

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. It 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 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.

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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.

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 un-brainwash me from the enlightened values I recently gained from my new friends?!

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 that 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 humour 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.

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 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.

Photo: Jerry Trompeter Photography Jerusalem – jerrytrompeter@gmail.com

JEWES FOR JUDAISM is dedicated to countering the efforts of Christian missionary groups that target Jews, the impact of cults and eastern religions, the growing rate of apathy, assimilation and intermarriage, BDS and anti-Israel propaganda, and other challenges to Jewish continuity that are devastating the Jewish community.

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For further information contact:

JEWES FOR JUDAISM

3110 Bathurst St, PO Box 54042

Toronto, ON Canada M6A 3B7

T: 416-789-0020 F: 416-789-0030

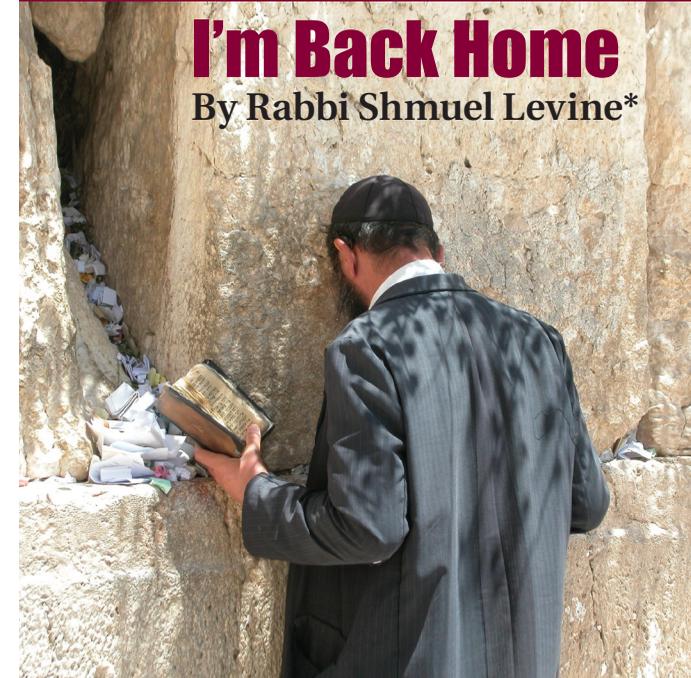
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**Thanks to
Jews for Judaism...**

I'm Back Home
By Rabbi Shmuel Levine*



**Sam Levine used to go
to church on Sundays.**

**Today, he's Rabbi Shmuel
Levine, a head rabbi at a
rabbinical college (Yeshiva)
in the city of Jerusalem.**

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