

Jews for Judaism® Lifeline

KEEPING JEWS JEWISH

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2795 Bathurst Street • Box 41032 • Toronto • Ontario • Canada • M6B 4J6 • (905) 761-0040

THANKS TO JEWS FOR JUDAISM...

I'M BACK HOME

Sam Levine used to go to church on Sundays. Today, he's Rabbi Shmuel Levine, a head rabbi at a rabbinical college in the city of Jerusalem.

Photo: Jerry Trompeter • jtrompeter@hotmail.com

By Rabbi Shmuel Levine*

There I was, in my freshman year at Haverford College, Pennsylvania, checking my mail while surrounded by some friends. What an embarrassment! I opened up a brightly coloured flyer inviting me to a Shabbat at the Hillel House which hauntingly asked, "Are you Jewish?"

Extremely embarrassed at being suspected of belonging to the most backward minority

sector of society, I quickly crumbled up the flyer. Finally, I got up the guts to sever the artificial relationship with G-d that I had maintained for many years. In my heart, I cut my ties.

Upon making this decision, I had a penetrating vision that my soul, symbolized as a bright star not too far away, was suddenly fleeing from me, becoming dimmer and

dimmer. Finally at the age of 18, I resolved to stop being a hypocrite and to accept the fact that I had no connection with G-d and furthermore, no connection with Judaism. To really appreciate my story, let me take you back a few years and give you a little background.

Ever since I was eight years old, I learned how to read Hebrew at the local Hebrew

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I'M BACK HOME

Continued from page 1



school, and every night before going to sleep, I recited, “Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad.” With childhood purity, I would converse with G-d. I did all the talking and all the imaginative work of filling my mind with His replies to all the important points I raised. I asked G-d to prevent my stuffed animals from fighting with each other, to help me to sleep well and to give me the strength to win the fights with my friends the following day.

I continued this practice until the age of 13 when I wanted more of an intellectual approach to Judaism. I had a lot of questions and unfortunately, the best thing that my local rabbi could offer was Herman Wouk's, *This is My G-d*. I enjoyed the first few pages but quickly descended into boredom because this book was not intended for an intellectually gifted 13-year old.

So for the next five years, I didn't talk with Hashem. However, whether motivated by fear, or some intrinsic connection to my heritage, I continued to say, “Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad,” every night before going to sleep. But now, at the age of 18, being a

mature, intelligent young man attending one of the best liberal arts colleges in the nation, I could no longer continue this spiritually and emotionally empty bedtime ritual. “Shema” stops now!

Freshman year was great and wild. No connection to Judaism, no guilt trips — just free sailing! However, sophomore year began with two blows. First, my beloved grandmother who was somewhat religious passed away. Then, I broke up with my gentile girlfriend in a most unpleasant way, to put it mildly.

So there I was, feeling quite alone and very much in need of connection. Maybe because of my grandmother's connection with Judaism, I decided to re-examine Judaism and attend Shabbat services at the campus Hillel House. Unfortunately, with the electric guitar in the background and people seemingly matched up in their cliques from Long Island, I just didn't feel any spiritual elevation, let alone friendship.

At the same time, Constance, a Christian girl in my Biblical Hebrew class, invited me to a party her social group was making. Her friends were such calm, friendly people interested in spiritual values and not overly materialistic. I enjoyed the novel change in my social life, and it didn't bother me that she and the others were born-again Christians. Within a few weeks, I started going to church on Sundays, and by November, I was already hinting to my parents that I was thinking about conversion.

A Christian girl in my Biblical Hebrew class, invited me to a party her social group was making... Within a few weeks, I started going to church on Sundays

Frightened and not knowing what to say, they called a well-known rabbi who soon discovered that he was no match for a philosophy major at Haverford College. His threat tactics, “Your soul is doomed!” and his hanging up the phone on me, produced no results. Another turn-off was his wanting to meet with me, one-to-one, in some kosher restaurant in Manhattan. Why couldn't

I choose the venue and perhaps bring along some friends?! Did he want to kidnap me and then try to unbrainwash me from the enlightened values I recently gained from my new friends?!

Today, I have the privilege of being one of the head rabbis in a rabbinical college in Jerusalem and building a happy, new generation of Torah literate Jews and families.

A few weeks later, my parents implored me to contact Rabbi Michael Skobac from Jews for Judaism for an initial discussion, and they described him as an expert on the subject of religion. From our initial conversation, I immediately realized that I was dealing with an educated, intellectually honest person who not only let me choose the venue, but also told me to bring along anybody I wanted. Because

I trusted him, we met in my home, just the two of us. Within an hour, I suddenly discovered that there were clear answers and viable replies to the challenges which born-again Christians present to the unsuspecting and unarmed Jews to whom they are offering “salvation.”

Rabbi Skobac demonstrated amazing scholarship in both the Old and New Testaments. His pleasant personality and

great sense of humor made it easy for me to open up, especially in the security of my own kitchen, on my own turf, within the walls that watched me grow up.

I started to believe that there must be other pleasant, intelligent, spiritual Jews who can help me find my way back into that beautiful warm house. As a little child, I always felt that, “somehow, I belong here.” Maybe now, I could rekindle these feelings.

My subsequent visit to Israel for my 21st birthday began with many doubts and apprehensions. I was about to explore where my soul truly belongs. Allow me to summarize that two-week trip in just one word: miraculous! The happy tears that filled my eyes at the airport were only the first of many more happy tears that followed. Thanks to Rabbi Michael Skobac and Jews for Judaism, I found my way back home.

As a follow-up to this story, after finishing my degree, I went to Israel for a two-year course in the basics of Judaism, and discovered that I had the potential to go far in the world of Torah. Within a few years, I became a rabbi. Today, I have the privilege of being one of the head rabbis in a rabbinical college in Jerusalem and building a happy, new generation of Torah literate Jews and families. My parents moved to Israel a year after I made aliyah and began growing religiously. Today, they are finally enjoying the intellectual and spiritual satisfaction they missed out on for half a century. ■

* Name has been changed to maintain anonymity.

JEWES FOR JUDAISM LIFELINE is a free publication of JEWES FOR JUDAISM (Canada). JEWES FOR JUDAISM is the only international educational, outreach and counselling organization exclusively dedicated to counteracting the efforts of evangelical Christian missionary and cult groups that specifically target Jews for conversion.

JEWES FOR JUDAISM's two primary goals are to strengthen Jewish pride and identity and to win back those Jews who have been influenced by Christian missionaries.

JEWES FOR JUDAISM works to achieve these goals and promote Jewish continuity through the following highly acclaimed programs and activities:

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- COMMUNITY LIAISON
- INTERNET WEBSITE
- REFERRALS
- MONITORING
- LECTURES & CLASSES
- AUDIO & VIDEOTAPES
- EXIT COUNSELLING
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To date, over 275,000 Jews worldwide have participated in JEWES FOR JUDAISM'S successful educational programs and counselling services.

One of JEWES FOR JUDAISM'S most outstanding accomplishments has been the uniting of the entire Jewish community in a common cause. JEWES FOR JUDAISM has earned endorsements from a wide spectrum of Jewish agencies, rabbis and educators.

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RISING TO NEW HEIGHTS TO CONVERT JEWS



Hebrew-Christian missionaries hired an airplane to pull a huge banner with a Hebrew proselytizing message over the annual Israeli Festival, Woodley Park, California.

By Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

Executive Director,
 Jews for Judaism, Los Angeles

In Los Angeles on Sunday, April 29, 2007, "Hebrew Christian" missionaries rose to new heights in their efforts to gain the attention of potential Jewish converts.

As we do every year, the Los Angeles Jews for Judaism branch hosts a booth at the annual Israeli Festival held at Woodley Park in the San Fernando Valley. Working with our volunteers, we distribute literature, field questions and promote Jews for Judaism's many programs. This year, the booth attracted a large number of the 25,000 people who attended the Festival.

Nevertheless, the park was surrounded by dozens of Jews for Jesus and Messianic Jewish missionaries, some from Israel, handing out

tracts in both English and Hebrew. Because of a court order forbidding them from distributing materials inside the Festival area, they remained outside the park.

So, to grab the attention of the thousands of potential Jewish converts on the Festival grounds, the missionaries hired an airplane to pull a large banner with Hebrew letters that read:

Hear, O Israel, the Word of God. Jesus (Yeshua) is our Messiah. Moses and the prophets speak of him. The attached 800 phone number had a voice message in Hebrew promoting Jesus and a website.

Ironically, this banner created a phenomenal interest in our Jews for Judaism booth and the upcoming programs that our Los Angeles Jews for Judaism branch was launching. As a result, Jews for Judaism staff are now in touch with several people who expressed an interest in refuting missionary claims and in learning more about Judaism. ■



MISSIONARY BANNER BACKFIRES!

Jews flock to Jews for Judaism's booth at the Israeli Festival for information and discussion.

TAILING MISSIONARIES ON THE WALK WITH ISRAEL

On the morning of Sunday May 27, the weatherman's call for rain was a non-event! Ten thousand Toronto Jews proudly stood up for Israel and participated in the annual UJA Federation's *Walk with Israel* through the streets of downtown Toronto.

Anticipating the annual unwelcome visit from the Jews for Jesus missionary organization, 10 dedicated volunteers working with Jews for Judaism's "Counter-Missionary Task Force" were also on hand. Like an army geared up for battle, we dispersed into the huge crowd, using our cell phones to coordinate our astute maneuvers.

As soon as the walk began, Jews for Judaism discovered the Jews for Jesus missionaries who were schlepping shoulder bags bulging with missionizing literature to distribute to the walkers. To the missionaries' enormous frustration, wherever they turned, our "Task Force" volunteers were right there, behind, beside or in front of them.

Many walkathon participants were disgusted at the sight of these missionaries, and were thrilled that the Jews for Judaism's "Counter-Missionary Force" was out in full force.

Jews for Judaism had a mission. Although the missionaries were laden with heavy bags of Christian tracts, we wanted to ensure that they had a very bad proselytizing day. And so we did. The missionaries were so overwhelmed by the number of Jews for Judaism volunteers that they never even attempted to distribute their deceptive pamphlets. That, in itself, was a major victory!

Our perceptive volunteers also spotted six missionaries from Congregation Melech Yisrael, a Toronto-based messianic synagogue.

While we were engaging the missionaries in lively discussion, passers-by were happily voicing their approval and giving us the "thumbs up" for stopping these characters in their tracks. We challenged the Jews for Jesus missionaries to be intellectually honest. We invited them to come and learn privately with us so they can discover the authentic reasons why Jews don't believe in Jesus. Not surprisingly, they gave us an assortment of weak excuses for rejecting our invitation.



Photos: Moshe Yehudaioff

Rabbi Michael Skobac (R), Jews for Judaism Education Director, challenges the arguments of a Jew for Jesus missionary on the annual UJA Walk with Israel in Toronto.



At a Walk with Israel food concession, Rabbi Skobac and volunteer Marty Abeles continue to challenge two Jews for Jesus missionaries, preventing them from mingling with the Jewish participants.

JEW FOR JUDAISM

18TH

ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Volunteers Needed!

Over the past 18 years, kind donors, like you, have helped JEWS FOR JUDAISM ensure the continuity of the Jewish people in Canada by keeping Jews Jewish!

Your support of JEWS FOR JUDAISM has extended an invaluable lifeline to at-risk and vulnerable Jews by:

- ✓ Providing free crisis counseling to young Jews influenced by deceptive missionaries and cults
- ✓ Sponsoring JEWS FOR JUDAISM seminars and lectures to fortify Jews against the threat of missionaries, cults and eastern religions
- ✓ Helping Jews of all ages connect to their own spiritual heritage through free inspirational High Holiday services and Jewish meditation programs
- ✓ Underwriting the production and distribution of vital educational booklets and CDs
- ✓ Reaching Jewish people in need across the globe via our award-winning website: www.jewsforjudaism.org

For 18 years, Jews for Judaism has been dedicated to fighting today's many challenges to Jewish continuity – from aggressive missionary groups and cults that specifically target defenseless Jews – to rapidly increasing assimilation trends. And we have been successful!

Jews for Judaism is looking for volunteers to help us plan, coordinate and produce an exciting community event to commemorate our 18 years of successful programming throughout Canada.

Please contact our office. Become involved in our eighteenth anniversary celebration of perpetuating Jewish "life" and help JEWS FOR JUDAISM continue to keep Jews Jewish! ■

At the end of the walk, the frustrated missionaries left, utterly beaten. For the Jews for Judaism volunteers, their defeat was our outright success!

If you want to become a "Counter-Missionary Task Force" volunteer, please call Jews for Judaism at (905) 761-0040. For two to three weeks every summer, about a dozen Jews for Jesus missionaries blitz our city. You can help us counter their efforts. As well, we desperately need "spotters", concerned people willing to spot the missionaries and call us immediately. "Spotters" tell us where they are, as they spread themselves throughout the city, evangelizing on street corners, shopping malls, public events and Jewish neighbourhoods. Whenever a "spotter" calls our hot-line, we have a well-trained Jews for Judaism crew on the spot, in minutes! Help us, please, to **spot'n'stop the missionaries** and keep Jews Jewish! ■



Julius Ciss (L), Jews for Judaism Executive Director, attempts to reason with a Jew for Jesus missionary at the annual UJA Walk with Israel.



Jews for Judaism Counter-Missionary Task Force staff and volunteers (from left to right) Marty Abeles, Ruth Glatter, Julius Ciss, Miriam Rivkah Weiss, Robert Walker, Miriam Ciss, Shaul Bursuk, Rabbi Michael Skobac, Charles Glina and Alex Katz.



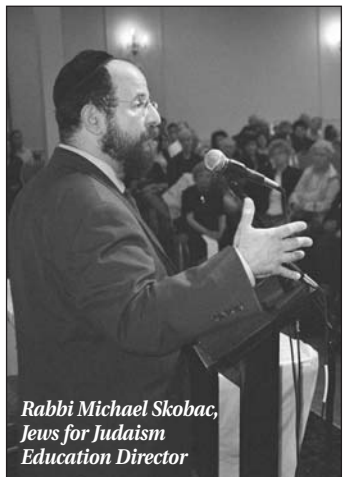
Ad and poster for "The Da Vinci Code"

DA VINCI CODE FEVER... STILL RUNNING HIGH

By the spring of 2006, *The Da Vinci Code* cultural craze had already peaked and began to fade. So in July 2006, when over 300 people crowded into the social hall of Toronto's Shaarei Tefillah Congregation to hear Rabbi Michael Skobac present a Jewish perspective on this best-selling novel, we were truly astonished. Over the past year, the interest of Jewish audiences in Rabbi Skobac's *Da Vinci Code* presentation has not waned. To our amazement, he has delivered this lecture dozens of times to thousands of people across the United States, Canada and Australia.

Realizing the importance of Rabbi Skobac's message, Julius Ciss, Executive Director of Jews for Judaism, encouraged him to develop a written version of his lecture. In August 2006, the book, *The Da Vinci Code: A Jewish Perspective*, was published and to date, most of the 17,000 copies have been distributed. As well, it is available for free download at the Jews for Judaism website, www.jewsforjudaism.org. The response to Rabbi Skobac's book has been extremely positive, and the Israeli outreach organization, Shuvoo, has requested permission to make it available on its website, as well.

Many Jewish people have wondered why *The Da Vinci Code* phenomenon would have any relevance to our community. Clearly, the Christian world was irked by the controversial claims of author Dan Brown, but that's because he called into question many central tenets of its faith. To highlight his point, Rabbi Skobac relates the story of a priest who declared during his Sunday sermon, "One day, everyone in this parish will die." As he said this, a man seated in the back began to laugh. After services, the priest asked him why he was so amused. The man



Rabbi Michael Skobac,
Jews for Judaism
Education Director



Over 300 people attend Rabbi Michael Skobac's "The Da Vinci Code: A Jewish Perspective", one of Jews for Judaism's most popular programs, at Shaarei Tefillah Congregation, Toronto.

answered, "Because I'm not from this parish!"

Rabbi Skobac believes that there are several reasons why this program is very relevant to Jewish audiences. First of all, there is the undeniable fact that Jews have a natural inclination to understand the truth. The ambient religion in North America is Christianity, and many Jewish people are curious about Jesus. Who was he and what are the origins of the enormous religion centered on him? Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* asserts that there has been a massive historical conspiracy to conceal the true story of Christianity. While Brown's alternative narrative has been thoroughly discredited by virtually all scholars, nevertheless many of these scholars believe that there is a real story that has been obscured. Rabbi Skobac's presentation shares some of the latest findings from this growing field of scholarship.

Secondly, the nature of these findings presents very serious challenges to those Christians who target Jewish people for conversion. Basically, these missionaries believe that Jesus rejected the Judaism of his time and started what is essentially a new religion. Rabbi Skobac demonstrates that, in truth, there is no substance to this view at all! Citing Rabbi Jacob Emden, the famous 18th century Talmudist, and passages from the Gospels, Rabbi

Skobac shows that Jesus was totally in sync with first century Judaism. Scholars have demonstrated that, after Jesus' crucifixion, his closest followers, such as Peter and his brother James, remained thoroughly loyal to the Torah and Judaism. However, historical Christianity is not really based upon their teachings, but upon those of Paul of Tarsus. Even though Paul never met Jesus, and taught many things that veered dramatically from his teachings, nevertheless Paul became the most influential Christian leader after the Holy Temple was destroyed in the year 70 and Jesus' original followers were scattered throughout the land.

Lastly, Rabbi Skobac believes *The Da Vinci Code* is highly relevant to Jews today precisely because of the growing movement of non-Jewish scholars of Christian backgrounds who acknowledge that Christianity went seriously off-course in its embryonic period. In the 12th century, Maimonides wrote that Christianity has the potential to prepare the world for the ultimate true Messianic age. The Hebrew prophet Zechariah revealed that one aspect of this Messianic age is that the entire world would acknowledge the Jewish people as bearers of the truth. Over the past 25 years, for the first time in history, there is a growing movement of Christians who openly recognize that Jesus, the Gospels and the pristine roots of their faith ultimately point them in the direction of Judaism. The Jewish community must be prepared to handle the growing number of non-Jews who will turn to us in coming years and will ask, in the words of Zechariah, "Let us follow you for we have heard that G-d is with you" (8:23). ■

OVERWHELMING RESPONSE TO RUSSIAN LANGUAGE DA VINCI CODE PROGRAM

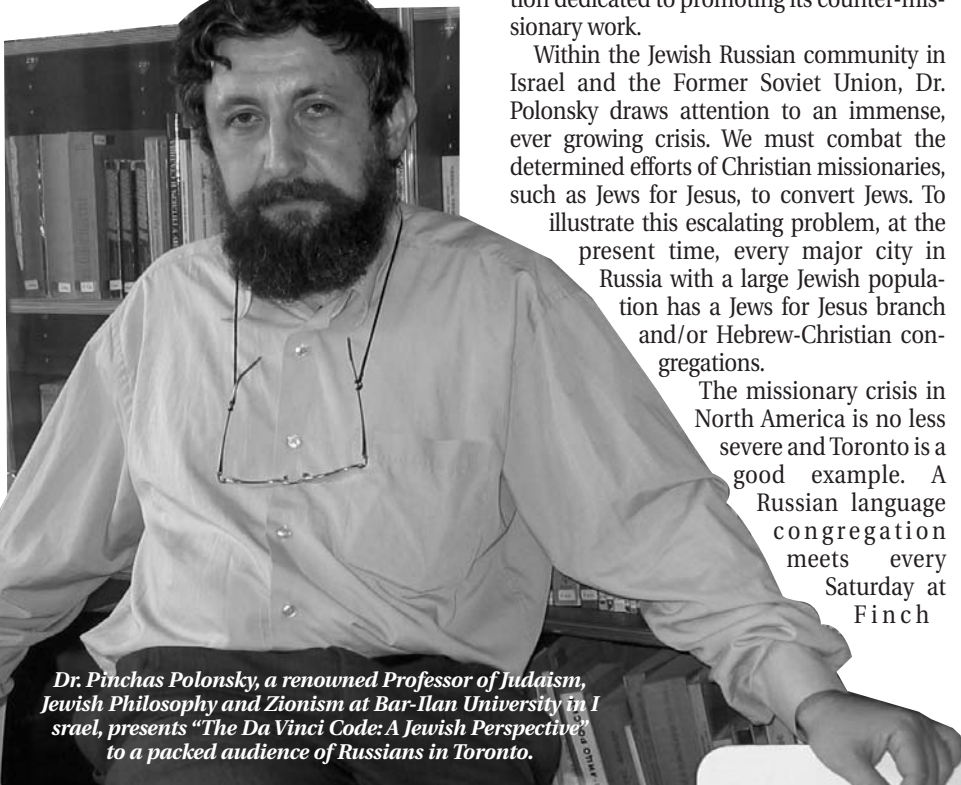
By Alex Katz

Volunteer,
Coordinator for Russian Outreach, Toronto

It was 1:00 pm, Labour Day holiday weekend, the last Sunday of the summer. We hoped for a maximum of 50 people, maybe even 65 or 70. Imagine our pleasant surprise when 150 people suddenly appeared!

The secret? The Russian community's immense interest in Dr. Pinchas Polonsky and everything he has to say.

A highly respected Professor of Judaism, Jewish Philosophy and Zionism at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, Dr. Polonsky's outstanding reputation was first established in Moscow during the 1970s when he was a Refusnik under the iron fist of the Soviet regime. During the time that he was not allowed to leave the country, he organized a network of the underground Hebrew and Torah classes. In 1987, the Soviet government finally allowed him to immigrate to Israel. In contrast to many other Refusniks, Dr. Polonsky didn't stop his activities on



Dr. Pinchas Polonsky, a renowned Professor of Judaism, Jewish Philosophy and Zionism at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, presents "The Da Vinci Code: A Jewish Perspective" to a packed audience of Russians in Toronto.

behalf of the Jewish people. Realizing the enormous need to provide Jewish education to Russian Jews in Israel, he was one of the founders of Machanaim (meaning two camps in Hebrew), an institution that continued working in the Former Soviet Union, while attaining recognition as a Jewish educational and cultural centre in Israel, his new country.

Over the years, Machanaim (machaniam.org) has published many Russian language books on several Jewish topics. At the start of his Refusnik days in Moscow, he attended a Hebrew Christian group advocating conversion to Christianity or, at least, the synthesis of the two religions. When Dr. Polonsky discovered that the group had no reasonable logic on which to base its conclusions, he chose to follow authentic Judaism. He later wrote a book about his experiences which includes the reasons he decided to leave this group and the concept of so-called Hebrew Christianity.

Jews for Judaism is partnering with Dr. Polonsky in publishing a new book, "Jews and Christianity", a subject he knows first-hand, for distribution to the large Russian Jewish market. Jews for Judaism will have a small section dedicated to promoting its counter-missionary work.

Within the Jewish Russian community in Israel and the Former Soviet Union, Dr. Polonsky draws attention to an immense, ever growing crisis. We must combat the determined efforts of Christian missionaries, such as Jews for Jesus, to convert Jews. To illustrate this escalating problem, at the present time, every major city in Russia with a large Jewish population has a Jews for Jesus branch and/or Hebrew-Christian congregations.

The missionary crisis in North America is no less severe and Toronto is a good example. A Russian language congregation meets every Saturday at Finch



Russian ad and poster for "The Da Vinci Code"

and Bathurst. Missionaries often visit the homes and apartments of Jewish Russian seniors to develop personal relationships with these residents. Longing for the companionship that family and the mainstream Jewish community do not always provide, these seniors welcome the missionaries who satisfy their need for ongoing friendship. However in the process, these deceptive missionaries also manage to convince our vulnerable Jewish brothers and sisters to convert to Christianity.

The location for our lecture was certainly not a coincidence. We chose the Bernard Betel Centre, a popular meeting place for Jewish seniors in the hub of the Russian community. Free of charge, this event was open to everyone in the Russian community and we were very pleased that many Russian seniors attended.

Our Russian language presentation, "Dr. Pinchas Polonsky discusses The Jewish view on The Da Vinci Code", was advertised in major Russian language publications for several weeks prior to the event. This attracted a wide spectrum of people from Toronto's Jewish Russian community. Also, great interest was generated because of the popularity of the book. During the lecture, Dr. Polonsky addressed many misconceptions about Judaism and Christianity, explained why Christianity has never been a valid choice for Jews throughout the ages and answered many questions from the audience.

This lecture, sponsored by Jews for Judaism, was the culmination of an exciting three-day weekend of programs with Dr. Polonsky dedicated to Zionism and the current situation in Israel. His visit also provided an important impetus to the creation of Ohr Hatzion (ohrZ.com), the new Jewish Russian outreach organization affiliated with Congregation B'nai Torah and Mizrachi Canada and intended to become a "third" camp to Machanaim in Israel.

On behalf of the Jewish Russian community, I thank Jews for Judaism for helping us sponsor Dr. Polonsky's important visit which served as an authentic and vital wake-up call to our Jewish Russian brothers and sisters throughout Toronto. ■

JUDAISM IN A CHRISTIAN WORLD

4TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

During the month of December, Jewish people become acutely aware of their minority status within Canadian society. Simply turning on a radio, or walking through any shopping centre, thrusts one into the midst of the Christmas holiday season. For many Jews, this season often prompts questions about the differences between our religion and Christianity. With this in mind, Jews for Judaism, in conjunction with Torah in Motion, organized a special year-end conference to explore critical issues at the interface of Judaism and Christianity. This year's conference, "Judaism in the Christian World" was held, once again, at Shaarei Tefilah Congregation in Toronto, and attracted well over 100 participants who enthusiastically participated in four stimulating presentations. ■



At the annual 'Judaism in a Christian World' conference held in December in Toronto, Rabbi Michael Skobac presents, "Evangelicals and Israel: Knight in Shining Armour or Trojan Horse?"

JUDAISM IN A CHRISTIAN WORLD

SEMINAR I

The Ambivalence of Jewish Law Towards Christianity

Dr. Eugene Korn, Professor of Jewish Thought at Seton Hall, a Catholic university, presented a survey of how Christians and Christianity are seen in Jewish law. He began his lecture by noting that Jesus and his original followers were a deviationist group operating within the parameters of the Jewish community. However later, under Paul's leadership, there was a theological break with Judaism by declaring that G-d's original covenant with the Jewish people was no longer valid, and that faith in Jesus replaced observance of Torah as the way to connect with G-d. With this development, Christianity became an intolerable heresy.

Paul further exacerbated this split by exporting his movement to the gentile world of the Roman Empire. Now, the issue was no longer an internal Jewish disagreement about heresy, but a question of how to relate to an external, independent non-Jewish religion. This break was solidified with the conversion of the emperor Constantine and the acceptance of Christianity as an official state religion after the Council of Nicea in 325CE.

Dr. Korn showed that the Jewish scriptures generally view gentiles as primitive pagans steeped in immorality and idolatry. The one exception to this model is the "ger", proselyte, who leaves his world and embraces Judaism. The Torah repeatedly teaches that we are to treat the convert with fairness and dignity. In

Talmudic literature, the rabbis expanded this concept to include non-Jews who live according to the Seven Noachide laws. These are universal laws of morality that were originally transmitted to Adam and Noah, including prohibitions against murder, theft, adultery, idolatry, blasphemy, cruelty to animals and a requirement to set up courts of law to enforce these laws. The rabbis even taught that non-Jews who live according to these teachings have a share in the world to come.

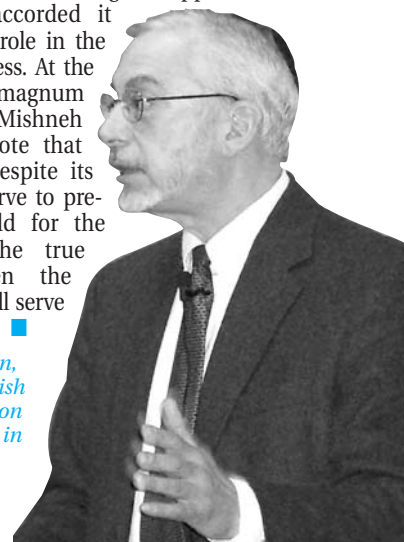
The status of Christians and Christianity in the context of these parameters was first addressed in the middle ages. Maimonides, writing in 12th century Spain, maintained that Christianity was to be considered "avodah zara" (illicit worship) in light of its graven images, worship of saints, doctrines of Trinity and incarnation. This denial of the Unity of G-d rendered Christianity a religion that could not be accepted as a legitimate expression of the Noachide path.

However, Rabbi Menachem HaMeiri, a French Talmudist living in the 13th and 14th centuries, viewed idolatry not primarily in philosophical and theological terms, but as a cultic practice that eschewed basic moral guidelines for its adherents. Although the Trinitarian doctrine violates the concept of monotheism, it doesn't render Christianity as idolatrous according to Meiri, since it does mandate laws of ethics and morality.

Strictly speaking, Jewish law imposes many restrictions on Jews dealing with idolaters, such as prohibitions against doing business with them on and around the times of their holidays. However in practice, even those who lean toward the view of Maimonides don't refrain from such enterprise in our day and age. Some rabbis advanced the idea that the standard of monotheism was different for non-Jews than it was for Jews, and maintained that Trinitarian belief would not be outside the bounds of Noachide practice.

Finally, Dr. Korn suggested that even Maimonides, the strongest opponent of Christianity, accorded it some positive role in the historical process. At the end of his magnum opus, the "Mishneh Torah", he wrote that Christianity, despite its errors, does serve to prepare the world for the coming of the true Messiah when the entire world will serve G-d in unison. ■

Dr. Eugene Korn,
Professor of Jewish
Thought, at Seton
Hall University in
New Jersey.



The Catholic Church and the Jews: From the Inquisition to Interfaith Dialogue



Dr. David Berger, Brookludian Professor of History at Brooklyn College, City University of New York.

Dr. David Berger, Professor of History at Brooklyn College, asserted that the formal position of the Roman Catholic Church in relation to the Jewish people in the Middle Ages was marked by both toleration and repression. In the 5th century, Augustine taught that Jews are the witness people whose existence verified the truths of the Christian faith. He claimed that the persistent sufferings of the Jewish people in exile testified to our guilt for rejecting Jesus. In addition, by preserving our scriptures and living by them, we prove that the Bible is true and not a late Christian forgery. In Augustine's eyes, we served as the book bearers of the Church.

The first Crusade in 1096 was a turning point where toleration waned and repression rose. By the 13th century, the treatment of Jews in northern Europe became more and more brutal, and the Church played a complex role in this process. During this time, Jewish converts to Christianity brought the Talmud and other post-Biblical Jewish texts to the attention of the Church which clearly fueled anti-Jewish sentiment. Feeling that these texts contained blasphemies against Christianity, the Church organized disputations in 1240 and 1263 where the Talmud was viciously attacked.

In the 13th and 14th centuries, Jewish communities were attacked after Jews were accused of desecrating Christian ritual

objects, poisoning wells and murdering non-Jews in order to use their blood for Jewish ritual purposes. The Church conducted investigations in the year 1230 to determine if Jews used Christian blood in their rituals. They determined that there was no truth to this allegation. Nonetheless, these blood libels spread and continued for centuries, sometimes with the active complicity of the Catholic Church. For example, Simon of Trent was declared a saint after having been allegedly ritually murdered by Jews in 1475.

The following centuries saw the Church taking an increasingly hostile stance towards the Jewish people. The Inquisition, although technically directed only at Jewish converts to Christianity who were suspected of reverting back to Jewish practice, also targeted the general Jewish community for encouraging this kind of practice.

In the 16th century, the Reformation challenged the Church which struck back with its own Counter-Reformation. During this time, the most hostile Papal Bull, ever, was issued, establishing the Roman ghetto and enforcing numerous restrictions against Jews, including the mandatory wearing of a badge.

The Mortara affair of 1858, in which a Jewish boy was secretly baptized by his Christian nurse in Rome and later taken from his family and raised by the Church, was another low point in Jewish-Christian relations.

The Roman Church was originally hostile to the Zionist movement of the 20th century. The Church didn't feel that the Jewish people should be allowed to establish a sovereign state if they were being eternally punished for rejecting Jesus. During the Holocaust, Pope Pius XII did not make any meaningful public statements about the murder of Jews, but post-Holocaust history saw a dramatic turn in the stance of the Church toward the Jewish people.

The Second Vatican Council of the 1960's proclaimed that Jewish people today could not be held guilty for the death of Jesus, and even 2,000 years ago, only those directly involved with his death could be seen as responsible. This major change was not just the result of Jewish advocacy, but was part of a larger modernizing development that the Church experienced in the later half of the 20th century. The Second Vatican Council also called for interfaith dialogue with the Jewish community. This has led to educational reforms within Catholic institutions and a more positive position regarding the State of Israel than that of liberal Protestant denominations. ■

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Evangelicals and Israel: A Knight in Shining Armour or Trojan Horse?

Rabbi Michael Skobac, Jews for Judaism's Education Director, clarified the nature of the "double-edged sword" relationship the Jewish community has with the Christian right today. In a world that has grown increasingly hostile towards Jews and Israel, evangelical Christians have emerged as the solitary supportive group.

This group, which represents 25-40% of the American population, and 10% in Canada, is itself a very diverse group. The PEW forum on Religious and Public Life conducted two important surveys in 2004 which revealed that only 50-60% of evangelicals expressed their support of Israel over the Palestinians in the current conflict. Nonetheless, as many have expressed, America's Bible belt is Israel's safety belt.

These Christians have organized tremendous political support for Israel through their lobbying and activism and have conducted ongoing rallies and prayer meetings on behalf of the Jewish state. In addition, they have provided significant financial aid to Israel, have been very sup-

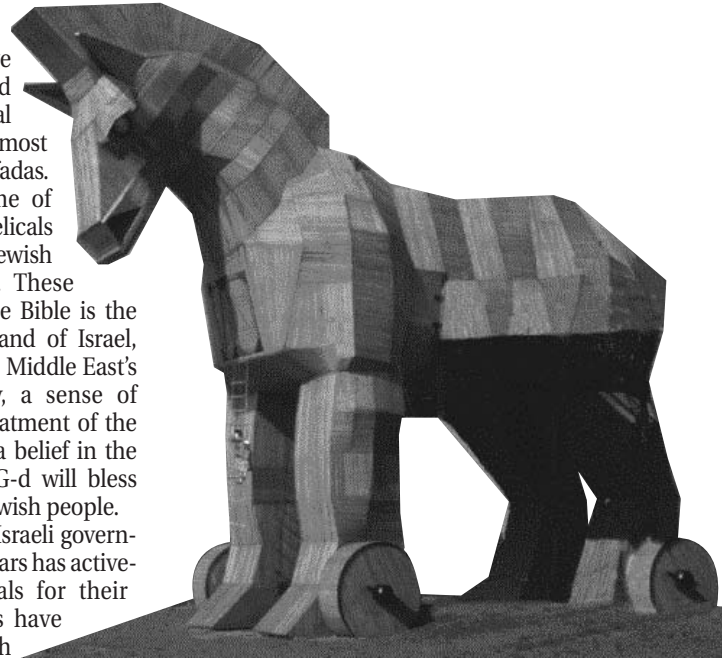
portive of projects to encourage and facilitate Aliyah to Israel and have themselves been very loyal tourists, even throughout the most dangerous times during the Intifadas.

Rabbi Skobac outlined some of the many reasons that Evangelicals tend to be very supportive of Jewish interests in the world today. These include the conviction that the Bible is the Jewish people's deed to the land of Israel, identification with Israel as the Middle East's only real democracy, a sense of remorse over their treatment of the Jews in the past and a belief in the Bible's promise that G-d will bless those who bless the Jewish people.

Even though every Israeli government for the past 25 years has actively courted Evangelicals for their vital help, many Jews have areas of concern with this relationship. Some American Jews have been concerned with the broader political and social agenda of the Christian right and fear that some are seeking to overturn the historic separation of church and state. Mainstream North American Jewry which tends to fall on the liberal end of most social issues is uncomfortable with the right's



Rabbi Michael Skobac



lack of tolerance for these values. In addition, many Jews are uncomfortable with some of the extremist positions some evangelicals take regarding the situation in Israel itself – positions often far right of the most right-wing groups in Israel.

Certainly, there is some suspicion of lingering anti-Semitism among Evangelicals. This was raised when Bailey Smith, head of the Southern Baptist Convention, proclaimed that G-d does not hear the prayers of a Jew. The lack of empathy in the Evangelical world over Jewish concerns about the potential fallout from Mel Gibson's "Passion" film was another telling moment. This incident also demonstrated the delicate nature of Christian support for Israel when Ted Haggard, an evangelical leader frustrated by Jewish protests over the film, raised the prospect of withdrawing support for Israel.

Finally, Rabbi Skobac explained that it is precisely those Christian denominations that are most supportive of Israel that stand in the forefront of movements targeting the Jewish community for conversion. Some Christian groups use their pro-Israel stance as a way to lubricate the conversion process and proclaim, among themselves, that the key to Jewish hearts is showing them unconditional love. Clearly, it is vital to carefully investigate any organization that seeks to work closely with the Jewish community on behalf of Israel to avoid assisting those with a hidden agenda. ■

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Jews & Christians in the 21st Century: Can the Future be Better than the Past?

Dr. Korn began the final lecture of the seminar with a striking illustration of how the Catholic Church radically altered its stance towards the Jewish people over the past 100 years. In 1897, before the 1st Zionist Congress, an article appearing in an official Vatican publication asserted that Jews must live as servants in exile until the end of days, a fate that could be averted only by converting to Christianity. In 1904, Theodor Hertzl went to meet with Pope Pius X to garner support for the nascent Zionist enterprise. The Pope made his feelings quite clear, "It is not in our power to prevent you from going to Jerusalem, but we will never give you our support...The Jews do not recognize our lord, hence we cannot recognize the Jewish people or the Jewish return to the Holy Land..."

However, in March 2000, Pope John Paul II made an official visit to Israel, met with the President, chief rabbis, went to the Western Wall and prayed for the welfare of the Jewish people, his "elder brothers" who still remain the people of G-d's covenant.

This dramatic shift in the Church's position began 60 years ago in the wake of the Holocaust. This traumatic event shocked the Church into realizing that its historical teachings of contempt for the Jewish people paved the way for the terrible genocide of European Jewry. There was a sense that something horrible had been festering with-

in the Church for centuries. The Catholic Church underwent a process of self-examination and reorientation that was summarized by one theologian as the five R's:

- Repudiation of anti-Semitism
- Rejection of the charge of deicide
- Repentance for their role in the Shoah
- Recognition of the State of Israel
- Rethinking the issue of proselytizing Jews to Christianity

Of course, the Christian world is not monolithic. Although the Roman Catholic Church does represent about one-half of the world's two billion Christians, all are quite different both theologically and politically from the various Protestant denominations. Here, we find an interesting split between Evangelical Protestants who love Jews and Israel, but grant no legitimacy whatsoever to Judaism as a viable living faith. On the other hand, liberal mainline Protestant groups respect Judaism as a legitimate world religion, but are very hostile to Israel.

Generally, the Roman Catholic Church falls in the middle between these two groups. It's not opposed to Israel as the mainline Protestants and not as enthusiastically supportive as the Evangelicals, but tries to stay neutral. Rabbi Korn emphasized that, in truth, the rank and file of the mainline Protestant groups tend to be supportive of Israel, but that these denominations have been hijacked by a small and very vocal group of ideologues. These activists who view the Jewish state as colonialist occupiers have led their denominations to boycott and divest from Israel which they regard as an apartheid state.

Dr. Korn explained that most Christians are supportive of Israel because it represents values of pluralism and democracy, and serves as a strategic ally in the

West's struggle against radical Islam. Aside from these common political interests, Dr. Korn suggested that the Jewish community has much in common with religious Christians of all stripes since we all find ourselves somewhat alienated from the secular world steeped in materialism and hedonism. We are united in our commitment to G-d and living a life based upon eternal moral values.

Ultimately, the future may hold a brighter future for our relationship with the Christian world, but how this plays out will ultimately depend on how each of us navigates the road ahead. ■



Dr. Eugene Korn

This edition of Lifeline is dedicated to the blessed memory of

Rabbi Graeme Finkelstein, z"l
Hillel Gershon ben Avraham
v'Batsheva

הלל גרשון בן אברהם
ובתשבע ז"ל

Who passed away on
Shevat 14, 5767

י"ד שבט תשס"ז

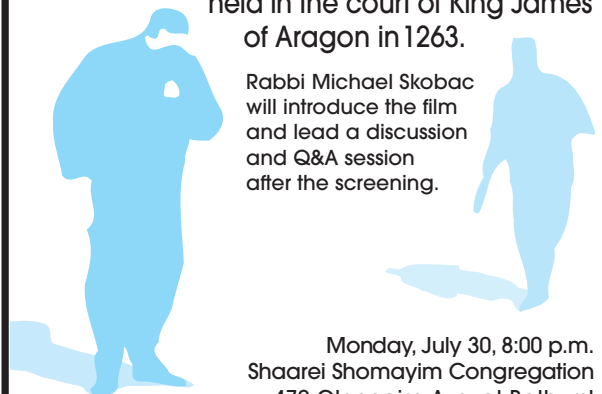
Small In Stature:
A Giant In Chesed

May 14, 1966 – Feb. 2, 2007

THE DISPUTATION

BBC produced film of the dramatic debate between Rabbi Moses Nachmanides and the Jewish apostate Pablo Christiani held in the court of King James of Aragon in 1263.

Rabbi Michael Skobac will introduce the film and lead a discussion and Q&A session after the screening.



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SMALL IN STATURE: A GIANT IN CHESED

IN MEMORIAM: RABBI GRAEME FINKELSTEIN

Hillel Gershon ben Avraham v'Batsheva • February 2, 2007 • Shevat 14, 5767

It is with profound sadness that we report the recent passing of Rabbi Graeme Finkelstein, the former director of the South African branch of Jews for Judaism. Rabbi Finkelstein was a rare breed – deeply sincere and passionately dedicated to the work and mission of Jews for Judaism. All of us who worked with him will always remember Graeme as someone with an unquenchable desire to learn and an earnest desire to help Jewish people through the holy work of Jews for Judaism.

Rabbi Finkelstein was highly regarded in the South African Jewish community as a person of great faith and an accomplished Torah scholar. He was a lover of people, especially children, and was selflessly devoted to caring for, comforting and guiding those in need. Rabbi Finkelstein was also the resident rabbi of the Chevrah Kadisha. The immense esteem

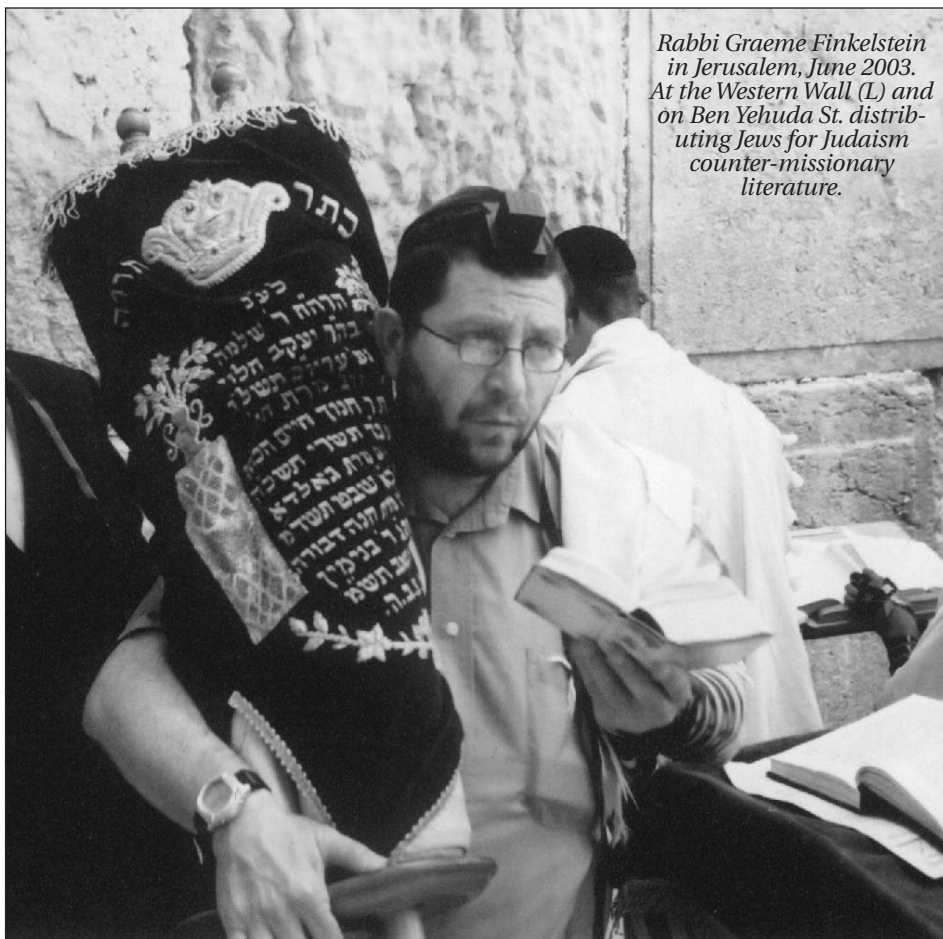


Rabbi Graeme Finkelstein, z"l

in which he was held is attested to by the more than 1,000 people who attended the funeral service held just hours after his passing.

In his tragically short 41 years, Rabbi Finkelstein accomplished a tremendous amount and touched numerous people. He was involved with the Bnei Akiva youth movement from 1980-1983 and attended the Yeshiva Gedolah in Johannesburg from 1983 to 1991 when he was ordained. Rabbi Finkelstein taught at Yeshiva College and the Hirsh Lyons School, and served as senior counselor of Nechama, specializing in the terminally ill and bereavement counseling.

Graeme, as we at Jews for Judaism so fondly called to him, will be terribly missed. His wife Shana and four young children survive him. May his memory be blessed and may it serve as an inspiration to all those whose lives he touched. ■



Rabbi Graeme Finkelstein in Jerusalem, June 2003. At the Western Wall (L) and on Ben Yehuda St. distributing Jews for Judaism counter-missionary literature.

