

The Chosen People



Volume VII, Issue 9 Special Edition

Hope for a New GENERATION



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City Talk and the Search For Meaning

by Jennifer Klein

I met him on the bus—the not uncommon mix of post-modern disillusionment and upper-middle class Jewish upbringing. He had been raised in a Conservative home in Southern California and had gone on to obtain a business degree at an Ivy League school. Then, straight out of college, it was work in Manhattan, a stab at his own dot-com business and a fling at a jet-set lifestyle. With the dot-com enterprise now defunct, “Adam” was busy looking for the next great thing—the next, all-encompassing goal to pursue.

A Jewish Search for Answers

As we spoke, Adam informed me that he had joined up with a social reform organization and would be working in the inner city for the next couple of years, trying to right the issues of inequity that plague the nation’s urban centers. A worthy goal, I observed. I asked him what had brought him to that place. I expected to hear the story of some sort of epiphany, a moment of revelation wherein Adam realized that jet-setting and dot-coming were not the source of happiness in life. I expected to hear that he had realized that the only source of joy in life is love and that love, for him, was helping people in the inner city. No such luck.

“I don’t know,” he told me. “I’m not sure what I want to do. I’m not sure if this is right for me. I’m just sort of killing time.”

The faith Adam had been raised with was still intact, though. We agreed on the importance of Sabbath observance. We discussed the unfortunate trend of declining synagogue attendance. He loved his heritage, but at the same time, religion seemed to be more a set of abstract principles than an actual, living faith.

Who Holds the Key?

My conversation with Adam left me wondering what he was looking for from life. He had money and a measure of success, but they didn’t seem to have been enough. He still had his beliefs, but it didn’t seem to give him the satisfaction or direction he craved. It was a tradition—a part of his heritage.

I can empathize, because I began with the same doubts and questions. But, when I began to look seriously at what the message of the New Testament offers, I had to admit there was more to it than I originally thought. As I grew to believe that message, I have to say that it has grown in me.

The Messiah offers everything Adam is looking for. He offers life with a purpose—not simply the pursuit of money. He offers a faith that is vital, life-producing, and far more than a tradition or heritage, as beautiful as that can be. Messiah embodies the standard for social activism and true justice, because He is all about love.

It’s worth looking into.

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Can Christmas & Hanukkah Live in the Same House?

by Justin Kron

Once upon a time, it was unthinkable for a Jewish man or woman to even consider marrying someone who wasn't Jewish. But today, in the United States, Jewish people are marrying outside of the Jewish community about as often as they're marrying within it. The Jewish community is understandably alarmed and most traditional rabbis won't marry a couple of mixed faith. I'll never forget when my uncle married a non-Jewish woman only a few years ago. It caused incredible conflict within the extended family.

Despite the Jewish community's uneasiness with interfaith marriages, we are being forced to come to grips with them. Those making the interfaith marital journey are finding that the challenges, some of which were no doubt unforeseen, are harder than first thought. This is especially true when the holidays come around. Will my spouse want a Christmas tree? Will he want to light the menorah? Will she feel uncomfortable if we go see "A Christmas Carol?" What if my mother makes ham for Christmas dinner?

Is it even reasonable to think that Christmas and Hanukkah can live in the same house?

My aunt and uncle seem to have found a workable resolution for their cultural and religious differences. If you were to pass by their home during the month of December, you would see that one side of the house is adorned with multi-colored Christmas lights. The other side of the house sports bright, blue-and-white Hanukkah bulbs. It is an outward expression of their inward reality—you have your traditions and I have mine. I have my religion and you have yours.

I would like to suggest another way. For when we've peeled away the colorful exteriors, we find that Christmas and Hanukkah are integrally related. Both of them point us toward a God who works marvelous miracles that affect us all.

Hanukkah is about God's faithfulness in delivering the Israelites from their Syrian oppressors in 165 BCE. What's the connection with Christmas, you might ask?

What if the Syrians had destroyed the Israelites? Would there have been a baby in a Bethlehem manger 165 years later? Think about it! Without Hanukkah, there wouldn't be any Christmas story to be told.

Furthermore, Christmas and Hanukkah are bound together by God's promise to Abraham to bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham's descendants (Genesis 12:1-3).

God shed more light upon this promise through the Prophet Micah, *"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times. His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace"* (Micah 5:2,4-5).

Had God not enabled the Israelites to prevail over the Syrians, Micah's prophecy could not have come to fruition.

Can Christmas and Hanukkah live in the same house? They can, but only when we begin by asking Jesus the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, to make Himself at home in our lives.



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Starbucks Spirituality

by Justin Kron

If you could have coffee with the most influential Jewish person who ever lived—would you?

Who would you choose? Maybe Jerry Seinfeld? He's definitely put smiles on millions of faces. How about Steven Spielberg? His movies have undoubtedly left an indelible impression upon the imagination and conscience of our generation. How about Howard Shultz?

"Who's Howard Shultz?" you ask. No, he's not your uncle, but I think I can make a pretty good case for him. Howard Shultz was a Jewish kid who grew up in the projects of Brooklyn and eventually became the chairman of Starbucks®.

Howard Schultz had an idea. He wanted people to experience freshly brewed coffee from the world's finest roasted coffee beans in an environment that stimulated more than just their taste buds. Hence, the establishment of the Starbucks café.

The rest, as they say, is history. Thousands of Starbucks are quickly spreading to the four corners of the world. In fact, Israel recently became home to the first Starbucks store in the Middle East. L'Chaim for Cappuccino! For Howard Schultz, it was nothing more than reinventing the wheel and taking it places no one had yet dreamed it could go.

Truth and Coffee

The coffeehouse is not a new idea. For decades, Jewish people met in coffeehouses in the major cities of Europe to argue politics and pursue truth. Some of the greatest writers and thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries hatched their theories over cups of French roast or espresso. Some of them went on to fame on the world stage, while others sank back into obscurity.

One thing that has not changed is our thirst for meaning. We want to exchange ideas—hear something new, perhaps, that will change our lives. We long for a spiritual transformation and look high and low for someone to supply it.

Who knows? Perhaps your Starbucks companion at the sugar dispenser will be the next Seinfeld or Spielberg. It's hard to tell beforehand who will be the next great mover and shaker. Appearances are not everything.

An Unlikely Candidate?

According to an anonymous writer, the life of the most influential Jewish person who ever lived does not fit a description that we would necessarily associate with fame:

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman.

He grew up in another village, where he worked in a carpenter's shop until he was thirty. Then for three years he was an itinerant preacher.

He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a house. He did not go to college. He never visited a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place he was born. He did none of the things one usually associates with greatness.

He had no credentials but himself.

He was only thirty-three when the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends

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ran away. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for his clothing, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Twenty centuries have come and gone, and today he remains the central figure of the human race, and the leader of mankind's progress. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man on this planet so much as that one solitary life.

It's apparent that this "one solitary life" is that of Jesus—a man who doesn't make it on most people's "Rendezvous@Starbucks" list. Evidently the prophet Isaiah knew this would be the case concerning the coming Messiah: "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted" (Isaiah, chapter 53—written approximately 800 years BCE).

Smell the Coffee – and Wake Up

Howard Schultz put his finger on a need and made millions. His vision taught him that in an increasingly impersonal world, people need a place to share the warmth of human companionship. A cup of coffee and a conversation can still lead to some surprising places. The quest for truth can be even more thrilling than that first caffeine rush of the day.

If you want to meet an influential Jew, don't overlook Jesus. Maybe you haven't yet taken the time to "esteem" Him. Maybe you've pegged Him as just another spiritual guru. Maybe you've acquiesced to the tide of peer or familial opinion without giving Jesus a fair shake. Maybe He longs to rendezvous with you—just as He did with the poor, the prostitutes and the professionals of His generation.

Isn't it about time to consider having a "Starbucks" encounter with Jesus today? Don't worry about which location. If you look for Him, He'll be there waiting.



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Reflections

Reflections at a Morning Workout

By the way, at the end of the tour—my passport said that I died at Buchenwald. Makes you think.



by Alan Shore

They're watching me out of the corner of their eyes. At the gym, that is. No one works the stair-stepper like I do. Twenty-four minutes cranked up to the top and I don't stop until I can see my face reflected in the pool of sweat that collects on the black rubber mat at my feet.

Keeps me strong. Keeps me trim. The only thing is, it hurts like blazes. Every single moment, it hurts.

On Being Jewish in the 21st Century

I watch the TV fastened to the ceiling to distract myself from the pain. I see more pain on the TV screen, but it doesn't seem real. This morning's litany of woe includes murder and corruption in high places. There's a woman sitting on top of some Mideast rubble, crying. There's a casualty list of Jews who have died there in recent weeks. Some of them have my last name, before my grandfather changed it. Arabs are dying, too. What should I think about it all?

I'm Jewish, but to tell you the truth, I never gave it much thought—until recently. I took a trip to D.C. and toured the monuments. Checked out Lincoln and Jefferson, saw Lindy's Spirit of St. Louis in the Smithsonian.

Then I went to the Holocaust Museum. They give you this passport with the identity of an actual person who was in a concentration camp and at the end of the tour, you find out if you lived or died. It's actually very well done. They take this big, mind-numbing thing that happened and show it to you a little at a time, so that at the end of it you can at least understand the horror a little more.

I had relatives I never met, of course, who died in Europe in concentration camps. But, even when I was a kid, at the holiday gatherings, there were only a couple of elderly aunts and cousins who remembered anything about it. We didn't talk about it too much. To tell the truth, no one much wanted to hear about it anymore. They'd heard it all before and besides, once they got started, that was the end of the evening.

By the way, at the end of the tour—my passport said that I died at Buchenwald. Makes you think.

Pain and Struggle in the New Millennium

I have my own struggles and it's not just the pain in my joints and sinews this rough morning. I'm getting by, sure, but I have to admit I've begun to wonder if the day in, day out routine is all there is to it. I sure hope this level of satisfaction isn't all there is to the payoff for all those years of school.

It's also pretty hard to meet anyone in this town. Most of the women I know I met through work. It's like they have "No Vacancy" signs around their necks. Everyone has a wall up around them. Me too, probably. It gets awfully old going back to an empty apartment night after night.

People used to join clubs or things like that. There's a singles group at the synagogue downtown, but I'm not sure I want to get involved there. Once you're labeled, "A Single," you might as well give up.

Whew! Six minutes left. Three quarters through. This is how I measure my days. So much time left until the hurting stops. What a life!

An Avenue of Hope

There is someone here at the gym I've spoken to once or twice. He wears a T-shirt sometimes that says "Ask Me About the Messiah." At first, I thought

he was one of those ultra-Orthodox from Crown Heights. He smiled and said, “No—I’m Messianic.”

When I asked him what that was, he said, “I’m Jewish and I believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah of Israel. Messianic Jews today believe what His early Jewish followers believed—that the Messiah was promised by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Our own Hebrew Scriptures support this claim and there is nothing contradictory about believing this and continuing in a Jewish identity.”

I told him I was raised to believe that this wasn’t possible. He answered, “So was I. I was raised to think that if you even thought about Jesus, it was like an insult to the suffering our people endured throughout the centuries at the hands of the Christian churches.”

I almost didn’t want to, but something inside of me made me ask, “So what happened?”

He said, “I started to ask why the story of this suffering Jew was so central to what so many people believed. I met some other Jewish people who seemed to think that the life of Jesus held the key to understanding who we are and what we’re doing here—particularly as Jews.”

He continued, “What can I say? I started to look into it myself and I became convinced. I found peace, community and purpose. The life of Jesus and the destiny of the Jewish people are bound together. Faith in the Messiah holds the key to our forgiveness and makes us a part of the redemptive work God is undertaking in the world. If that isn’t a Jewish outlook, then there is no such thing. Think about it.”

Something to Consider

So, all right, I’m thinking about it. I looked up some of the passages in the Hebrew Bible this guy suggested. And to be even more honest, I also looked up some of the things Jesus said.*

What if there’s really something to it? What if the whole point of Jewish history and all our sufferings are summed up in the life of this Jewish Messiah? What if faith in Him is what opens the door that causes it all to start to make sense? What if being Jewish and believing in Jesus are not only compatible, but also essential to each other?

Four, Three, Two, One – Done. There I am, a reflection in a sweaty puddle. A portrait in physical pain. If I look hard enough, I can almost see Someone peeking over my shoulder. How about that?

* Passages to research: Isaiah 53, Zechariah 12:10, Matthew 2:1-6, Luke 1:67-80.

steps to a personal relationship with God

1

Both Jews and Gentiles fall short of God’s standards (Isaiah 53:6)

2

Yeshua the Messiah paid the penalty for us all (Isaiah 53:4-5, 10; Psalm 22:12-16)

3

When we accept Him as our Messiah we are forgiven and receive a new life (Jeremiah 31:33)

“You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.”
(Jeremiah 29:13)

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Generation J

the Quest for Meaning

by Jason Sobel

What does it mean to be Jewish and “Generation X?” Lisa Schiffman, in her popular book, *Generation J*, describes us this way, “We’re in a kind of limbo. We’re suspended between Judaism and atheism, between a desire to believe in religion and a personal history of skepticism. Call us a bunch of searchers. Call us Post-Holocaust Jews. Call us Generation J.”

As a member of Generation J, I can relate to this search for identity and meaning. In my case, it led to a spiritual journey that radically changed my life.

I grew up in a Conservative Jewish home, but my search for spirituality did not really begin until I turned eighteen. While working for a well-known recording studio in New York City, I observed the lives of the celebrities around me and realized that something was missing. It became evident that fame and fortune were no substitute for true meaning and purpose.

A Spiritual Challenge

This realization prompted me to search for spiritual answers. As a result, I became a Jewish “New Ager.” I went to synagogue on the Sabbath, but during the rest of the week, I would meditate and practice yoga.

One day, my best friend, John, who is not Jewish, called me to say that he had had a life-changing experience with Jesus, the Messiah of Israel. “Oh brother,” I thought. “John has gone crazy.” Anyway, in my mind, there was no way you could be Jewish and believe in Jesus. So, that let me out.

Several months later, John called and asked if he could read me a couple of Biblical passages about the Messiah. I decided to humor him. The first was about a man who was executed by the Romans, so that we might be forgiven and reconciled to God. I said, “The New Testament, right?”

He said I was correct. Then he read another passage that said the Messiah was going to be “bruised for our transgressions and crushed for our sins.” I thought to myself, this passage must also be about Jesus. I said, “New Testament, again.”

I was shocked when John told me that it was written by Isaiah, a Jewish prophet, over 700 years before Jesus lived. I also felt a little foolish. Here was my friend, who was not even Jewish, and who knew more about the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish Messiah than I did.

Generation J – Rediscovering Jewish Identity

I started to search the Scriptures for myself. I prayed that God would reveal to me the truth about Jesus. I also started to read the New Testament for the first time and was amazed at how Jewish it was. After further investigation and soul searching, I became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel. This spiritual discovery has revolutionized my life and my understanding of what it means to be Jewish.

Generation J. That’s me. We are searching for genuine spirituality and a Jewish identity that will make a difference in our lives and in our world. May I suggest that what we, as Jews, are looking for may be found in an authentic relationship with the promised Messiah of Israel? Read the Bible and decide for yourself.