjoyed celebrating all the holidays with family and participated in all the events at the synagogue. My father’s hope was that I would maintain the traditions, become a leader in the Jewish community, perhaps the head of a national Jewish women’s organization. I was happy with my life and my religion. The problem was that I knew nothing about who God really was, nothing about the spirit within, nothing about doing God’s will, and I thought about him only when I was doing something wrong.

One Christmas I went to a church service at midnight with a friend. We were seated at the front of a balcony. The service was unfamiliar, but magical and I was totally engaged. Suddenly the preacher was looking at me and shouting: “Have you been saved? Have you taken Jesus as your Lord and Master?” And then he was yelling: “Come down, confess your sins and take Jesus as your savior.” I thought he was talking directly to me and I was scared out of my mind. I wondered how he knew I was Jewish and that I didn’t believe in Jesus.

Of course, I was not about to believe in Jesus. Like Mary and Joseph up to the time Jesus was twelve years old, I could never have “even faintly dreamed that Jesus was indeed and in truth the actual creator of this local universe of things and beings (124:4.4) Jewish people just don’t believe in Jesus as divine. First of all, the belief in one God is a certainty in Judaism. Jews KNOW that there simply are not any other gods, especially one who died on a cross and came back to life in three days. They obey the First Commandment: “I am the Lord thy God and thou shalt have no other gods before me.” In fact, as Urantia Book readers know the belief in one God is the revelation of Melchizedek and the legacy of Abraham and Moses. The most important Jewish prayer, the Sh’ma, (“Sh’ma Yisrael, Adonoi Elohaynu, Adonoi Echad - Hear Oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one”) is the first prayer that is taught to Jewish children and the last one uttered before one dies. It is repeated many times daily at synagogue services all over the world. It was certainly repeated by Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth and in the Temple at Jerusalem. The “Sh’ma” was the answer Jesus gave to one of the Pharisees who while trying to entrap him asked: “Which is the greatest commandment?” Jesus answered: “There is but one commandment, and that one is the greatest of all, and that commandment is: ”Hear Oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one...” (174:4.2)

Secondly, “Jesus” is kind of a bad word in most Jewish households. The persecutions during the Spanish Inquisition, the Crusades, the pogroms, the Holocaust, widespread anti-Semitism – much of the suffering that Jews have experienced is in some way laid at the feet of Jesus. They make no distinction between Christianity and Jesus. And finally, there is the feeling of the need

to perpetuate the race. Today the Jewish population is approximately 13.5 million and some fear that the downward trend indicates that Jews may disappear in a few generations. Jews fear assimilation, intermarriage and especially conversion to Christianity.

No, I was not about to believe in Jesus. But I had lots of Christian friends and I liked everybody. It never occurred to me to think who was Jewish and who was not. However, it concerned my parents that I was dating “gentiles.” In spite of their constant efforts to make me go out with Jewish boys I liked the Italian boys and my dad was very worried that I would fall in love and marry a non-Jewish man. His concern was so great that he uprooted our family and moved to a town that was not “restricted” and had a sizable Jewish population. There I would likely meet a nice Jewish boy and get married. I did! I met Steve almost immediately and six years later we had a big Jewish wedding.

So how did I come to see Jesus as divine? I was involved in Jewish organizations and on the way to fulfilling my earthly father’s dream. I believed I was Cinderella and I had married the prince. But our early years together were very difficult. In the first year Steve’s dad died suddenly and tragically and we became responsible for his despondent mom and sixteen year old sister. I had intended to teach while Steve finished graduate school, but we had an unplanned baby and I was unable to continue teaching full-time. I found my mother in law to be very emotionally needy and demanding, and I was young and immature and didn’t handle things well. There was lots of conflict and sadness and life was not the fairy tale I had imagined it would be.

I was confused, unhappy and not coping well, but Steve was searching. He was searching for meaning and he was searching for truth. For many years he had studied philosophers and truth seekers, explored many paths and contemplated the meaning of life. I went along for the ride, but solutions to our problems were not forthcoming and the quality of life didn’t improve very much. And then he found and began to read The Urantia Book and I saw a significant emotional change in him that seemed very real. In spite of all the chaos and conflict around us, he was peaceful. And it lasted, and I knew he had found something really important. So in spite of the fact that the book had something to do with Jesus (and the idea frightened me very much) I began to read it too. And it was in the pages of The Urantia Book that I first found Jesus.

At first I saw that there was much about his young life that I could relate to personally. Like me, as a child he lived in a place that was more gentile than Jewish and spent lots of time in the synagogue. He engaged in the same rituals (although he questioned their meanings, which I never did) and celebrated the same Jewish holidays. He celebrated Hannukah, the Festival of Lights commemorating the dedication of the Temple after the victory of the Macabbees; Purim, the feast of Esther and Israel’s deliverance through her; Passover, the commemoration of the escape from Egypt and the sparing of Jewish first born sons; Succoth, the feast of the first fruits and the harvest ingathering; and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Like most Jewish boys he was circumcised eight days after birth, and like Steve, and our son Marc, who were first born sons like Jesus, he was ritually redeemed from sacrifice in a temple ceremony. At thirteen, like Jewish boys the world over, when Jesus graduated from the course of training at the synagogue he was pronounced a “son of the commandment” (bar mitzvah). This is a very big occasion today for most Jewish boys.

When his mother joined him on his Passover trip to the Temple for his consecration as a son of the commandment she was made to sit in the women's gallery. I remembered the little synagogue where I sat in the back balcony with my grandmother. Women took no part in the religious life of the Jews in Jesus' time, and are still segregated from the men in Orthodox synagogues today. For almost 4000 years when orthodox men recite the morning prayer, they have prayed: "Blessed art thou the Eternal Our God, King of the Universe who hath not made me a woman." Jesus' treatment of women shocked the apostles, but "he made it very clear to them that women were to be accorded equal rights with men in the kingdom." (138:8.11) As a young man, in spite of the fact "that girls of Jewish families received little education, Jesus maintained that they should go to the same school as boys, and since the synagogue school would not receive them he conducted a home school especially for [his sisters.]" (127:1.5) That endeared him to me.

He openly and graciously shared his relationship with his Father in heaven. He knew him to be kind and compassionate, loving and merciful, a Father who loved each of his children personally and affectionately. It was so different from my vision of a powerful God of judgment and anger. I loved when he had his little talks with him. I began to try it myself instead of mindlessly repeating the 23rd Psalm or the "Our Father." God didn't talk back to me, but I began to realize that he was there, and that he was my friend – not my judge. I began to love God instead of fear him, and ask him what he wanted me to do, and not be afraid to do it. I began to have a relationship with God and Jesus was teaching me how, and when I was in doubt about what God wanted, Jesus was there to show me the way. He was the way.

Because of him my marriage improved. I realized that if there were problems to solve I needed to look inside myself for the power of goodness to make the changes, not to the supposed wrongdoer. The story of Jesus and Anaxand in Caesarea made a profound impact on me. My son Marc doesn't know it, but I became a more competent and caring mother by learning from Jesus who was the master parent to his brothers and sisters. Because of Jesus I became a better teacher. I noticed that my teaching was changing. I began to look more for the children's motives than at their behavior. I tried to give them what they needed before they asked rather than as a reward for good behavior.

His fatherly treatment of aggressors helped me to see aggressive parents at school in a new way. Our district had been accused of "institutional racism" and white teachers were under scrutiny and attack by many black parents. One day I was summoned to meet with a single mom who had just moved to town and whose son was to be in my class. She pointed her finger at me and yelled threateningly, "I know about this district and I know the law and I don't expect my son to get a fair shake and I'll be watching you." It was a scary moment, my heart was pounding, and I took a deep breath and prayed: "Help me Father," and then I heard myself say to her, "Nickolas is one lucky boy to have an advocate like you in his corner. I can't imagine what my life would have been like if my mom cared about me the way you care about him." She was completely disarmed and we became friends and partners in Nickolas' education. I realized later it was the Spirit of Truth speaking and I knew then for the first time what it meant that Jesus would always be with me in times of trouble. And he is.

My dad didn't have to worry. I am a Jew. Belief in the divinity of Jesus is not conversion to Christianity. It is a deepening of faith in God. Jesus kept all that was fine and beautiful in the Jewish teachings and enlarged the concept of God's nature through his life. He asked his followers to believe with him, not in him. I was inspired by his teachings but I was won over by the life he lived. Jesus' love is irresistible. He was God's love revealed and is the most beautiful personal expression of God on earth. Because of him I know I am a beloved child of God. And that's simply divine!

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