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Former Messianic Jew now battles missionaries

LEISAH NAMM

Staff Writer

[E-MAIL](#)

"Belief in Jesus doesn't conflict with the basic tenets of Judaism."

That is the message that members of the Evangelical Christian community want to tell Jews, and to help spread this message, they developed the Hebrew-Christian movement, according to Jews for Judaism, a counter-missionary resource and outreach network.

This movement, also known as Messianic Judaism, encourages Jews to continue to practice Jewish customs and observe Jewish holidays, while at the same time embracing Jesus Christ.

A former Messianic Jew will talk about his experience in this movement in "Battle for the Jewish Soul: The Missionary Threat to Jews" 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 15, at Young Israel of Phoenix, 745 E. Maryland Ave., #120, Phoenix.

In this event sponsored by The Phoenix Community Kollel, Julius Ciss, executive director of Jews for Judaism, will present an in-depth analysis of why Christian missionaries feel compelled to target the Jewish community and the methods they use to do this.

Evangelical and fundamental Christian groups spend more than \$150 million a year trying to convert Jews, according to the Task Force on Missionaries and Cults of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York.

Because the tactics used are subtle and deceitful - "rabbis" leading services in "synagogues," lighting Shabbat candles, celebrating Jewish holidays - the Hebrew-Christians provide a threat to their main prey: uneducated, unaffiliated or alienated Jews.

Ciss, a child of Holocaust survivors, grew up in a traditional Jewish home, attended Hebrew school and became a bar mitzvah.

During his fourth year at Toronto's Ontario College of Art, he began dating a fellow student whom he later found out was a "born-again Christian."

As they continued to date, their relationship quickly evolved into that of a missionary and potential convert, Ciss writes in a statement. After several heated discussions about religion, Ciss realized that he didn't know very much about Judaism.

As he struggled to defend his religion, his girlfriend supplied him with books written by

Chabad family
retreat
JCC preschool
registration
TORAH STUDY
Sea of Reeds



Jews who converted to Christianity.

His girlfriend prodded him to go to church with her and although he finally consented, he felt very uncomfortable and refused to return. She found another congregation, with several Jewish attendees, and he agreed to go to an "Erev Shabbat" service, complete with congregants wearing yarmulkes and tallitot, kiddish and hamotzi (blessing over bread) and Hebrew songs.

His interest in Judaism was rekindled in this "Messianic Jewish synagogue" and the Jewish symbols and Hebrew words - such as "Yeshua HaMashiach" and "Brit Chadasha" (New Testament) - soothed his qualms about attending a church service.

After five active years within the movement - studying, teaching and proselytizing - his continuing search for the "truth" led him in the opposite direction, and back to Judaism.

Ciss opened the Canadian Branch of Jews for Judaism in Toronto in 1989 and has since traveled throughout Canada, the United States and Israel sharing his story.

His experience is not unusual.

According to Jews for Judaism, there are more than 900 missionary groups in North America.

A search of the International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues' Web site lists two Valley organizations: Beth Simcha Hamashiach, a congregation in Scottsdale; and Hear O Israel Ministries, an international evangelistic and congregational outreach organization headquartered in Phoenix.

Hear O Israel, founded in 1993 by Jonathan Bernis, boasts that it has reached over 423,000 people in Messianic Jewish music festivals in Russia and Eastern Europe.

Bernis is also president of Jewish Voice Broadcasts - a media outreach ministry that proselytizes on local radio and television stations.

A third Hebrew-Christian church in the Valley is Immanuel Congregation in Phoenix.

Aaron Scholar of The Bureau of Jewish Education teaches a class titled "What Every Jew Should Know about Missionaries and How to Respond" but he could not be reached for comment.

Although some people associate missionaries with handing out pamphlets on the street, "a lot of what happens you can't see so easily," said Rabbi Michael Skobac, director of education at Jews for Judaism in Toronto.

"The way most of the missionary groups operate is by not directly accessing the Jewish community, but by trying to mobilize the church community," he said.

The missionary groups visit evangelist churches and give presentations of how to approach Jewish people, what kind of questions Jews would ask and how to best answer them, and leave them with tapes, videos, pamphlets and books.

"They're basically there to train and equip and encourage the local born-again Christian community to share their faith with Jewish friends and neighbors and business associates," Skobac said.

For example, one Messianic Web site offers the program "How to Share the Messiah with your Jewish Neighbor (Jewish Evangelism Seminar)." The program is based on a book described as "an orderly presentation of everything you'll need to share the Messiah with a Jewish friend."

Jews for Judaism monitors missionary activity, counsels "Hebrew Christians" and offers counter-missionary courses and materials. Visit the Web site www.jewsforjudaism.org.

During his talk, Ciss will also show clips of videos produced by various missionary groups.

Suggested donation is \$5.

Call 602-265-8888.

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