

## Converting Jews Back to Judaism for 30 Years

By Alex Rose

**J**ulius Ciss has always considered himself Jewish, even during the five years in the late 1970s when he believed in Jesus. Ciss, the founder and executive director of Jews for Judaism, said that Messianic Jewish missionaries tailored their brand of Christianity to be similar to traditional Judaism, so that it would be familiar and comforting to their potential converts – Jewish people who do not feel fulfilled in their spiritual lives.

When Ciss went to Messianic Jewish services, he would see people wearing kippot and tallitot, and sometimes there would be an Aron Kodesh with a Torah scroll inside. All the Christian names and terms were Hebraicized: Jesus became Yehoshua, Mary became Miriam, the New Testament became Brit Hadasha (meaning “New Covenant”) and so on.

“This can make a Jewish person feel comfortable and not have the guilt that one would assume a Jew would have in being open to the message of Christianity,” said Ciss, who had earlier rejected more overt Christian messaging. “So my strong identity as a Jew, even though I didn’t understand much about it, was the only reason that I went to this Hebrew Christian group.

A group of Jewish activists eventually got through to Ciss and, in 1980, he left the Messianic Jewish movement. He spent the better part of the ’80s doing counter-missionary work on his own. Then, in 1989, he started Jews for Judaism in Toronto, after an American organization with the same name reached out to him.

Over the past three decades, Jews for Judaism, which will be celebrating its 30th anniversary in November, has worked with countless Messianic Jews, teaching them about the true Jewish faith. The organization also works with Jewish people who practice Eastern religions, struggle with intermarriage or feel apathetic about



Julius Ciss, Executive Director of Jews for Judaism, countering Jews for Jesus missionaries on the corner of Yonge and Bloor Streets in Toronto in the early 1990’s.

their Judaism. It devotes a large portion of its resources to educational programs designed to show Jews that Messianic Judaism is really just Christianity in disguise.

“Through our educational program, what we hope to do is inoculate the Jewish community against the threat of missionaries and possibly cults ... so that Jewish people will be a little bit more cautious when they see the red flags of these groups and also have a stronger understanding of Judaism,” said Ciss.

He said there are an estimated 350,000 to 500,000 Jews around the world who have fallen for Messianic Judaism, and ideally Jews for Judaism would like to reach all of them. But in practice, once a Jewish person begins to feel comfortable in a Messianic Jewish community, it can be very difficult to reach them. That’s why he believes that preventive measures are necessary.

That’s also why the first step to reintegrating these Jews isn’t teaching them about real Judaism, said Rabbi Michael Skobac, the

organization’s director of education. The first step is establishing trust.

“When it comes to Jews who are involved with Christianity, they are basically told not to speak with us. They are told that we are Satan, we’re the devil, we’re the Antichrist,” said Rabbi Skobac. “Even if they’re not told that, they’re thrilled with what they’re doing. They’re happy. They didn’t see anything in Judaism that was compelling. Now they have a rich, vibrant spiritual life ... why should they sabotage what’s making them so happy?”

Instead of lecturing closed-off Messianic Jews about Judaism, Rabbi Skobac said the goal is to make them curious about Judaism.

“A lot of the work is basically breaking that hard ground and trying to open someone up to be willing to even engage with us. So once that happens, it’s pretty easy. Because we believe that the case for Judaism is incredibly strong, and that the foundations of the Christian faith are not that strong,” said Rabbi Skobac. ■

Photo: Stephen Epstein

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# VOLUNTEERS NEEDED



**D**uring the summer months, Christian missionary groups like Jews for Jesus take to the streets and target pedestrians with their

proselytizing literature. They also distract drivers at rush hour by waving at them and holding large street-corner banners promoting Jews for Jesus.

In response, Jews for Judaism needs volunteers for its counter-missionary campaign to oppose this threat.

We need volunteers for our Counter-Missionary Rapid Response Unit to be available on short notice, on a stand-by basis, to help in this effort. Volunteers will act as “Counter-Leafletters” distributing our counter-missionary literature in a non-confrontational manner on the street beside the missionaries or stand next to the missionaries on street corners at rush hour with our own banners. Jews for Judaism is also seeking dedicated individuals to act as “Spotters” who will notify us if, when and where missionaries appear.

When the Jews for Jesus “Summer Street Campaign” begins, it usually lasts for 2-3 weeks in July and August, with most activity at morning rush hour (7:30–9:00 a.m.), lunch hour (11:30–1:30 p.m.) and evening rush hour (4:00–6:00 p.m.). If you would like to volunteer for our program or help support our vital work, please contact us. We will be organizing a volunteer orientation meeting in the near future. ■

## Say “YES” to Judaism

This week and every week, make your Jewish practice stronger and more meaningful:

- Study Torah – And learn more about Judaism
- Light Shabbat Candles – And bless your children
- Have a Shabbat Meal – Enjoy it with family and friends
- Give Tzedaka (Charity) – Generously help those in need
- Do Tikun Olam – Try your best to make the world a better place
- Pray to the God of All Humanity – And connect with a synagogue

For every step you take – invite somebody to join you!

[jewsforjudaism.ca](http://jewsforjudaism.ca)  
KEEPING JEWS JEWISH



## Why Aliyah? and why Jews should consider Aliyah for their Jewish future.



### with Rabbi Moshe Stern

Rabbi Stern, Rabbi Emeritus of Shaarei Tefillah Congregation, using sources from Torah, Tenach, our Sages and history of the last century, will show how half of the Jews in the world today are onto something.

Wed., June 26, 2019 • 8:00 PM • Admission FREE

Shaarei Tefillah Congregation, 3600 Bathurst St.

For Info: 416-789-0020 or carol@jewsforjudaism



# SHAVUOT the Festival of Love

By Rabbi Yisroel C. Blumenthal - Director, JudaismResources.net

Love doesn't calculate. Love does not hear the discouraging voices. Love is innocent. Love yearns and it follows. But love does not ask: what will I gain? Could I really get there?

Scripture doesn't throw around the term: "love" very lightly. In all of Scripture, Abraham is the only one that God describes as: "the one who loved me". (It is said of Solomon: "and he loved the Lord" - 1 Kings 3:3, and David declares: "I love you Lord of my strength" - Psalm 18:2. Indeed, David's love for God still inspires Israel today and Solomon wrote the ultimate love-song; Song of Songs, but Abraham still stands out with his love for God highlighted as a part of his very identity, and this from God, in the first person.)

Abraham did not know where his love would lead him to. Abraham did not know where it could possibly lead him to. How could a created being form a bond with the Creator of all? But love does not calculate - love just follows. Abraham saw that God is kindness, he followed kindness. Abraham saw that God is truth, he followed truth. He didn't stop to ask himself: how could I ever reach God's kindness or God's truth? Abraham did not hear the discouraging voice that contended: "you will never be righteous in His eyes" - "you are inescapably tainted with the sin of Adam". Abraham yearned and he followed.

Ruth didn't calculate either. She didn't ask herself: what hope is there for a Moabite widow in God's nation? She just followed.

Israel didn't calculate. They did not ask themselves: where will this relationship end up? How could we, created beings, form any meaningful relationship with the Creator of all? They just followed (Jeremiah 2:2).

Shavuot, the Festival of weeks, is not about love. Passover is about love. Passover is when Israel followed God into the unknown, into the impossible. Passover is followed by seven weeks.



Seven weeks of yearning. Seven weeks of following.

The Festival of weeks is God's reciprocation to sincere love. On this day God reached out to Israel with an eternal embrace. He presented His beloved nation with the innermost expression of His will; His holy Torah. God formed an eternal bond with this nation that loved Him; a bond that would have been impossible to imagine. A bond between Creator and created. But love does not follow rules.

Ruth's love brought David and Solomon to the world. Ruth's love for God brought her to the center of God's plan for the universe. She could never have dreamed of such an outcome. But love does not look at the outcome. Love simply follows.

God responded to Abraham's love with Isaac, the child of laughter. Laughter - because it does not make sense. A child to a one hundred year old man?! Not just any child. But a child that will father a nation of human beings that will be granted an eternal commission from God - a commission to carry the truth, the holiness and the blessing of the Creator of all throughout the corridors of history. Is it possible for created beings to be entrusted with the work of the Creator of all?! Could Abraham have imagined that this is where his love would lead him to? Of-course not! But Abraham wasn't looking for a payoff when he began his journey of love. Abraham simply loved, and love does not calculate. ■

## Your Gift is a Legacy for Tomorrow

A bequest to **JEWS FOR JUDAISM** will ensure that our vital counter-missionary work will continue now and into the future.

Gifts made through your will should be worded in one of the following ways:

- I give, devise and bequeath \$\_\_\_\_\_ to Jews for Judaism, 3110 Bathurst St., P.O. Box 54042, Toronto, ON M6A 3B7.
- I give, devise and bequeath \_\_\_% of my estate (or the residue of my estate) to Jews for Judaism, 3110 Bathurst St., P.O. Box 54042, Toronto, ON M6A 3B7.

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**LIFELINE** is a free publication of **JEWS FOR JUDAISM** an organization that counters many growing threats to Jewish survival. We win back to Judaism those Jews who have been influenced by evangelical missionaries, destructive cults, eastern religions, Jewish apathy and ignorance, intermarriage, anti-Israel BDS movements and other challenges to Jewish continuity. We achieve our goals through free educational programs, educational literature, counselling services and worldwide Internet outreach that connect 4,000 people daily to the spiritual depth, beauty and wisdom of Judaism. **JEWS FOR JUDAISM** unites the entire Jewish community in a common cause and is endorsed by a wide spectrum of Jewish agencies, rabbis and educators.

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# A LETTER TO RABBI MICHAEL SKOBAC

Dear Rabbi Skobac,

You have made a tremendous impact on my life with the work that you do through Jews for Judaism. Before I met you online, Judaism was an insignificant part of my life. All Judaism really meant was having a Friday night meal with my parents, who were very upset that I was alienating myself from Judaism.

Rabbis in my community and even in Israel (when I would visit) tried to bring me closer to Judaism... but all failed. I was so not into religion. I shut myself off from their message. Many

tried to reach me but I simply refused to listen and I let them talk to the wall. Since, as long as I can remember, I was always negative about Judaism.

*I will forever remember that it was you who caused me to fall in love with Judaism*

But this ALL changed three years ago when I was searching 'Jews for Jesus' on YouTube. Surprisingly, some of your videos popped up when I typed 'Jews for Jesus' into the search bar. The first video, 'A Rabbi Cross-Examines Christianity' was the trigger video that changed my life... and everything else for me... about Judaism. After watching that video I became

addicted to learning more from you. I watched many of your videos. You became my good friend on YouTube as each time I had an opportunity to watch a video, whether during my long drives or going to the gym, I occupied my mind with learning more and more from you.

Rabbi Skobac, you are the only person who ever succeeded in bringing me closer to my Jewish identity, faith and heritage. I don't know where I'd be without you.

I am so grateful from the bottom of my heart for all that you have done for me. I will forever remember that it was you who caused me to fall in love with Judaism... and I will remember this until my dying day. Thank you.

— Zohar S. ■

## MINI-LECTURES

With Rabbis Michael Skobac and Eli Cohen

### COUNTER-MISSIONARY

Thurs. June 27, 8:00 – 9:30 PM

- **New Testament Anti-Semitism** and Negative Stereotypes About Jews
- **But Christianity Changed My Life!** Can Miracles Prove Anything?
- **A Priestly Messiah:** Does the Jewish Messiah Have a Priestly Role?
- **Judaism vs. Christianity on Real Giving:** How Does God Give?
- **Why The Jews REALLY Rejected Jesus:** Facts vs. Fiction
- **Death of the Righteous:** Missionaries Cherry-Pick the Talmud

### SPARKS OF JUDAISM

Thurs. July 11, 8:00 – 9:30 PM

- **Can Faith & Reason Co-Exist:** Does Judaism Demand Blind Faith?
- **Faith in the Sages:** How Much Reliance Must We Have?
- **In God We Trust:** How to Cultivate Trust in G-d.
- **Hocus Pocus:** Is Magic Permitted in Judaism?
- **How to Pray:** How to Improve Your Prayer Experience
- **Judaism on Yoga:** Exercise or Idolatry?

Toronto Zionist Centre, 788 Marlee Ave, Toronto  
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