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THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date June 7, 1982
 to Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum
 from Rabbi A. James Rudin
 subject

On June 3 Netanel Blasbalg, an Israeli engineer who lives in the Haifa area, spoke at a meeting of the New York City JCRC Task Force on Missionaries and Cults. Blasbalg has organized the Israeli "Concerned Parents Against Cults." He reported there are now approximately 10,000 Israeli cult members, most of whom are in the following groups: Hare Krishna, Divine Light Mission, Scientology, EST, Transcendental Meditation, Rajneesh and a local Israeli cult called Rinah Shaney. He indicated that the Unification Church has very few members in Israel, and has been poorly received because it is perceived as a form of Christianity, whereas, the other cults are either Far Eastern in nature or appear to be self improvement groups.

Blasbalg is especially concerned about Scientology's Israeli leader who is a mathematics professor at Ben Gurion University. Blasbalg has evidence that several Israeli Army Generals and other senior officers are involved with EST and TM. He reported that like the US, youth are most heavily recruited by the cults, and two of the cults, Scientology and Hare Krishna, are giving young men and women advice on how to be rejected for Army duty based on cult membership. Blasbalg said there is heavy Israeli membership in the cults by Kibbutz members, especially those coming from a socialist background, and he said that most of the cult leaders are Israeli citizens and not foreign nationals. Similar to their American counterparts, the Israel cults raise an enormous amount of money: one Hare Krishna team in Haifa raises between 12 and 15 thousand shekelim each day.

Last summer, when Marcia and I were in Israel, we met with officials of the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. We alerted them to the existence of cults in Israel since Marcia and I had visited both the Unification Church and Scientology headquarters in Tel Aviv and Beersheva. At that time (July 1981), the official Israeli attitude seemed to be "It can't happen here," but, of course, it has. Since then the government has set up an interdepartmental committee headed by Miriam Glaser, a member of the Knesset. Blasbalg indicated that the committee is attempting to bring counter cult educational materials into both the Israeli school system and into the Army Training Programs. Bernie Resnikoff and his office have become a resource center for cult material and a recent issue of Tfutzot Yisrael was devoted to the cult problem. Blasbalg said there is growing awareness in Israel about the cult problem, but he is calling on experts in the United States to provide help and assistance in sensitizing Israelis, in general, and schools and the military, in particular, to the seriousness of the issue.

June 7, 1982

One final and sad note. I asked whether former members and parents of cult members have spoken out in Israel. He said so far there are very few ex-cult members, and when and if a parent does publicly speak out, the cult threatens the family with the possibility that its child who is a cult member will be taken out of Israel and sent to another country, usually India. The Israeli cult problem is serious and demands our attention and assistance.

I am enclosing an article from an Israeli magazine dealing with Blasbalg's organization.

AJR:FM
Encl.

cc: Harold Applebaum
Judith Banki
Inge Lederer Gibel
Miles Jaffe
Abe Karlikow
Sam Rabinove
Bernard Resnikoff
Zach Schuster



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Concerned Parents Organize Against Cults

"The trend towards cults is a danger to our youth and to our country. Israel is fertile ground for such phenomena and it is time to barricade ourselves against onslaughts of this nature."

Netanel Blasbalg, coordinator of "Concerned Parents Against Cults", has not stopped at words to describe his concern for the appearance of "cults" in Israel. Nor can his words suffice to describe the resentment he feels ever since his son became actively involved in a Guru movement in the U.S. a number of years ago.

With his son still out of the country, he has started to take action here in Israel by calling together parents, like himself, who have "lost" their children to the various movements.

"A big problem is locating these parents," he explains gravely. "They are simply too embarrassed about their children and so they conceal the fact instead of coming out and doing something about it."

In the beginning, he experienced a similar reaction but later conquered his feelings and decided to investigate the movements for himself. At one point he even joined the Transcendental Meditation program to discover what it was all about and maybe find some relief from his depression over his son as well.

"A Load of Nonsense"

"The truth is that in the beginning the feeling was good, but I soon realized that the movement was a load of nonsense," he contends. "Now, we have organized 'Concerned Parents Against Cults,' similar to organizations in the U.S. with whom we are in contact. Action must be taken soon to stop these destructive forces in our society."

The aims of the group range from helping parents overcome embarrassment, to acting as a pressure group, and making the public more aware, to urging the government to enact laws which will curb further development of the movements.

The association defines a cult as a group, led by a charismatic leader, who imposes his doctrine upon his followers and controls them through subtle techniques. The cults — referred to as "love bombing" because of their over-indulgence in love — attract people who are lonely and under stress, the association

contends. "This does not mean to say that those who join are of a low IQ," explains the parents' group coordinator. "Most of those who do involve themselves are actually very intelligent people, as they are the seekers. In fact, the TM and Scientology movements do not even accept all applicants and conduct personal interviews with these interested."

He believes the Transcendental Meditation movement is the most dangerous, because of what he calls its "subtle" techniques in recruiting people and then deceiving them. "Most people in the more extreme cults started off in the TM movement," he points out. "They publish statistical figures to prove lies, using doctors and lawyers to substantiate such findings. These cults are actually multi-million dollar businesses and the members are usually conned into donating 30 to 60 percent of their earnings to the movements."

"... Israel is just the place in which cults can entrench themselves. We are a people who think, who search, and it is such a people that the cults attract."

The parents' association seems particularly perturbed by the effect that techniques such as meditation have on the individual. This practice causes a blanking of the mind, they claim, makes the individual apathetic and lowers his rate of metabolism. "It even eliminates one's sense of humor," groans Blasbalg. The parents also claim that the cults' activities induce personality changes and destroy the body's center of automation.

"People become programmed, their behavior becomes robot-like, and Israel is just the place in which cults can entrench themselves. We are a people who think, who search, and it is such a people that the cults attract. They have a foothold now and they are trying to spread."

The Concerned Parents' criticism is not pure talk. They do offer suggestions and solutions that they believe can help, if not cure, the problem. For the public

at large, they suggest that children of school age be made aware of the movements and their motives through special classes on the subject. The media should also fulfill its purpose by bringing such dangers to the attention of the public through scheduled programs and talk-shows, they claim.

Counter-Cult Program

The more serious problem is how to assist those already involved in or hooked by the cults, says Blasbalg. And he believes that one of the only ways in which this can be successfully achieved is by deprogramming and "conservatorship". The latter is a law, repealed in most states in the U.S. but still existing in some, which enables parents to get custody for a number of weeks of children involved in cults, to reform them and help them regain their thinking processes.

"The goal in life is to be human, to feel and think," reflects Blasbalg, "and deprogramming is channelled in this direction. The concept is a difficult one to conceive and many people are frightened of the name, but I would very much like to see it legalized in Israel."

Since some believe that movements or cults offer some form of relief from daily pressures and tensions, the association proposes a substitute. It could come in the form of "relaxation centers", both in schools and for the general public. "There is also Jewish meditation," Blasbalg adds. "It is not eastern in origin, not destructive and has no totalitarian leader involved." He recommends the Jewish Meditation Center in Safed, run by Chaim Rosen, a doctor in the Anthropology of religion. A firm believer in the State of Israel and Judaism, he feels that the center conforms to the Jewish religion and, unlike the cults, "keeps the individual within his Jewish environment."

The Concerned Parents recently appealed to Knesset representatives and the Ministry of Education to help in their battle.

"No, we are not harming Israel's democratic system," Blasbalg stresses. "Sometimes limitations must be made when society at large is endangered. For the good of all, the cults must be curbed."

Michelle Amdur

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Stephen S. Rosenfeld examines
Jack Javits' very special role

Jack N. Porter reports on a
Nazi's campaign for mayor

Bernard Lefkowitz remembers
Dolly Schiff's New York Post

Teddy Kollek reflects on
Jerusalem

Sylvia Rothchild profiles Rav
Soloveitchik, "An absolute genius."

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Present Tense

The Magazine
of World
Jewish Affairs



The Jews for Jesus (and the others too) are out to get your kids.
By A. James and Marcia R. Rudin

Published by the American Jewish Committee

Onward (Hebrew) Christian Soldiers

They're Out to Grab Your Kids



An impassioned moment at a Hebrew Christian revival meeting.

"Jesus is in my heart," she says. "You can't have my heart. No one can make me stop believing in Jesus. I know what I am in God's eyes. I am a follower of Yeshua, the Jewish Messiah."

You can believe in Jesus as the Messiah and still be Jewish!

Such is the dramatic claim of the Hebrew Christians. In fact, they explain, Jesus is the fulfillment of Judaism, and without him, Judaism remains an incomplete religion. In

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*A. James Rudin and
Marcia R. Rudin*

order to be fully, truly Jewish one must accept and believe in Jesus. "Through Christ [Jews] are returning to their heritage," says Moishe (Martin Meyer) Rosen, the leader of Jews for Jesus, one of the most publicized

Hebrew Christian groups. "They are living as Jews and loving it."

"Hebrew Christians" is the collective term for a variety of groups which evangelize among Jews in many parts of the world, including the United States. But not all those who are involved in these groups are Jews. Some Christians seek to make their religion more meaningful by stressing the Jewish roots of Christianity, even adopting many Jewish symbols. They believe that everything "Jewish" draws them closer to Jesus, their Messiah. Such Christians often join the Hebrew Christian movement; in some places, they even outnumber Jewish participants.

In this country, Hebrew Christians operate in forty states, with large concentrations in every major Jewish population center. In the New York area, where the movement is especially

They attempt to lull the Jew into the belief that he is not actually changing his religion, when in fact the ultimate goal is to convert him to Christianity and have him join an established Christian church.



Two Texas supporters chat with Mike Evans (right).

strong, it is estimated that there are sixty Hebrew Christian groups.

On the international level, the American Board of Missions to the Jews (ABMJ), oldest of these organizations, boasts thirty-three missions in such places as Israel (Haifa, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem), Athens, Paris, Buenos Aires, Toronto and Montreal. It also has centers in thirteen American cities.

How many people are actually members of Hebrew Christian bodies? The groups themselves make inflated claims for publicity purposes. On the other hand, some Jewish observers tend to minimize the extent of the Hebrew Christian following. Estimates of the total number vary widely. One hears that there are fewer than 1,000 in the entire United States—and several thousand in Long Island alone. (In that area, which contains the third-largest Jewish community in the United States, a concentrated drive to gain Jewish converts is now being waged.) An estimated 500 to 700 Hebrew Christians make up the Beth Yehoshua (House of Joshua) group, led by 46-year-old Lutheran minister

Jack Hickman in Long Island. Mike Evans, in his late twenties, head of the pentecostal B'nai Yeshua (Children of Jesus), who moved from Texas to Stony Brook, Long Island last year, claims 800, and says there are "thousands and thousands of Hebrew Christians in the United States."

Probably the most reliable estimates of Hebrew Christian numbers come from Malcolm Hoenlein, executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, which closely monitors the movement through its Task Force on Missionary Activities. He says there are at least 1,000 Hebrew Christians in the New York area and perhaps as many as 10,000 in the United States.

There is also disagreement about the number of professional Hebrew Christian missionaries at work. The ABMJ claims to have 100 full-time missionaries. Jews for Jesus, originally a small storefront operation in San Francisco, and B'nai Yeshua have about seventy staff members each. Hesh Morgan, leader of the Anti-Missionary Institute, a New York-based

group that "deprograms" young Jewish Hebrew Christians, declares 5,000 Hebrew Christian missionaries are working in the New York area, but Moishe Rosen says the total is only about fifty.

And it is impossible to ascertain how many or what percentage of Hebrew Christians are Jews. Rabbi Samuel Glaser, president of the Long Island Board of Rabbis, believes there are only 300 to 400 Jews in the groups in the New York area. But Rosen claims there may be as many as 30,000 Jews who have accepted Jesus since his movement began in 1970.

Hebrew Christians work on the streets, in storefronts, apartments and private homes, as well as in churches. They sometimes even appear in synagogues where unsuspecting rabbis, impressed by their commitment to Israel and Soviet Jewry but unaware of their true purpose, give Hebrew Christian singers, dancers and drama troupes an opportunity to perform. National Jewish community leaders accuse them of infiltrating Jewish organizations such as sisterhoods, brotherhoods and Zionist groups.

Originally they pitched their appeal largely to the age group between 15 and 30, but recently they have expanded their drive to include the very young—opening nursery schools and presenting programs in primary schools—and the elderly—evangelizing in nursing homes and hospitals. (They get into public schools by offering free "educational" programs and entertainment for student assemblies.) Critics also charge them with preying on helpless and vulnerable Jews in foster homes and mental institutions.

For young Jews who are often ignorant of their Jewish heritage; unsure of their status in a predominantly Christian society and unsettled in their personal lives vis-à-vis mates and careers, they hold "rap sessions" in storefront centers, then follow up with mail and telephone solicitations. They help find jobs and places to live, and provide counseling services for the deeply troubled.

They combine their Gospel message with cultural and ethnic aspects of Judaism, such as the Hebrew language and Jewish humor, food and holidays. They profess strong support of Israel and actively rally in behalf of Soviet Jewry. Thus the Hebrew Christians seek to assure prospective converts that they are not renouncing Judaism.

or the Jewish people if they accept Jesus as the Messiah.

And they use Jewish symbols, often in distorted form, to get their message across. For example, the three matzoth on the Seder plate represent for them the Trinity, and the broken *afikoman* the crucified Jesus. The *shamash* on the Chanukah *menorah* represents Jesus as the light to the world. They assert that 6,000,000 Jews died in the Holocaust unredeemed, that the 6,000,000 Jews in the United States should not remain unredeemed.

Barbara Janov, executive director of Hineni, a Jewish anti-conversionary group, contends that the Hebrew Christians are "brainwashed." "They repeat the same thirty-five or forty Bible passages to us. That's all they know. They have that glazed look."

A former Jew for Jesus left the group in California when "they got us into 'speaking in tongues.' I was a speech major and I know that glossolalia is the road to senility and loss of reason. I had to get out."

Hebrew Christianity, or Messianic Judaism, is not a new phenomenon.

Hebrew Christian missions to the Jews began operating in Great Britain and the United States early in the 19th century. The First Hebrew Christian Church in America was founded in New York City in 1885. In 1894, Hungarian immigrant Leopold Cohn, a former rabbi, founded the American Board of Missions to the Jews. In 1915, the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America, a loose confederation of proselytizing groups, was formed in Chicago. Six years later, the First Hebrew Christian Presbyterian Church of Chicago was launched. And in 1960, Martin Chernoff established a Hebrew Christian church in Cincinnati. Other churches have sprung up recently in several American cities.

For many years the Hebrew Christians remained fairly quiescent, beyond the fringes of Judaism and Christianity, somewhat seedy and old-fashioned. But in the last decade or so the movement has undergone a startling revitalization and growth.

Hebrew Christians now employ sophisticated media and marketing techniques. They produce slick publications. They purchase full-page ad-

vertisements in major newspapers with large circulations among Jews, such as *The New York Times*; they buy expensive television and radio time.

The highly provocative, almost baiting advertising techniques used by the Hebrew Christians have made them well-known and controversial. Moishe Rosen claims: "There is hardly a Jew on the North American continent who has not heard of us." A few years ago, for example, the *Jewish Post and Opinion*, a national weekly newspaper, carried a full-page advertisement paid for by the ABMJ, featuring smiling men and women under a giant caption which read: "Why Are These People Smiling?" Readers who mailed the attached coupon received a handsome ABMJ missionary brochure.

The fact that a Jewish newspaper would accept such an ad sparked bitter public reactions among Jews. Other irate public responses by Jewish and Christian leaders to Hebrew Christian publicity tactics have unwittingly given them free and extensive exposure.



Ecstatic converts at Shechinah '77 revival meeting.

"Through Christ [Jews] are returning to their heritage," says Moishe (Martin Meyer) Rosen, the leader of Jews for Jesus, one of the most publicized Hebrew Christian groups. "They are living as Jews and loving it."



Stan Telchin, a former Jew, testifying on his newly discovered faith.

Sixty-four-year-old Reverend Daniel Fuchs, whose Jewish parents were converted by Leopold Cohn, has parlayed the original modest ABMJ storefront center into a \$2,000,000-per-year operation with headquarters in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey. It has tried to rid itself of its missionary image by changing its name to Beth Sar Shalom (House of the Prince of Peace) in some of its New York centers.

Fuchs' staff members, both Jewish and non-Jewish, undergo a rigorous, six-month training program which includes psychological testing and screening, and doctrinal examinations. The non-Jewish missionaries are trained in Jewish life (Yiddishkeit, Jewish food, literature, etc.) so that they can better relate to Jews. All the missionaries also study the latest canvassing and mass media techniques.

The ABMJ annually spends more than \$180,000 on mass media and \$190,000 on printed missionizing literature. Hour-long evangelistic broadcasts are beamed every night to Israel in Hebrew, English, French and Yiddish via Trans World Radio, an

Evangelical Christian network. Similar programs are transmitted to other countries where it maintains missions.

In addition to attention-grabbing, full-page advertisements, the ABMJ uses personal columns, such as this simple appeal in the University of California at Los Angeles *Daily Bruin*: "If you are Jewish and believe in Jesus, please call Bill, 824-1565." An item in the *Village Voice* in New York also reflects this low-key approach: "We are some Jews who think that Jesus is beautiful. He has made us happy and we want to share this happiness with you. Let me tell you what it's all about."

One of the ABMJ's most successful tools is its Jewish Art Calendar, in English, Yiddish and Hebrew. Outwardly it looks like the calendars familiar to Jews, but closer examination reveals subtle proselytizing passages. One hundred thousand are distributed each year in the United States, Israel and other countries.

Each month features a conversionary message printed above the Sabbath candle-lighting times and the

weekly Torah portions. In January 1977 it was: "Only one Jewish man has succeeded in fulfilling hundreds of prophecies." For March, the reader was asked to consider: "Why such an apparently insignificant person as Jesus . . . the Word of God . . . the Messiah of Israel . . . should have such a tremendous effect on history."

Though the printed materials and media exposure produce results, the ABMJ and other Hebrew Christian groups find that the one-to-one personal encounter is still the most successful approach. A senior staff official of a national Jewish organization talked about his experience in Washington's Dupont Circle a few months ago.

He was in a depressed mood and his face reflected his feelings. Two ABMJ missionaries approached and asked, "Are you Jewish?" The official grunted, "Yes." The pair replied that even though he was upset and sad, they—and Jesus—still loved him. "I didn't know whether to laugh or cry," the official remarked later. "Actually, I did neither. I thanked them for their concern and walked away. And you know, I felt better. Somebody seemed to care."

ABMJ missionaries are encouraged to form friendships with Jews. "Most Jewish people do not consider it [religion] a topic to be discussed with a stranger. If you want to witness to someone whom you do not know, form a friendship first," Fuchs tells them. He provides a printed guide for promoting dialogue, with sample lists of questions and answers.

Moishe Rosen also stresses the effectiveness of the one-to-one approach to his Jews for Jesus staff. Born nearly fifty years ago in Denver into what he describes as a "typically secular" Jewish family, he was converted to Christianity in 1953 after his wife began studying the New Testament. He was graduated from Northeastern Bible Institute and was ordained as a Baptist minister in 1957. He worked for the ABMJ for ten years in New York and Los Angeles. In 1970, when Rosen went to San Francisco to begin a storefront ministry to "hippies," he broke away from the ABMJ and formed his own group. He decided to call it "Jews for Jesus" for its shock value for Jews and to catch the eyes of the media. It did indeed, and before long the group gained national attention.

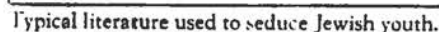
After four months of prayer, God confirmed to us . . . that the Jew we beheld was in the City of New York and that we were to go there and that He was going to anoint us to come against demonic forces and principalities and that a revivalist was going to come. He would speak to the hearts of Jewish young people and would join with us in proclaiming His message and *share* the message of the Messiah [emphasis his] throughout New York City. We have determined with all our hearts that we will not keep silent in the midst of the fact that Satan is coming against us in every possible way.

A wide range of opinions has been expressed about the impact of the Hebrew Christian movement on its major target—Jewish young people—and about its potential threat to the Jewish community as a whole. A recent B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League report concludes that the Hebrew Christians as well as other religious cults have failed "dismally,"

Malcolm Hoenlein strongly disagrees with this view, declaring that "The problem, regardless of the numbers of converts one accepts as valid, is already one of major proportions." The Hebrew Christians constitute a more serious problem than the exotic religious cults, Hoenlein says, because the former have "learned their mistakes of the past . . . and because youth are more vulnerable today." He agrees with a B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation survey which warned: "Even Jewish

Some Jews feel that Hebrew Christian groups threaten the very existence of the Jewish people. Says Rabbi Morris Shapiro of the Suffolk County Board of Rabbis: "We have just experienced a Holocaust, and the attempt to convert Jews is another attempt to annihilate them."

It is logical to ask whether Hebrew Christians receive financial support from Christian Evangelical churches



In 1973, Jews for Jesus, along with B'nai Yeshua, took over the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America, changing its name to Messianic Jewish Alliance of America, as part of Rosen's carefully orchestrated campaign to downplay his group's "Christian connection" for prospective Jewish converts.

Rosen, a believer in what he calls "creative communications," has originated over 150 humorous, cleverly written, illustrated brochures which proclaim, among other things, that "Jesus made me kosher," that there are "goyim for Jesus," that "hitching" with Jesus pays off ("He picks up all riders who want to go . . . and there's plenty of room for you! Jesus is just down the road—out of sight!"). Mary Hartman's problems would be solved, he declares, if she turned to Jesus. ("When it comes time for the Final Ratings you won't have to worry. God will never cancel you!") "If being born hasn't given you much satisfaction . . . Try being Born Again!," another asserts. "Jesus Delivers Life" (JDL) is a parody of the Jewish Defense League's slogans and methods. Rosen claims that more than 9,000,000 "communications" have been distributed, with excellent results.

Recognizing that classic Christian hymns are often offensive to Jews, Rosen devised a new kind of "Jewish gospel music" in which the melodies are Middle Eastern and "Jewish," but the lyrics bear New Testament messages. Jews for Jesus followers sing such Hebrew songs as "L'Cha Dodi" ("Come, My Beloved") and "Am Yisrael Chai" ("The People Israel Lives") at the opening of their study sessions.

Rosen also employs drama, presenting "distinctive Jewish-Christian plays" in churches and, where possible, in synagogues. His troupes—The Liberated Wailing Wall, the New Jerusalem Players and Israelite—which, according to Rosen, deal "with many aspects of Jewishness and Christianity," actually demean Jews and Judaism. Non-Jews are given a "Certificate of Acceptance into the Ancient Family of Abraham," announcing they are no longer gentiles but part of the proud heritage of Judaism.

Like the workers in the ABMJ, Rosen's staff is highly trained in New Testament theology and the latest public relations and missionizing techniques.

Thirty of the Jews for Jesus staff are now in four Texas cities—Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and Fort Worth—running Operation Lone Star of David, a concentrated one-state campaign. "If this pilot evangelistic project is successful," Sue Perlman, information officer for the organization, told us, "we will use it all around the country."

The Beth Yehoshua Hebrew Christians worship with Reverend Jack Hickman at his St. John's Lutheran Church in Massapequa or his Saturday evening service at the Christ Lutheran Evangelical Church in East Meadow. Several Jewish observers have estimated that at least three-fourths of his followers are Christians. Hickman, whose mother was Jewish, is known as "Pastor Jack" or "Abba" to his followers. He also runs Rebirth, a storefront counseling center, and a coffee house for Jewish teenagers, an elementary school and a retreat center.

Hickman's Hebrew Christian activities have drawn sharp criticism from other Lutheran ministers. Last

year Reverend Ronald Bagnall of Wyandanch, New York and other clergymen termed Hickman's movement "extremely divisive for Lutheran congregations." They accused him of "severe manipulation . . . sometimes leading to psychological disorder" among the group's members.

Last fall, B'nai Yeshua purchased the eight-and-one-half-acre former Stony Brook School for Boys for \$480,000, and has reportedly spent more than \$65,000 converting it into its headquarters.

Mike Evans, a handsome, modishly dressed young man, is the major force behind Operation Gideon, an intensive three-month recruitment and training session to improve missionizing techniques among Hebrew Christian proselytizers, which he started in May. He sponsored Shechinah '77, a national gathering of Hebrew Christians from all over the country, in June in Stony Brook, climaxing an eight-week drive (Messiah '77) to convert Long Island's Jews.

Evans speaks in strong revivalist



A segment of the audience at a Hebrew Christian meeting.

They assert that 6,000,000 Jews died in the Holocaust unredeemed, that the 6,000,000 Jews in the United States should not remain unredeemed.

which are currently experiencing an extraordinary growth in members and income. Historically, Jews, along with other "non-Evangelicals" have long been targets of Evangelical proselytizing. In a confidential report prepared especially for Evangelical Christians, Rosen directly solicits funds for Jews for Jesus, declaring:

We do not have the financial backing of any denomination, nor would we accept such help. We feel that it is God's will for us to look to concerned Christians to supply the finances to continue this ministry. If you believe in what we are doing and how we do it, we invite you to become a contributor.

Barbara Janov asserts that the Hebrew Christians are given large sums of money by the Campus Crusade for Christ, a well-financed national missionary group which appeals directly to students and sponsors the "I Found It—Here's Life, America" campaign. The Crusade, which seeks to convert all people, including Jews, reportedly refers interested Jews to the Jews for Jesus group.

What about financial help from the mainline liberal Christian denominations? James Christison, former general secretary of the American Baptist Church's National Mission Society, says that, so far as he knows, no money is given to the Hebrew Christians by national church organizations. Individual church members may contribute, he says, but "there is no funding on a national level."

The question of funding leads to other intriguing questions. What are the Christian community's reactions to the Hebrew Christian phenomenon? Do the Hebrew Christian groups receive moral, if not financial, support from mainline Christian individuals and churches—or do these churches oppose efforts to convert Jews? Our findings, based on extensive conversations with Christian clergy and lay people, reveal a certain ambivalence.

The official reactions of the Christian community are negative. Reverend Lawrence McCoombe, chairman of the Episcopal Church's Diocese of Long Island Commission on Christian-Jewish Relations, considers the activities of Hebrew Christians "distressing." He says:

It is upsetting to Jews because it impugns the integrity of Jewish belief. It is alarming to Christians be-

What are the Christian community's reactions to the Hebrew Christian phenomenon? Do the Hebrew Christian groups receive moral, if not financial, support from mainline Christian individuals and churches?



B'nai Yeshua gift shop specializes in Jewish and Israeli goods.

cause it misrepresents Christianity. It is disturbing to both Jews and Christians because it undermines the basis of mutual respect which it has taken so long for us to establish. "We wish, therefore," McCoombe concludes, "to make it clear that as Christians we acknowledge and affirm the integrity of Judaism and disavow completely the message and methods of these 'Jewish-Christian' groups."

Earlier this year, the board of governors of the Long Island Council of Churches released a strong statement of condemnation:

The Board . . . notes with alarm that certain groups are engaging in subterfuge and dishonesty in representing the claims of their faith groups . . . there is a confusion which results in mixing religious symbols in ways which distort their essential meaning. The Board also deplors the pressures which result when any faith group calls into question the right to continued existence of another faith group.

However, there is evidence that the Christian community is more receptive to the aims, if not the methods, of

the Hebrew Christians than such official statements indicate. "After all," says Christison, "unconverted Jews . . . make the Christian wonder if perhaps Jesus is not the Messiah after all. . . . Besides, it is an integral part of Christianity to spread the gospel." So, concludes Christison, mainline Protestants look upon groups such as the Hebrew Christians as a species of "surrogate conversionary agents" who do the rather unpleasant job of attempting to convert Jews for them. "If they [the mainline churches] don't approve of the efforts, they certainly do nothing to stop them. They couldn't stop them even if they wanted to," Christison adds, "because of pressures from their local member churches." Reverend Nathan VanderWerf, a Presbyterian minister and an official of the National Council of Churches, agrees with Christison: "I abhor the Hebrew Christians, but there is latent support for them within the mainline churches."

Written evidence exists suggesting a close tie between Rosen's Jews for Jesus organization and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. In 1976,

cause her husband adheres to basic Judaism. "Jesus is in my heart," she says. "You can't have my heart. No one can make me stop believing in Jesus. Other Jews may say I am no longer Jewish in their eyes. I don't care what I am in their eyes. I know what I am in God's eyes. I am a follower of Yeshua, the Jewish Messiah."

What is being done to counteract the effects of Hebrew Christian activity? And what should the Jewish community do in the future?

The Task Force on Missionary Activity of New York's Jewish Community Relations Council, organized in December 1976 and chaired by Dr. Seymour P. Lachman, former president of the city's Board of Education, gathers information about missionary groups, particularly in the New York metropolitan area, and disseminates it to the widest possible audience. The JCRC is pushing for New York State legislation to prohibit evangelizing in homes for the mentally retarded, homes for the aging, hospitals, foster homes, etc. The American Jewish Committee and other major Jewish organizations are alerting their constituencies to the existence, techniques and dangers of the Hebrew Christian groups. The Board of Jewish Education of New York City arranges counter-missionary programs for parents and children in their schools, and helps parents to provide stronger Jewish education in students' homes.

Hesh Morgan is the founder and active leader of AMI, the Anti-Missionary Institute. (AMI means "my people" in Hebrew.) A burly, outspoken man, Morgan is so angered by the Jews for Jesus, B'nai Yeshua and the ABMJ that he is "prepared to do anything" to "reclaim" young people from the missionaries. Jews for Jesus leader Rosen charges that AMI uses illegal and violent tactics in its rescuing and "deprogramming" activities, and claims that Morgan's group is associated with the Jewish Defense League. AMI denies both charges.

A few years ago, Esther Jungreis, wife of an Orthodox rabbi in Woodmere, Long Island, founded a group called Hineni (Hebrew for "Here I am"). In a personal and individual way, she works with Jewish youth who have become Hebrew Christians to create a sense of community and warmth based on the richness of the Jewish heritage. Operating out of her home and through lectures in many

parts of the country, she provides an atmosphere of support—even to the point of taking young people in to live with her, sometimes for long periods. Among her achievements, she says, was the return of Lisa Levi, a Miami leader of the Jews for Jesus, to the Jewish fold. She claims she convinced sixty Jews for Jesus, including many top leaders, to "abdicate" the Hebrew Christian movement. "This shattered the Jews for Jesus," Mrs. Jungreis claims.

In New York, the Board of Jewish Education established Jewish coffee houses, which seek to create a total Jewish environment in cultural and spiritual terms for Jews of all ages. The Bilu coffee house in Massapequa, Long Island, set up by the South Bay Jewish Community Council primarily for high school and college students, counters Jack Hickman's outreach program. The Los Angeles Hillel Council operates storefront coffee houses near each high school and college in the area. Similar efforts are being undertaken by concerned Jewish communi-

ties across the country.

But more than coffee houses are needed. We have spoken to many rabbis, teachers, Jewish community leaders, parents, young people and Hebrew Christians, and it is clear to us that defection from Judaism does not happen only to those with weak Jewish backgrounds. We believe it can happen in any Jewish family. Rebellion against parents and rejection of one's religion often go hand in hand.

And sometimes the source of the problem may be basically psychological. Moshe Adler, a Hillel director in the Los Angeles area, believes that the cause of defection from Judaism may be "alienation of self, that is, a sense of having no personal worth and therefore no real home." He points out that "at the heart of many religious problems there are hurt human beings," and that it is essential to try to "heal their hurts within a religious Jewish milieu before they begin trying non-Jewish trips as balm."

If our two daughters ran away from



Dancing the hora at a recent Hebrew Christian meeting.

Hebrew Christians now employ sophisticated media and marketing techniques. They produce slick publications. They purchase full-page advertisements in major newspapers. They buy expensive television and radio time.

"An Adventure With Jesus"

It is 6 p.m. on a beautiful spring Saturday, moments before Jack Hickman's "Havdalah" service—which, among Jews, marks the end of the Sabbath and the beginning of the new week. Young men carrying walkie-talkies are standing guard around the Lutheran church in East Meadow, Long Island. Inside, other boys, at approximately six-foot intervals, line the walls of its large gymnasium.

About 500 people are there, nearly everyone sitting on the floor. Men and women are segregated. All the men wear *yarmulkes*; many of the women wear Mogen David necklaces or *mezuzas*. One little girl sports in her pierced ears tiny dangling Mogen Davids which match her Mogen David necklace.

The crowd consists primarily of teenagers, college students and young families with small children. Mothers with tiny babies look down on the proceedings from the glass wall of the nursery room above. (Colored letters spell out "An Adventure with Jesus" on the nursery wall.) Small children are held on their mothers' laps or sit alone, dispersed throughout the crowd. There are some middle-aged, but only one or two old people. The group is middle-class, wholesome, clean-cut; it contains one black girl and a smattering of Orientals.

Everyone listens raptly and participates enthusiastically in the nearly two-hour service, most faces reflecting joy. Clearly, practically all of these people have been here many times before and know the procedure well.

In the center of the room are a temporary Ark, and a large square platform which functions as a *bema*, decorated with blue candles at each corner. A band plays Hebrew folk songs; everyone sings along and claps enthusiastically. Dancers leap onto the *bema* and perform Israeli-style folk dances.

Reverend Jack (Abba) Hickman begins his sermon. He is a heavy-set, bearded, middle-aged man, in an open-necked sportshirt. His approach is casual and informal. Several young girls pull out Bibles and notebooks. They take notes as he begins his talk.

Hickman starts with a scripture reading from the New Testament, then rambles for a half hour. God is a Living God, he says, working miracles in the world. (He frequently refers to God as "Ha Shem"—"The Name.") God promised that the living Spirit would come into the world, and he has kept that promise. The Commandments and the Law are a means to an end only. One must believe and have faith. God is an exciting God—we never know quite what he is going to do—"whether he is going to send us to the ovens or part the Red Sea for us." God's purpose can't be realized within the Christian Church or by Jews, but only by people dedicated to His Purpose. We must be ready to do whatever has to be done for the Plan, we must be ready to make any sacrifice, to give ourselves completely, to "proceed with absolute faith."

Jesus is mentioned only once, and then Hickman refers to him as "Yeshua." (Nor are Jesus, or "savior" or "Messiah" mentioned elsewhere in the entire service.)

After the sermon the singing resumes again, and then the audience forms small clusters, holding hands, their arms around each other. They close their eyes and begin to pray. Hickman puts a large *talis* over his head and circles the *bema*. Then he blesses a large container of wine, and aides pour it into smaller goblets which are passed along to the group. A young man distributes pieces of a huge *challah*. All eat and sip together communally.

Hickman loudly sings a sort of chant praising and reciting Hebrew names for God. Individuals spontaneously repeat his phrases. One person offers an informal prayer, another quotes a scriptural passage. Everyone sways, eyes closed. Some people hum. Faces reflect ecstasy.

All then turn to face the Ark. It is thrown open; one glimpses the Torahs inside. The band once again plays joyous Hebrew songs. Everyone sings and claps, then raises his arms to the Ark. There is a loud cheer.

The service is over.

Friends greet each other; there is much chatting and laughing. They seem very close. No one approaches to welcome me, an obvious stranger—nor am I given material about the group or solicited to join it. I see a long line and follow it to a table containing four bowls, two for general contributions and two labelled "tithes." The bowls overflow with checks.

Outside, people are still lingering. Children romp on the ample church lawn. The sun is beginning to set.

M.R.R.

home, would they find refuge in a Jewish hostel for runaways, rather than one provided by the Hebrew Christians? Would a 24-hour telephone "hot line" manned by rabbis and psychiatrists be available to them? Young Jews are asking for walk-in, store-front counseling centers so they can talk about their personal problems. Would there be retreat centers for the entire family? Though such services do exist in some cities, their availability needs to be better publicized—and where there are none, they should be established as soon as possible.

We strongly believe that the American Jewish community must become aware of the new realities and needs—especially of Jewish young people—and be ready to take whatever steps are necessary to aid them. We must provide solutions to youths' problems as the Hebrew Christians seem to do, and retool our resources to meet our young people "where they're at."

But ultimately the core of the Jewish response lies in increasing and deepening quality Jewish education, within the home and outside it. Hebrew Christians and other cults appeal primarily to those who are unsure or ignorant of their own heritage. Often young Jews are attracted to the missionaries because they are unaware that they can find the answers they seek within Judaism. They are easily swayed by the confident, Bible-quoting proselytizers. Educational efforts should begin at nursery school age and extend upward to adult education.

Training programs should be initiated for day school and Talmud Torah educators and youth leaders to prepare them to counteract the proselytizers. These should include Christian theology and the Bible passages most frequently cited by the Hebrew Christians and should familiarize them with the sophisticated techniques of Hebrew Christian missionaries and how to refute them. They should also be told about resources—such as synagogues, boards of Jewish education and Jewish community relations councils—within the community, for further aid in confronting these groups.

American Jews must seek ways to satisfy basic emotional and spiritual hungers. It is time to return to "God-talk," prayer and the search for personal relationship and communion with God. Judaism should be a vibrant and living experience, an emotionally satisfying faith for Jews of all ages. □

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Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum

You may find
the enclosed
of interest -
Jim Rudin





Why Teens JOIN CULTS

by John Mariani

Lost, lonely, or
just looking for something
to do, many young people turn to
these unconventional religious groups

"How could she? She seemed so well adjusted!"

This gasp of bewilderment is a typical response to the news that a friend, sister, or daughter has joined a religious cult. Most people don't understand why anyone would want to be a cult member, and friends and family are usually overwhelmed with fear and surprise.

Cults range from such established sects as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, which is based on traditional Hindu theology, to newer groups like the Bo and Beep UFO followers, who believe they will be transported by spaceship to a better universe. One of the most notorious cults was the People's Temple, responsible for the "Guyana Massacre" of November 1978, when 911 men, women, and children died from drinking poisoned grape drink under the direction of their crazed leader, Jim Jones.

There are thousands of cult stories—some proven, some not—about teen converts being beaten, sexually abused, starved, deprived of sleep, overworked, and forced to marry other cult members they barely knew. There are also accounts of how one cult used female members as prostitutes to attract wealthy converts; how a bizarre "rite of breathing" by members of another cult caused the death of two people; and of how ex-cultists exhibit long-term emotional neuroses.

Critics also point out numerous cases of fiscal fraud on the part of cult leaders. Last spring, the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, head of the Unification Church, was convicted of tax fraud.

Yet teen-agers continue to join cults, and many of them are not the types of people you would expect to be religious converts. They're not necessarily drop-outs, ex-drug addicts, or products of broken homes: In fact, Dr. John Clark, assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, found that 40 percent of the cultists he studied were essentially normal, maturing persons. Dr. Margaret Singer, a clinical psychologist and professor at the University of California in San Francisco and Berkeley, estimates that 75 percent of the cultists she studied could be described as normal persons.

"I wasn't a rebel or a problem kid or anything like that," says Angela, a twenty-one-year-old from California, who joined the Unification Church when she was fifteen and is now living at the Church's center in New York. (The names of cult members have all been changed.) "I had lots of friends and an active social life, and I went to a Presbyterian church every Sunday. I wasn't really looking for a new religion, but it was a serious time for me. I lived with my parents in an

apartment building where a lot of people were getting divorced and where drugs and sex were constant topics of discussion. First, I tried meditation and fasting, then I met a Unification Church member and had dinner with his group. I was impressed with their sincerity, so I joined, and I've been a member ever since."

No one knows exactly what attracts a girl like Angela to a cult, but many new recruits share certain general characteristics. "There are various times when people are more vulnerable to cults," Dr. Singer says. "I've found that people tend to be lonely or somewhat depressed when they join. Also, the cults pick them up at unstable times—between high school and college, between romances, between college and their first job, or after a divorce."

Every teen-ager experiences times when life seems empty and the stresses of growing up seem unbearable. During these periods, the cults may promise a special sense of belonging. Dr. James S. Gordon, a psychiatrist at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, in Washington, D.C., who studies cults that attract young people, explains, "It is impossible to grow up and not be confused. The cults offer these kids what the major religions traditionally don't—a sense of immediacy. The cultists are ready to become intimate, and they offer a phony love to those who are looking for it."

Rachel, twenty-seven, was first attracted to a cult because of the sense of community. She joined the Divine Light Mission in California when she was nineteen years old. "I wasn't a rebellious kid," Rachel says, "or avidly searching for God, but one day, I went with my sister to the mission. The guru was a thirteen-year-old boy named Maharaj Ji. At first, I didn't take him seriously, but I enjoyed being with the people, who were friendly and loving. After a while, I began to have more faith in the guru, and I decided to join the group. When I arrived at their house for the initiation, it was absolutely hypnotic. We were brought to a dark attic, where we meditated for eight hours straight. Then it came time for me to bow down to a picture of the guru. At first I refused, but after eight hours of being in a trancelike state, I eventually *did* bow down. All of a sudden, everything came rushing in on me. I started to cry, and I had a feeling of ecstasy and purity, as if I'd taken an hallucinogenic drug. I was hooked."

Rachel continued to attend meetings for the next three months, and she gave the group everything she owned, including her old love letters and poems. "By that time, I felt I'd become a robot," she says. "I even learned how to act 'normal' outside the mission so that I would not look different

to nonmembers. While Rachel was still in the Mission, her parents persuaded her to return to college. There she met her future husband, who helped her break away from the guru. After Rachel left the cult, the Maharaj Ji, who had advocated celibacy, married his secretary, causing many of his shocked followers to defect. The Divine Light Mission finally dissolved. Rachel, now a happily married mother, works with teenagers who are trying to get out of cults.

Because celibacy is mandatory in many cults, these unconventional religious groups often seem a sanctuary for teens who feel pressure to be sexually active. Hank, twenty-three, from New Jersey, joined the Unification Church partly for this reason. "I was torn apart by sexual stress," he explains. "I was depressed because my parents always fought, and I had a real concern about how to cure suffering in the world. When I was fourteen or fifteen, I studied Jesus, Mohammed, and Buddha. I became a Jesus freak for a while, but I still wasn't satisfied."

Then Hank met some Unification Church members and was impressed by what he called their "childlike aliveness." He says, "The men and women were like brothers and sisters; there was so much happiness." Hank has been a "Moonie" for eight years.

Cult recruiters often try to convert vulnerable teens who are traveling or who have run away from home. They usually approach confused, lonely, and hungry young people in places like airports, bus terminals, and city streets. The

typical prospect, according to sociologist Ronald Enroth, of Westmont College, in Santa Barbara, California, is between eighteen and twenty-two, white, middle or upper class, and has at least some college education and some religious upbringing.

Jason, twenty-four, a former cult member, now a part-time deprogrammer in Ardsley, New York, was a perfect target for the Unification Church. "I felt estranged from the world," says Jason, who was twenty-two when he joined the Moonies. "I had just broken up with my girl friend, and I was hitchhiking across the country. In San Francisco, I was invited to a free dinner at the Unification Church. Why not? I thought. I was hungry." At the dinner, Jason says he was immediately "love-bombed," a term used to describe a cult's attempt to make prospects feel as if they are part of a family.

"They told me how much they cared for and sympathized with me," Jason says, "how I needed a sense of family. What I didn't know then was that this is a planned approach. The Moonies are taught how to lure you in with the good parts about family and community. But soon those good feelings turn into a real fear of the outside world. I was told my own father was Satan because he wanted to get me out. I was in that house for six weeks before I got out."

Despite the Moonies' efforts to isolate him, Jason wanted to see his family again. His father came to visit and persuaded Jason to go to his grandmother's eightieth birthday party instead of a Moon rally.

Soon after, Jason left the Moonies. He says it took a long time and many conversations with a rabbi and a deprogrammer before he understood how he had been manipulated.

Jason, like many former cult members, believes he was a victim of mind control. But whether or not cults use special tactics to turn converts into unquestioning zealots is a difficult question. Their techniques include meditation, chanting, removal from the outside world, fasting, and other forms of self-deprivation, which often produce trancelike, euphoric states. Dr. Clark contends that experienced cult members use mind-control tactics such as obsessive praying and constant lecturing to keep potential converts involved. He also says they enforce a lack of sleep that weakens the mind's resistance and may place the prospect in a panicky, disoriented state. The recruiters then manufacture an emotional crisis that may result in the person's becoming "psychotic." "At this stage, the group can control the prospect's actions and thoughts," he says.

Other professionals who study cults disagree on whether the tactics they use are sophisticated "brainwashing" techniques. Some say every traditional religion has advocated one or more of these practices for the spiritual betterment of its members. In their book, *Strange Gods: The American Cult Scare* (Beacon Press; \$6.95), David G. Bromley, chairman of sociology at the University of Hartford, in Connecticut, and Anson D. Shupe, Jr., associate professor of sociology at the University of Texas, Arlington, argue that the use of such procedures is routine in all armed forces boot camps as well as at many Roman Catholic convents and monasteries. "It remolds values, alters personalities, disciplines individuals, and shapes their perspectives," they write, "but it does not render them robots."

Many authorities also warn that some deprogramming techniques can be as bad as, or worse than, any of the mind-altering behavior cults use. (Parents sometimes enlist the help of a deprogrammer to get their child out of the cult.) Some deprogrammers have been accused of physically detaining cultists, browbeating them, and employing the same mind-control techniques the cults supposedly use.

However, in many cases, the deprogrammer reasons with the cultist to make him or her see the deceptions, corruption, or irrationalities that seem to be inherent in some cults. And many former members are thankful that they were made to see how wrong cult life was for them.

Some teens decide to leave a cult on their own accord. Twenty-one-year-old Sean, from Brooklyn, New York, is an example. He considered himself "a pretty wild kid," when suddenly, a rare disease made him legally blind at age eighteen. "That left me feeling lonely," he says. "One day, a girl I knew asked me if I wanted to meet her friends from the Church of Bible Understanding. They turned out to be really nice people, so I started going to their meetings. But they called me the 'great debater,' because I always challenged them. We read the Bible, and I learned everything about Jesus. Eventually, I joined the group, and at first, I loved it."

"But later, the group started to lay a guilt trip on me: I couldn't go out with girls, and they said my parents were devils. The house we lived in was dirty, the food was mush, and we slept on the floor. Then I heard one of the big leaders of the church was living like a king on the members' money. Finally, I realized something was wrong, but I didn't know how to get out. I thought I was going crazy. Luckily, I heard a cult hotline broadcast. I called—and they helped me get out."

The cult question is still hazy, and no one is sure just what effect cults may have. Many part-time and full-time cult members are happy with their experiences, while other former members feel cults are responsible for ruining part of their lives. The important thing to remember is that adolescence is often a confusing time, and that neither cults nor any other group can truly solve the problems of growing up.

Cults—questions and answers:

Q. How many people really join cults? Will they overtake established religions?

A. It's hard to estimate the number of cult members in the United States because hundreds of cults come and go every year. There may be as many as two thousand religious cults in America, but only about six have substantial memberships. Probably the best known cult—the Unification Church—has no more than two or three thousand full-time core members and another twenty-three thousand associate, or part-time, members in the U.S. Cult membership is small compared to that of established churches, and most authorities believe recruitment of new cult members has been declining since the mid-seventies.

Q. What should I do if one of my friends joins a cult?

A. Do not act as if she is weird or lost forever. Remember that what may seem strange to you is probably important to her. Talk with her (continued on page 161) rationally about her ideas and beliefs, but don't lecture her, yell at her, or tell her she is foolish. You may want to ask her parents or minister for advice. Most important, don't cut your friend out of your life. She needs to be in touch with "outside" people.

Q. Where can I go for help to get out of a cult?

A. These organizations counsel young people about cults or provide referrals:

- American Family Foundation, Box 336, Weston, Mass. 02193.
- Freedom Counseling Center, 1633 Old Bay Shore Highway, Suite 265, Burlingame, Calif. 94010.
- The National Council of Churches of Christ, 475 Riverside Dr., New York 10115.
- Spiritual Counterfeits Project, Box 2418, Berkeley, Calif. 94702.
- Cult Hotline and Clinic, Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, 1651 Third Ave., New York 10028 (212) 860-8533.

Q. Where can I get more information?

A. Read one or more of the following:

- James and Marcia R. Rudin, *Prison or Paradise? The New Religious Cults* (Fortress Press; \$8.95).
- Carroll Stoner and JoAnne Parke, *All God's Children* (Chilton Book Co.; \$8.95).
- Christopher Edwards, *Crazy for God* (Prentice-Hall; \$8.95).
- Robert W. Dellinger, "Cults and Kids: A Study of Coercion" (a free pamphlet, from Boys Town Center, Boys Town, Neb. 68010).
- Steve Allen, *Beloved Son: A Story of the Jesus Cults* (Bobbs-Merrill Co.; \$12.95).

Newsletter

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in this issue...

Are you concerned about the cults? Read **FAMILIES AND CULTS....**

The upsurge of interest in the role of Jewish women is assessed in **JEWISH WOMEN AND JEWISH LIFE....**

To know what is being done around the country to strengthen Jewish families, see **NEW PROGRAMS AND PUBLICATIONS ON THE JEWISH FAMILY....**

AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

FAMILIES AND CULTS

One of the most startling developments in American religion over the last decade has been the proliferation and growth of new cults. A cult may be defined as a group that rejects the values of society, claims to offer its members something altogether new, and demands total, unquestioning obedience to a leader. It is estimated that between 2 and 3 million Americans belong to one of over 2500 cults, many of them non-existent a generation earlier. Literature is accumulating about the impact of cult membership on the families of those who join such groups. Some of this material consists of first-person accounts by ex-cultists or their parents. Other descriptions and analyses come from social scientists and therapists who have studied various cults or treated some of their members. The publication *Marriage and Family Review* recently devoted an entire double issue (vol. 4, 3-4) to "Cults and the Family."

Who Joins and Why

Considerable research has been done on the kinds of people who are particularly vulnerable to cult influence. Rabbi A. James Rudin, Assistant Director of AJC's Interreligious Affairs Department, and his wife Marcia, in their book *Prison or Paradise: The New Religious Cults* (1980), report that the typical recruit is between 18 and 26 years old, white, single, upper-

middle class and relatively well educated. More men join cults than women. The periods of greatest vulnerability seem to be the first and last years of college, when transition to new stages of life and the need to make decisions about long-range goals create tensions for many young people.

The Rudins also explore the personal and social factors that lead people into cults. Lonely people with few attachments, they report, are prime candidates. So are men and women who are between jobs or romances, those undergoing personal crises and drug users. The authoritarianism of the cults enables their members to avoid difficult decisions about their sexual activity, careers, and relationships. At the same time, cult membership fulfills the unmet desire for self-sacrifice among many middle-class young men and women.

Forces in the general society, including a disillusionment with the overblown promises of science and technology, a revulsion at the commercialism of our culture, and a broad dissatisfaction with establishment leaders and institutions also contribute to the attraction of cults. "In an age of dislocation, when one's own family is seen as superficial and vapid, one's own religion as irrelevant and relativistic, and society as chaotic and uncaring, the absolute claims, guarantees, and promises of cult life are appealing," the Rudins write.

Recently the cults have targeted elderly retirees in Florida and California, who have been joining cults in

growing numbers and often turning over their pension and social security checks to them. Like younger people, the aged yearn for community and meaning in a world of baffling change and loneliness. In addition, some retirees are drawn to the diets and mental exercises stressed by some cults in the hope of staving off the aging process. And others maintain a cult connection in order to keep in contact with younger family members already in the group. There are also instances of minors, even very young children, who have been enticed into cults or brought to them by parent members (almost a third of the more than 900 people who died at Jonestown were children).

The Cult as Substitute Family

Though it is difficult to generalize about the many cults now in existence, most deliberately stress the sense of family among their members and emphasize within their own circles many traditional family values. The theology of the Unification Church ("Moonies"), for example, is based on the goal of family perfection. Adam and Eve failed to produce the perfect family, the Reverend Sun Myung Moon teaches, because of their sin in eating the apple, and Jesus failed because he did not marry. Moon and his wife are viewed by his followers as "True Parents," and Unificationists call each other brothers and sisters. The well-publicized mass marriages that Moon has arranged are designed to develop perfect families and bring the Messiah.

Christopher Edwards, a former Moonie, stresses that this cult's technique for attracting and holding members centers on exploiting the recruit's own family conflicts and providing substitute family ties. After his first weekend with the Moonies, Edwards began to see a resemblance between the recruiter and his own father, and noticed similarities between other cultists and his own siblings. "The intended message [was]: we are like brothers and sisters living together and enjoying our life as never before." He was told, and came to believe, that his true family were the leaders and members of the Unification Church.¹

Impact on Family Life

However much the cults idealize and use traditional family values, their effect on real family life is destructive. Many cults prevent members from maintaining contact with their families; others maintain tight control over such contacts. Parents, anguishing over loss of touch with their son or daughter, agonize about what they did wrong, and some families are so embarrassed that they hide the fact that their offspring has joined a cult.

Many cults control the sex life of their members rigidly. In Hare Krishna, no contact between the sexes is allowed outside of marriage, and married partners

are permitted sexual intercourse once a month, solely for procreation. In other cults, women are sexually exploited by the leader, and have little control over marriage, divorce and childbearing. Cult children are sometimes separated from their parents, and often receive poor nutrition, health care, and education.

In recent years there have been a number of court cases stemming from parental efforts to remove their grown children from cults. In addition, child custody battles have occurred when one parent has joined a cult or one of two parent members withdraws from such association.

The Debate Over "Brainwashing"

Most writers and parents who denounce the cults charge that many recruits are lured into the movements against their will, and cite procedures designed to undermine independent will and judgment. Recruiters lavish warmth, friendship and praise on the potential recruit, and invite individuals who react positively to their blandishments to spend a weekend with their entire group. During the weekend, potential recruits are kept busy with lectures and other cult-related activities, escorted everywhere by cult members who monitor their every move, and deprived of sleep. A diet devoid of protein, critics charge, helps to induce passivity, and many young people emerge from the weekend with a changed personality and a robot-like obedience to cult authority.

The notion that people are psychologically coerced into cult membership has been challenged not only by the cults themselves, but by a number of legal and social observers who view the movements as emerging forms of legitimate religion. Their arguments are summarized in "Cult Versus Families: A Case of Misattribution of Cause?" by Brock K. Kilbourne and James T. Richardson, social scientists at the University of Nevada at Reno. Writing in *Marriage and Family Review*, they point out that only a small percentage of participants at recruitment weekends come back to the cult, and that claims of brainwashing are unsubstantiated by research. "Some parents appear to recognize that generally it would be inappropriate to accuse a ski club or a surf club (both of which offer the young competing allegiances and sometimes competing values to those of the middle class family) of interrupting their child's preparation for adulthood," Kilbourne and Richardson argue, "On the other hand, similar allegations against new religious groups, especially communal ones, are culturally appropriate because in our culture...it is permissible to believe in God, but not too much."²

Accusing many of the anti-cultists of a secularist, anti-spiritual bias, those who consider the cults to be potentially acceptable religions of the future stress that many established faiths today began as persecuted cults, and that a number of the established religions include sects that practice some of the techniques used

by cults. And they quote Jesus, who told his followers: "I have come to part asunder a man from his father, and a daughter from her mother" (Matthew X, 35).

Meanwhile individual families, the courts and society as a whole are grappling with a phenomenon that defies both simple definition and easy conclusion.

The Jewish Connection

The American Jewish community has been especially concerned about the cults, both because of a widespread assumption that these sects are attracting a disproportionate number of young Jews and because a number of the cults, most notably the Unification Church, are openly anti-Semitic.

Estimates of how many Jews are involved in cults vary widely but experts put the number at approximately 150,000, and professional deprogrammers employed by parents to reclaim sons and daughters from these groups report that half their clients are Jewish. On the other hand, there is evidence that the Unification Church, at least, attracts few Jews: it is reported that only 5 percent of the Moonies are Jewish, compared to 36 percent former Catholics.

Rabbi Rudin points out that many of the social and personality traits that mark cult members apply especially to young Jews. They are better educated than the general population; they tend to be idealistic; and they are upper-middle class. Rabbi Maurice Davis of the Jewish Community Center of White Plains, New York, suggests that the root of the problem lies in the weakened Jewish family. "The Jewish home... was once extended, with grandparents and many brothers and sisters and cousins. Now it is nuclear. One set of parents with 1.7 children."³ Michael Appell, Lifestyle Editor of *Boston Today*, argues that "cults offer a substitute and antidote for the abstract intellectual concepts of Judaism." Jewish ethnicity is no substitute for spirituality, he insists, and he advises Jewish leaders to talk less about Israel and community problems and more about God.⁴ Others have called upon the Jewish community to encourage and support charismatic Jewish spiritual leaders who could provide religious sustenance for young people within the framework of Judaism.

On October 14, 1982, the American Jewish Committee hosted a meeting of the Association for the Sociological Study of Jewry on the subject of Jews and the Cults. Professor Charles Selengut of the County College of Morris, New Jersey, who lived as a participant observer in Unification Church communities and interviewed Jewish members, reported that most Jewish Moonies had little Jewish background and found spiritual identity in the cult's teachings and practices. Selengut described three categories of Jewish Moonies. One group consists of religious seekers who feel that their parents, whatever their formal affiliation, were functional atheists, and view the cult's doctrine as a universalization of Judaic values. A second group looks to the cult as a vehicle for social change and sees it as a new expression

of the traditional Jewish impulse for social justice. The third group, a small minority, is alienated from Jewishness altogether. Selengut maintained that Jewish involvement in cults relates directly to the lack of ritual, transcendence, and community in American Jewish life. Several members of the audience, however, suggested his close relationships to Jewish Moonies might have led him to uncritical acceptance of their accounts, and a glossing over the deception and coercion used to lure members into cults.

Whatever the explanation for Jewish cult involvement, the community has begun to mobilize its resources to combat the phenomenon. In 1978 the Jewish Community Council of Philadelphia published one of the first serious studies on the subject and in May 1982 the Philadelphia Federation allocated money to the Jewish Campus Activities Board to counteract cults at local colleges. B'nai B'rith International has conducted seminars on cults in Atlanta, Denver, Houston and Seattle, and Jewish anti-cult task forces have been created in several cities. The New York Jewish Community Relations Council set up such a task force in 1980, but the mass marriage of 2,075 Moonie couples (many of them marriages between Jews and non-Jews) in Madison Square Garden on July 1, 1982, gave the issue new urgency. The New York JCRC is sharing information and statistics with other Jewish groups and maintains regular contact with Christian organizations. In conjunction with the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Service, it is conducting new research on why Jews join cults, and maintains a clinic and 24-hour hotline to counsel parents and children. Dr. Arnold Markowitz, who runs the New York clinic, advises parents to suspect cult involvement if their children begin "rejecting the family, changing plans suddenly, wanting to give away all of one's money and feeling euphoric."⁵

Even those most active in fighting cult influence recognize that education, denunciation and task forces are not sufficient. As the eminent expert on popular culture Theodore Roszak explains: "It is really no great feat to recognize the Reverend Jones, Charles Manson, the Maharaj Ji for what they are — frauds, fools or opportunists... The great unaddressed challenge of our time begins beyond that task of logical demolition; it is to reassess the spiritual need to which these charismatic figures attach themselves. What do we make of that need?"⁶

NOTES

1. *Marriage and Family Review*, IV (Fall-Winter 1981), 31-40.
2. *Ibid.*, 93.
3. *New York Times*, November 22, 1981.
4. *Moment*, November 1978, pp. 20-24.
5. *McCalls*, June 1982, p. 54.
6. *Nation*, February 10, 1979, p. 139.

Louis Coalition to Strengthen the Jewish Family, which was organized following a 1979 AJC conference on the Jewish family.

- The San Diego chapter held a conference in June, supported by all major Jewish agencies, entitled "The Jewish Family: Stress and Survival." Yehuda Rosenman, National Director of the AJC's Jewish Communal Affairs Department, highlighted the major problems affecting the contemporary Jewish family — low birthrate, high divorce rate, intermarriage, and the concerns of the aged. He stressed the need to articulate Jewish family values and to educate Jews to take these values seriously. A community-wide task force was created to publicize and implement the conference's recommendations.
- The New Jersey chapter and the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies co-sponsored a leadership conference on the Jewish family in November. At a morning symposium devoted to a discussion of the values underlying the Jewish family, Steven Bayme underscored the fact that Judaism is a family-based faith, and that Jewish tradition regards family as the core of Jewish society. Deborah Moore, Assistant Professor of Religion at Vassar College, traced the historical development of the American Jewish family; and Arnold Eisen, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Columbia University, discussed the impact of changing values. The afternoon session included workshops on problem areas in Jewish family life. Howard Charrish, Executive Vice-President of New Jersey Federation, keynoted the session, calling for extensive thinking and planning on family policy and programming, and a commitment to measures that will strengthen the family.

Philadelphia's Interagency Approach to the Jewish Family

The Philadelphia Federation of Jewish Agencies called on all local Jewish organizations, even those not affiliated with Federation, to pool their talents to devise a blueprint for enhancing Jewish family life. The result of this successful venture was summed up in *Strengthening the Jewish Family Through Community Supports*, the recent report of Philadelphia's Task Force on the Jewish Community and Family.

The aims of the task force were to "clarify current issues as they impact on individual Jews, their families, and the community," and to make practical recommendations. Two hypotheses informed its work: 1) Since

traditional Jewish family life enhances Jewish continuity, marriage within the Jewish fold and childbearing should be encouraged; 2) Since every individual is precious to the community, the community should reach out to those Jews who do not live in accordance with traditional ways.

The task force consisted of six committees, each of which dealt with a different stage in the life-cycle. Through an exhaustive process of research and investigation, much of it based on materials produced by the William Petschek National Jewish Family Center, they came up with policy recommendations and new program ideas. The final report also contains useful bibliographies pertaining to each stage of the life-cycle.

A brief summary of the committee's recommendations indicates the broad sweep of the Philadelphia study. The *Committee on Unmarried Adults* noted that Jewish institutions are geared to family units, so that singles feel alienated from them. Although Jewish single adults would like to marry within the faith, only an outreach program making them feel at home in Jewish settings will inspire them to do so. The *Committee on Young Families* emphasized the importance of premarital and marital counseling to prevent divorce, adequate day-care facilities to encourage childbearing, and special attention to single-parent families. The *Committee on Teenage Children* urged that parents serve as positive Jewish role models for their adolescent children. Since teenagers go through a stage of rebellion, they may turn against religion if they perceive their parents to be "hypocritical" about Judaism. The *Committee on College Age* stressed that Judaism should be made relevant to the spiritual needs of college students, and suggested visits to Israel as one way of reinforcing the Jewish identity of this age group. The *Committee on Mid-Life Families* discussed the need to train women for the workplace after their children have left home, and suggested ways of coping with divorce and widowhood, crises that beset middle-age families. The *Committee on Older Adults* dealt with preventive health care and other support services for the elderly.

The task force also made overall policy recommendations. Community agencies should evaluate their existing programs and tailor them to meeting family needs. Better use should be made of the media, especially the Jewish press, to inform families of available services.

The Philadelphia Task Force on the Jewish Community and Family is eager to share its findings with other communities interested in a similar interagency approach to family problems. For information write: Department of Allocations and Planning, Federation of Jewish Agencies of Greater Philadelphia, 226 South 16th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102.



JEWISH WOMEN AND JEWISH LIFE

The Jewish Woman, 1900-1980: A Bibliography. Compiled and annotated by Aviva Cantor (New York: Biblio Press, 1981).

The American Jewish Woman, 1654-1980, and The American Jewish Woman: A Documentary History, by Jacob R. Marcus (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1981).

On Women and Judaism: A View From Tradition, by Blu Greenberg (Philadelphia: Jewish Publications Society, 1981).

Consecrate Every Day: The Public Lives of Jewish American Women, 1880-1980, by June Sochen (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1981).

It is gratifying to note the large number of new books and articles published about women's place in Jewish history, and their changing roles and needs in Jewish life today in the wake of 15 years of feminist activism.

The most recent edition of *The Jewish Woman, 1900-1980*, a bibliography compiled by Aviva Cantor, seems to contain as many pages as the number of items listed in its previous edition a decade ago. An impressive array of articles, pamphlets, periodicals and books of fiction and non-fiction, deals with topics ranging from "Jewish Women in History/Herstory" to "Jewish Women in Poetry," the latter covering Jewish women writers in America, Israel and all parts of the world. In her introduction Ms. Cantor happily remarks that she recorded "twice as many listings for the past four years as for the preceding 76," and that the subject of Jewish women has pervaded more and more literary forms. What troubles her is that "serious historical studies of Jewish women are still mostly authored by Jewish male academics," though there is reason to believe that the growing number of women academics in Judaic studies and studying in rabbinical schools will soon produce enough scholars to rectify the imbalance.

Jewish women have indeed become a focus of serious study, not one "for women only." Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus, dean of American Jewish historians, has devoted his scholarly talents, honed by more than half a century of experience, to a two-volume work entitled *The American Jewish Woman, 1654-1980*. In the narrative volume, Marcus attempts to redress the sins of omission regarding women in the writing of American Jewish history by including the stories of some 200 women whose contributions and pioneering projects greatly enriched American Jewish religious and organizational life. The companion documentary volume illuminates the multifaceted roles of American Jewish women in their own words, spanning over 1,000 pages of memoirs, poems, biographical sketches, personal letters and other writings.

Although Marcus's work enriches our understanding of these women, many of whom we neither "little note

nor long remember," he clearly has not written the definitive history of Jewish women in America, especially in view of his traditional perception of women's role in general. He himself challenged future writers to the task, however, upon accepting the AJC's Akiba Award for his remarkable lifetime of contributions to Jewish letters. Professor Marcus's valuable research will certainly be helpful to those who undertake the project.

The factual groundwork laid by Marcus and other historians for a more equitable assessment of women's place in Jewish life over the centuries has been given a contemporary dimension by publications that seek to expand and enrich that role for our time.

One such work is Blu Greenberg's *On Women and Judaism*, a timely and courageous analysis of the efforts of one woman to confront the relationship between contemporary feminism and traditional Judaism. Extrapolating from her own experience as an Orthodox Jew, Ms. Greenberg urges that "every person, particularly religious leaders, ought to search for ways to absorb and integrate [the] basic claim that women are equal."

The book's essays, written in different periods, find a unifying theme in Ms. Greenberg's efforts to answer the fundamental questions troubling committed Jewish women in their relation to feminism. What elements of Jewish tradition can women integrate and which ones must they reject? How and where ought pressure to be applied so that tradition will neither discriminate against women nor close itself off from them? How do women assume greater responsibility to achieve equal membership in a holy community? Finally, what claims do women have on tradition and Halakhah today? Ms. Greenberg, who refers to herself as "a family-oriented transition woman" eager to achieve the feminist goals of equality and first-class citizenship, addresses these issues from a perspective that uniquely combines a scholar's understanding of Jewish sources, a personal experience of a warm and satisfying Jewish way of life, and a deep sensitivity to the problems faced by contemporary Jewish feminists within the traditional structure of Judaism.

Turning to the traditional Jewish community to meet feminism's challenges, she offers a basic program that is halakhically informed and at the same time mindful of the intellectual and emotional problems involved. She notes that "by combining common sense and a sensitivity to contemporary needs with a desire to remain faithful to the Torah, rabbis in every generation succeeded in preserving a love for tradition and a sense of its continuity." The Orthodox Rabbinate today should continue the process in that spirit, Ms. Greenberg urges.

A different approach is taken by Dr. June Sochen in *Consecrate Every Day: The Public Lives of Jewish*

American Women. In her introduction she states that "contrary to the popular view of Jewish American women as being narrowly focused upon family, home, and hearth — indeed, jealously guarding the home against outside invasion — Jewish American women have had rich public lives throughout the century."

Using the broadest definition of Jewish identification, the author discusses women in the past 100 years who at some level "established a conscious connection with Jewish themes." For example, she includes the author Edna Ferber, constantly reminded of her Jewish roots by the Christian community, as well as the anarchist Emma Goldman, because she was "a Jewish woman rebel who never forgot or abandoned her connection with Judaism." Goldman's career was of course a far cry from the public life of most American Jewish women who expressed themselves as volunteer activists or as "fearless leaders in the early days of union organizing," at a time when many of them were exploited workers in the garment industry.

While union leaders like Rose Schneiderman, Fania Cohen and Bessie Abramowitz fit neatly into what Professor Sochen calls "the mesh" between Jewish values and the ingredients of American culture, as do such creative volunteer activists as Hannah Solomon, Rebekah Kohut and Henrietta Szold and their followers, the place of Judaism is not always clear for many of her subjects. Yet, despite her overenthusiastic attempts to establish an often fuzzy Jewish connection, particularly among radical activists, Dr. Sochen does highlight the often overlooked role played by Jewish women in the public arena. Moreover, she points to an area for careful analysis by finding that "marriage and family removed [many women activists] from continued involvement." For the most part union leaders remained single, gaining acceptance for their achievements by their male

colleagues. Today, when the dual-career family is becoming the norm, it is all the more vital that women be supported in their efforts to reconcile the competing claims of family as the core value of Jewish life and the drive to self-fulfillment.

As women move beyond feminism to achieve a more equitable balance in the world they share with men — in marriage, family and work — publications like these assume growing importance. Despite the plethora, several important gaps still need to be filled. For example, as recent studies indicate, few Jewish history textbooks offer any clue to the activities of women in the Jewish community during various historical periods. Hebrew school texts and illustrations continue to ignore the changing role of women in society, relegating young girls exclusively to the kitchen and the lighting of candles. Even the importance of women's roles in their traditional fields is often denigrated or omitted, while their new positions and roles in Jewish communal life as scholars, teachers, rabbis and leaders are given short shrift.

The growing number of research projects and publications focusing on Jewish women and their concerns is a step in the right direction. The publication of sociological studies, historical inquiries, controversial interpretations and thoughtful inspirational essays supply the factual resources and spiritual support so necessary to those Jewish women seeking to combine self-realization with a commitment to family and community. The need for consciousness-raising information and understanding in this area demands that we continue to encourage "the writing of many books" about a major source of Jewish energy that has for too long been "written out of history."

Gladys Rosen

NEW PROGRAMS AND PUBLICATIONS ON THE JEWISH FAMILY

AJC Chapter Programming on the Family

The national activities of the William Petschek National Jewish Family Center have stimulated a number of local programs in Jewish communities. Initiated by the AJC chapter offices, these activities have generally taken the form of conferences, sponsored jointly by the major Jewish agencies in the community, to explore means of strengthening the family. These conferences have in turn led to the creation of task forces to implement new policies and programs to enhance Jewish family life and place the Jewish family at the top of the Jewish agenda. Steven Bayme, Assistant National Director of the AJC's Jewish Communal Affairs Department, recently reported on a number of AJC chapter programs in this area during the latter half of 1982.

- The Atlanta chapter and the National Council of

Jewish Women co-sponsored a forum in December on childcare for today's Jewish family, which explored collaborative communal efforts to address the needs of children and working mothers.

- The Portland chapter sponsored a four-part series on "The Jewish Family on the Contemporary American Scene" in the Fall of 1982. Topics covered included parenting, domestic family violence, intermarriage and the Jewish aged.
- The St. Louis chapter joined some 25 other Jewish organizations in sponsoring "a celebration of the Jewish family" in October, designed to show how the Jewish faith can strengthen and enhance the family. The program included workshops, exhibits on Jewish living, and special children's activities. The celebration was a project of the St.