

The New York Board of Rabbis

News & Information from the NYBR • www.nybr.org • Summer 2006

NYBR COMMUNITY ALERT:

This July, Hebrew-Christian groups such as Jews for Jesus will work to convert Jews to another religion.

“ So Rabbi, What are You Going to Do?”

*Message from Rabbi Robert Levine , President
Rabbi Craig Miller, Vice President
Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, Executive Vice President*

This summer the Jewish community of the greater New York area faces the largest and most well funded missionary campaign in history. Jews for Jesus, the Hebrew-Christian missionary group, is planning a “Behold Your God” campaign July 1 – 29, throughout our community. This campaign is the capstone event in their five year outreach effort to Jews around the world. Over \$3 million is expected to be spent including a \$1 million media buy for ads in subways, newspaper and billboards.

In response, The Jewish Community Relations Council of NY has launched the Spiritual Deception Prevention Project working closely with the UJA Federation of New York, Jews for Judaism, The New York Board of Rabbis and all denominations of the of the Jewish community. To combat this missionary challenge as a united people we must: 1) help educate Jewish community leaders about the aggressive and deceptive tactics of missionaries and cults that target the Jewish community for conversion 2) educate and inspire Jewish pride and identity in the community.

Jews for Jesus plan is as follows: bring their deceptive message to all five boroughs of NYC as well as Long Island, Westchester, Rockland and northern New Jersey using a cadre of professional missionaries supplemented by specially trained summer volunteers. These efforts will also target specific populations for special attention, such as: Russian-Speaking Jews, Jewish singles, Bukharian Jews, Israelis and Chasidic Jews with brochures and DVDs in Russian, Yiddish, English and Hebrew.

The Jewish community can expect to see ads in subways, on billboards, in major media outlets and receive telemarketing phone calls.

Hebrew – Christian missionaries have every legal right to proclaim what they believe in the public square. The issue is not one of the First Amendment but that they embrace a strategy that attempts to deceive Jews into believing that one can be both a Jew and Christian. When symbols and rituals, sacred exclusively to Judaism, are expropriated for use as props for the sake of converting Jews to a distinctly different religion, this behavior is deceptive.

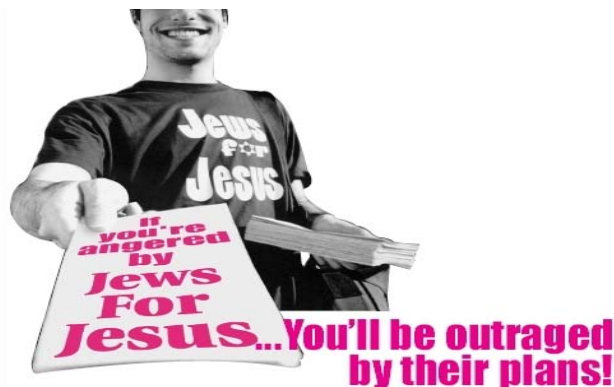


Photo Credit: Jews for Judaism

The entire Jewish community is of one accord: Those who adopt another religion should not maintain they are loyal members of two faiths simultaneously. Jewish converts to Christianity may pray in so-called synagogues, they may go through the motions of observing Jewish holidays, they may even use Hebrew words and Jewish rituals, but their religion is Christianity, not Judaism. To claim otherwise is wrong. The mis-use of core Jewish symbols, rituals and terminology is not merely offensive, it is deceptive.

In response, New York's Jewish community is focusing on a positive message:

Many Jews -- One Answer -- Yes to Judaism.

Several Christian leaders have informed us that they will be making a statement regarding spiritual misrepresentation and the need to respect the integrity of different religious traditions.

This month, and every month, make your Jewish life and practice stronger and more meaningful -

- **Learn Torah** – and more about Judaism.
- **Pray to the One G-d of All Humanity** – and connect with a synagogue.
- **Light Shabbat candles** - and bless your children.
- **Have a Shabbat meal** - with family and friends.
- **Give Tzedaka** (Charity) - help those in need.
- **Do Tikun Olam** - find a way to make the world a better

Resources



The New York Board of Rabbis

- **The NYBR Website:** Throughout the month of July the NYBR website : <http://www.nybr.org/> as well as NYBR Weekly Updates will be filled with resources to help educate you and your community.
- **NYBR Member Conference Call:** NYBR members are strongly encouraged to join us for a conference call scheduled for **Friday, July 7th at 10:00AM** with experts on Hebrew-Christian Missionary Tactics.



Spiritual Deception Prevention Project:

JCRC maintains a website providing background material, important documents and news on missionary and destructive cult/group activities.

- Has a Speakers Bureau which can provide engaging presentations for any age or interest group.
- Works with Jewish communities to mount effective and legal campaigns against infiltrating Hebrew-Christian missionaries.
- Has In-House staff capability for the Russian speaking community
- Distributes the JCRC produced DVD documentary and discussion guide *Jews in Search of Jesus* as well as teaches a high school curriculum.
- Mobilizes volunteers to counter-leaflet Hebrew-Christian missionaries on the streets of NYC.
- Works as a clearing house for the activities of counter-missionaries in the United States, Israel and the FSU.

Contact information:

Tel: **212-983-4800 ext. 127**

E-mail: **SDPP@jcrny.org**

Web: **www.jcrny.org**



Jews for Judaism

Jews for Judaism is an international organization that provides a wide variety of counseling services, along with education, and outreach programs that enable Jews of all ages to rediscover and strengthen their Jewish heritage. It has become the Jewish community's leading response to the multi-million dollar efforts of cults and evangelical Christians who target Jews for conversion.

Contact information:

Tel: **1-410-602-0276**

E-mail: **nybyg@jewsforjudaism.org**

Web: **www.jewsforjudaism.org**

But Rabbi, Jesus Makes Me Feel More Jewish.

Concerns over congregants converting to Christianity rarely keep the typical pulpit rabbi awake at night. Based on trends monitored by the Spiritual Deception Prevention Project (SDPP) of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, this soon may change. Missionary groups such as Jews for Jesus and Chosen People Ministries are increasing their efforts to convert Jews to Christianity. Mainstream Christian groups, such as the Southern Baptists and other likeminded evangelical Christian groups are encouraging their members to spread the "Good News" to all especially the "lost sheep of Israel."

The Growing Problem of Conversion

Currently, Jews who are influenced by Christianity number around 100,000. They either pray in established churches, such as Baptist or Assemblies of God, or in one of the more than 300 houses of worship where Jewish symbols are mixed with Christian worship. The latter is known as Hebrew-Christianity. The reasons for conversions are many: personal or family problems, bad experiences in synagogue, a desire for a more exciting worship modality, boredom with Jewish worship, and/or a feeling of sinfulness that they would now believe only Jesus can change. As a pulpit rabbi your first encounter with Jews professing a belief in Jesus will most likely be by telephone. >>>>>>>>>>



NYBR CONFERENCE CALL WITH EXPERTS ON HEBREW- CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY TACTICS

FRIDAY, JULY 7TH, 2006

10:00 am

Dial in: (866) 606-0746 Code: 722 24

How Jews Should Act –

How Jews react to Hebrew-Christians will determine whether they consider their efforts a success or failure. They thrive on interaction. The most effective way to deal with them is to ignore them. They want and need publicity – positive or negative.

Don't take a flyer – it will count as part of their total for "flyers distributed".

Don't engage in conversations with the missionaries

They are trained in the sales technique of Hebrew-Christianity through the manipulated use of our Torah.

Don't give them your name, address, e-mail or phone number. They will follow-up on this contact information

It gives them "proof" that they are successful to their funders

Don't react with anger or aggression - You are always a Jewish ambassador

Don't be insulting. It makes them feel like martyrs

Any violence or acts of vandalism is just great publicity for them and helps Hebrew-Christian groups raise money.

Just hang up the phone, close the door or keep walking

Do respond with a "No, thank you" or "I'm happy with my Judaism."

Do tell us when and where you saw the Hebrew-Christians.

Do find ways to connect with Judaism and your community.

What Are They Selling Now?

Missionaries have developed a cunning marketing strategy presenting Christianity with a Jewish veneer.

Their tactics include simulating holidays and rituals.

For example:

Missionaries may wear skullcaps and prayer shawls

Missionaries may light Shabbat candles and read from a Torah

Their "celebration" of Jewish holidays includes distorting their meaning, such as claiming at Passover Seders that

the 3 Matzo's symbolize the Christian Trinity and

the 4 cups of wine represent the blood of Jesus

Messiah in the Passover Complete Set

In addition, they frequently use misleading euphemisms:

They say 'rabbi' in place of pastor,

They say 'become a completed Jew' instead of 'convert to Christianity',

They say 'mikvah' service instead of baptism,

They say 'synagogue' instead of church.

Missionaries' claim that it is 'Jewish' to believe in Jesus and that Jews can retain their identity even after becoming Christian.



Photo credit:
Jewish Community
Relations Council
NY



"So, Rabbi, What are You Going to Do?"

A hypothetical situation could be as follows: a person calls hysterically saying that a child, teenager, friend or parent has just declared their belief in Jesus or expressed a strong interest. Another common scenario is a parent finding a copy of the New Testament in their child's room. The caller is frightened and confused and wants the rabbi to do something immediately.

You are in a delicate position. For many converts to Christianity, the meeting with the rabbi is an unmitigated disaster. The rabbi's inability to deal with their issues strongly reinforces their new-found Christian beliefs.

As the rabbi you are both on the frontline and expected to single-handedly turn the situation around. This is an impossible task to do alone. Your goal needs to be to find out why they are converting and to locate others to assist people in the discovery or rediscovery of the spiritual power of their religion. Though each case is different, the following steps are suggested:

[1] **Get to Know the Person Involved**-- A common first impulse is to immediately want to talk to the person. Before making any contact, find out as much as you can. Conversions are the result of a complex interplay of emotional, spiritual and intellectual factors. Ask about his or her religious and social background, synagogue involvement and Jewish education. Ask about any significantly negative Jewish experiences the person may have undergone. This is especially important because a large number of Jewish converts to Christianity report tremendous anger toward the Jewish community based on one or more incidents. Finally, find out about the nature of the person's Christian involvement; is it through a specific church or ministry or organizations?

[2] **Become Informed** -- One of the worst approaches that a rabbi can take is to be unprepared while meeting with the convert or potential convert. Counter-Christian conversion methodology is not taught in any rabbinical program. What most rabbis know about the type of Christianity to which a Jew may convert is generally inaccurate and counterproductive. Therefore, what the rabbi needs to show is that Judaism itself is a valid spiritual path based on God's teachings. For instance, a common mistake is to look at a Christian proof-text such as

Isaiah 53 and offer the Jewish interpretation based on *Rashi* or modern scholarship. Once done, you've lost the person. The convert or potential convert has been told by missionaries that Judaism is a religion based on the opinion of men, not God. You have now confirmed this view. He or she is now convinced that Judaism is more concerned with the teachings of the Rabbis or scholars rather than with the clear meaning of God's word, the Bible. Before meeting or talking with the person, contact one of the resources at the number below. The SDPP can provide correct information and referrals, as well as assist you in developing a strategy for dealing with each particular situation.

[3] **Develop a Jewish Support Network** -- As a rabbi your time is limited. Therefore, you will need help. Individuals involved in the convert or potential convert's life, such as parents, friends, children and synagogue members, need to become involved. In addition, professionals who are experts in this area may be needed. As a rabbi you can meet with the convert, explain why Jews do not accept Jesus and encourage greater Jewish involvement. This is important, but it is the people closest to the convert or potential convert who need to understand their role as part of the "team" that will bring their loved one or friend back to Judaism. In many ways the rabbi's role is one part therapist, one part spiritual guide and three parts coach of the "team."

Despite this network, you, as the pulpit rabbi, represent the face of Judaism. Your demeanor needs to be one of compassion and concern. The convert or potential convert needs to know that you care about his or her religious struggles and that you value him or her as a person, as a Jew and as a member of the community.

[4] **Follow-up and Follow-through** -- You need to win the person's trust as a spiritual counselor. But you and the people on your team are very busy. The rabbi must make it his responsibility to follow-up with both the person and everyone who has agreed to help. Lack of follow through will destroy the person's confidence in you and the Jewish religion which you represent.

Frequently Asked Questions About Hebrew-Christian Missionaries & “Jews for Jesus”

Q What are Hebrew-Christian Missionaries and “Jews for Jesus”?

A “Jews for Jesus” is just one of over 900 “Hebrew-Christian” missionary groups which attempt to convert Jews to Christianity. Leaders of these groups are many times ordained Christian ministers who are specifically trained in techniques for converting unsuspecting Jews. Members of these groups use Jewish symbols (such as a Star of David or skullcap) so as to appear Jewish. Their goal is to take Jews away from Judaism and to bring them into the Christian Church. These groups are currently spending over \$250 million per year on these efforts. Despite any trappings of Jewish tradition, their theology is 100% Christian. Both Jewish and Christian groups have denounced their tactics.

Q What type of Jew is most vulnerable?

A The average Jewish convert to Christianity is between 15 and 35 years old and has little Jewish education. Since people are most vulnerable at times of personal change and transition, the missionaries center their efforts on a number of vulnerable Jewish populations, including high school and college students, senior citizens, and recent immigrants.

Q How might I be approached?

A Someone might come to your door, catch you on the street or leave literature at your door. A letter or invitation to a “Jewish cultural” event might be mailed to you. A new friend, associate or someone from your neighborhood might invite you to a social gathering.

Q How do people join Hebrew-Christian missionary groups?

A “Joining” is a gradual process that starts with a personal contact by an appealing, friendly individual. Recruiters look for spiritual seekers, at-risk and alienated people. They offer help, friendship, love and “quick answers” to complicated problems. The vulnerable may feel that their needs are being met and come to depend upon this new source for support. The one-on-one relationship expands to an entire group. For a vulnerable person, instant acceptance by a friendly group of people is very enticing.

Q What are some of the tell-tale signs of these groups?

A If someone starts talking about being a “Messianic”, “fulfilled”, or “completed” Jew or claims that a Jew can accept Jesus or, as they sometimes call him, “Yeshua” without giving up Judaism – that you can be a “Jew for Jesus” – then you are speaking with a Hebrew-Christian missionary.

Q How “Jewish” are Hebrew-Christian groups like “Jews for Jesus”?

A While a large number of members are, in fact, born Jews, others are gentiles who have adopted Jewish or Hebrew names in order to appear Jewish. On a religious level, the “Jewishness” is a facade; these groups accept traditional Christian teaching and reject Jewish teaching in every single area where the two diverge. According to Judaism, the Messiah will not be divine or eliminate the obligation to observe Torah. Jews believe in a monotheistic system of a non-corporeal God. By believing that Jesus is “co-equal to God, the Father,” Hebrew-Christians have crossed over into another belief system.

Q Is the Jewish community unified in opposing Hebrew-Christians?

A On several occasions leaders of the four major Jewish movements have signed on to joint statements opposing Hebrew-Christian theology and tactics. In part they said:

“Though Hebrew Christianity claims to be a form of Judaism, it is not ... It deceptively uses the sacred symbols of Jewish observance ... as a cover to convert Jews to Christianity, a belief system antithetical to Judaism ... Hebrew Christians are in radical conflict with the communal interests and the destiny of the Jewish people. They have crossed an unbridgeable chasm by accepting another religion. Despite this separation, they continue to attempt to convert their former co-religionists”

Q Don’t Hebrew-Christians have a constitutional right to spread their message?

A Hebrew – Christian missionaries have every legal right to proclaim what they believe in the public square. The issue is not one of the First Amendment but that their attempts to deceive Jews into believing that one can be both a Jew and Christian. When symbols and rituals, sacred exclusively to Judaism, are expropriated for use as props for the sake of converting Jews to a distinctly different religion, this behavior is deceptive.

The New York Board of Rabbis • 212.983.3521 • Website: www.nybr.org