

What in the World is a Buddhist Jew?

This July, my immediate family took a well-deserved vacation. The year 2008 personally has been a tough one as I watched my family suffer through the devastating death of a loved one at the age of 42. This trip to San Francisco was a time when we could all come together and laugh ... even through the tears.

Of course, while in the City on the Bay, we visited Chinatown. The shops and the sights were amazing. My sister noticed that I was looking at the various Buddha statues you could find all over the district. At the end of the trip, she bought me a Buddha as a joke and then asked me why I was so interested. She found it hard to believe, and you might as well, that the Buddha intrigued me because so many Jewish people are turning to Buddhism as an alternative to traditional Judaism. Are you surprised? She was and still is!

However, Buddhist Jews are not a new but are a growing phenomenon in worldwide Judaism. As the tenets of traditional Judaism have failed to touch their heart and soul, Jewish people have turned to anything to fill the vacuum in their heart. For you see, and this might surprise you as well, Reform and Conservative Judaism believes that while you cannot be a Jewish believer in Jesus that it is perfectly okay to be a Jewish Buddhist.

So just what is it about Buddhism that attracts so many Jewish people to its teachings? First, Buddhism denies the existence of a real or

separate God apart from humanity. Within Buddhism, secular Jews essentially “can have their cake and eat it too”. They can embrace a belief system that is agnosticism at best and atheism at worst. However by being a Buddhist, these Jewish people can have a semblance of religion without any spiritual demands that will change their everyday lives. They want something to believe in but not anything that requires an eternal change in their lives. As written earlier, Buddhist Jews are “eating cake” without realizing that these calories have spiritual and eternal consequences.

Second, Buddhism provides the Jewish people, who have experienced suffering on an unimaginable scale, a way to avoid dealing with the pain. Buddhism teaches that if we end our need for personal desires we can find an answer to the question of suffering. Again, Buddhism seeks to provide a shortcut solution to real spiritual issues that some would rather avoid.

By now you still might be asking yourself – are there really Jewish people who follow the tenets of Buddhism? Consider for just a moment the fact that a Jewish person who follows Buddhism can

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purchase a Buddhist-focused Passover Haggadah at <http://www.modernhaggadah.com/haggadahs.html>. Or did you know that Goldie Hawn and Robert Downey, Jr., (no relation!) are Jewish Buddhists?

What can be done to reach Jewish people who are turning to Buddhism instead of Jesus with the Gospel message? First, we must recognize that to receive Jesus as Messiah would require them to face the questions of life they want to avoid. Second, approach a Jewish advocate of Buddhism as you would any Jewish person – with the truth of Messiah Jesus (i.e., No Sugarcoating!). Third, share with your Jewish friends the truth that God is knowable and approachable. God the Father is not Buddha. He wants to be sought out. In fact, He is waiting for His Chosen Ones to come to Him. Will you help them to find Him? Shalom. God bless.

Amy Downey

Bagels and Grits: A Jew on the Bayou ... A Ministry Review of a Tragic Book

This summer I read a book that brought tears to my eyes. *Bagels and Grits: A Jew on the Bayou* is a autobiographical account of a “Yankee” Jewish woman who moves with her family to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Hers is a true fish-out-of-water story as she travels about seeking spiritual answers but tries to avoid the towering steeples that surround her.

I wept over this book because I was struck by the reality of a woman who on one level would love to believe in Jesus but on another was afraid of what it might require. She also found nothing within the Christian witness she observed that made becoming a believer in Jesus appealing. The Christians she met often blamed her people for killing Jesus.

Yet, and despite everything, she actually tries to seek out Jesus. However, she never finds the truth of Messiah Jesus. Therefore, the book ends as it begins with a Jewish woman attempting to find religious fulfillment within Rabbinic Judaism that offers only rules and regulations and no true hope for eternity. I am still heartbroken by her story.

However, the great tragedy of this women’s account of living a Jewish life in the Bible Belt south is found in the postscript. I searched for her on the internet in hopes of finding a way to contact her. She and her husband have left the “Bible Belt”. They are living in New Jersey but with no address information to be found. Who will reach her now?

So what should we ask ourselves regarding this ministry review? Why did she not hear a clear presentation of the Gospel while she lived in a land of churches and Bible colleges? Is it because on a basic, core level many Christians ignore “to the Jew first”? I pray this is not the case because we as believers in Jesus have a sacred duty to make His Chosen People jealous for the Gospel (Rom. 11:11). I just wonder who will find a way to make the writer of *Bagels and Grits* jealous for Jesus in New Jersey.

Jewish College Students – Who Is Reaching Them with the Gospel?

The April 2006 edition of *Tzedakah Times* detailed the desperate need for Jewish college students to hear the Gospel. And while I do not want to rehash the article, as you can read it for yourself at <http://www.tzedakahministries.org/Tzedakah-Newsletters/April-2006/jesus-and-college-students.html>. This new article hopes to make the need of Jewish college students for Jesus very real to Christians and churches in college towns. Could you be the one “Watchman on the Wall” who reaches Jewish college students for Jesus before it is too late?

Jews for Jesus recently published an article about college outreach in which they reported that Hillel, the campus ministry of traditional Judaism, finds that one of the top ten colleges for Jewish population is the University of Texas. Consider this fact for a moment – 13% of UT Longhorns are Jewish and desperately in need of Jesus. In other words, thousands of God’s Chosen Ones are studying deep in the heart of Texas and who is reaching them with the Gospel? Right now ... no one at all. How could this be?

Tzedakah Ministries is putting together a program for campus ministries who not only want to disciple Christian college students but also want to encourage them to be bold in their faith ... even if it begins with their Jewish college roommate.

“Just Who Is Jesus the Messiah For?: Are You Brave Enough to Find Out (College Edition)” is designed as a one-night event in which campus ministries open up their meeting places as a place of Jewish evangelism and missions. This apologetic

outreach might be the one chance to reach Jewish college students with the Gospel. Please pray for this outreach. Please also pray for how your church/campus outreach might include Jewish college students on your evangelistic outreach plan.

Ministry Calendar

August 31, 2008 – “Ministry Testimony (a.m.),” Nutrioso Bible Church, Nutrioso, Arizona

September 28, 2008 – “Ministry Testimony (a.m.),” Calvary Baptist Church, La Verne, California

October 14, 2008 – “Mothers of the Messiah,” SW Arkansas District WMA, Emerson, Arkansas

December 14, 2008 – “Jesus and Hanukkah (p.m.),” Northside Baptist Church, Garland, Texas

December 17, 2008 – “Jesus in the Passover (Church Christmas Banquet),” Keltys First Baptist Church, Lufkin, Texas

April 9, 2009 – “Jesus in the Passover Dinner (Maundy Thursday Service),” Northlake Baptist Church, Garland, Texas

CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE!

On September 1, Tzedakah Ministries launched a major overhaul of the ministry website. This is the very first overhaul for the ministry!

Go check out the changes and let the Tzedakah Ministries know what you think. You can leave your comments online or email at info@tzedakahministries.org.