

# HINENI

Here am I, God, but Where are You?

*Tuvia Zaretsky*



A Jews for Jesus Testimony Booklet

*By Tuvya Zaretsky*

Edited by Tracy Stiffler



A Purple Pomegranate Book Purple Pomegranate Productions  
Hineni: Here am I, God, but Where are You? by Tuvya  
Zaretsky edited by Tracy Stiffler

© Copyright 2004 by Purple Pomegranate Productions Cover  
design by David Yapp

All rights reserved. Nothing in this book shall be reprinted or  
reproduced, electronically or in any other manner, without express  
written permission.

For more information, write to:

Reprint Permission

Purple Pomegranate Productions

84 Page Street, San Francisco, CA 94102

Published by Jews for Jesus®

60 Haight Street

San Francisco, CA 94102

USA

[www.jewsforjesus.org](http://www.jewsforjesus.org)

ISBN 1-881022-76-5

## HINENI

### Here am I, God, but Where are You?

*On my eighteenth birthday., I returned from the library to  
encounter a small gathering outside my dorm room. It occurred to  
me that they might be planning to surprise me with a small party in  
my room. I entered and set down my books. Some of the guys  
pushed their way through my door and I expected them to yell,  
“Happy birthday!” To my great horror, I noticed a poster on my  
wall. Someone had scrawled in dark red letters, “If I had known it*

*was your birthday, I would have baked you a kike.” I was both infuriated and humiliated. Turns out my roommate, a “friend” from high school, had let everyone in and helped them “decorate.” The fight that erupted left me with two broken ribs. I spent the rest of my birthday in the infirmary.*

My great-grandfather was murdered in the town square of a village in Byelorussia in the early 1900s. The leaders of the pogrom singled him out because he was the mill owner, a prominent town figure. His death was meant to signal everyone in the area that Jews were no longer welcome there. Out of desperation, my great-grandmother sent my grandfather and two of his brothers to North America where they could support the rest of the family and carry on the Zaretsky name.

When my father was born, he was given the name Abraham “Abe” Zaretsky. In an attempt to blend into his “Christian” cultural environment, however, he later took the more common name “Al.” But apparently that was not enough, because he and his family then changed their last name to *Carsen*, and that is how a Jew of Eastern European descent, finally became known as Dr. Albert Carsen.

My mother’s father also tried to assimilate into the American “Christian” culture when he emigrated from Poland. He and six other Jewish men chose to call their clothing line *Haminton Park Suits*. By purposefully giving it a “goyish” name, they hoped to avoid the stigma associated with being Jewish businessmen. Like so many Jewish people of that era, my grandfather chose to downplay his Jewishness to gain a chance for success in the “land of opportunity.”

I was born in 1947, on the day my parents moved to San Jose, California. They named me Lloyd Carsen. Our post-World War II tract home was in a mostly “Christian” neighborhood. Yet in my preschool years, I wasn’t even aware that I was a minority. My parents socialized almost exclusively with Jewish friends and family, so in my small world everyone was pretty much like me.

As a child, I had a sense of something bigger than anything I could see or imagine—a sense of God. I still remember my first impression of him. I was about six, and (as usual) I had been outside all day, running around—literally—just running this way and that. The day was ending, and I was tired, so I flopped down on our front lawn, rolled over on my back, and looked up at the sky. I watched as the sky faded slowly from bright blue to pale blue to purple then finally to black. I felt something like awe as I looked up at the infinite sky that night. And I believed God lived somewhere out there, because it was the only place big enough for him.

From that night on, my sense of wonder grew and my mind began to reach out—wanting to know how far the darkness went, how the stars got up there, and how I got down here. Then, like the sky, my wonder began to fade from “bright blue” excitement to “a deep dark” fear. Suddenly, I became aware of my smallness and God’s bigness. Even so, I wanted to touch God. He was as distant as the stars to me, yet just as real. I knew He was there, somewhere. And I wanted to find him.

After I started public school, my parents joined Temple Emmanu-El in San Jose where I attended religious school and Hebrew classes. For the first time, I began to feel my uniqueness as a Jewish boy in a mostly “Christian” neighborhood. But I welcomed it. I didn’t feel excluded. I appreciated the closeness of our Jewish social circle and counted it a positive part of who I was.

Every Sunday, I went to religious school at our synagogue with my Jewish friends. My classmates came from various schools in San Jose, so it was fun getting to know kids outside of my immediate social circle. In public school, we were always the outsiders—the ones who didn’t celebrate Christmas or Easter. But at religious and Hebrew School, my friends and I were the insiders; we were a community unto ourselves. We had fun.

I remember one morning cramming for class in the car.

Everyone else was joking around and telling me to give up—that it was too late. When I got to class, however, Mrs. Blomberg called on me to answer the first few questions (the only ones I had

prepared for)! After I had answered them, she asked the others to answer the remaining questions. It was funny to watch my friends buckle beneath the pressure as my teacher pinned a halo over my head that day. We laughed about it all the way back home.

I began to look forward to Sundays, not just because of the classes, but because my dad, a busy physician, would sometimes pick me up early from class and take me to 49er football games up in San Francisco. Other times, he would stop at the New York delicatessen on the way home and get lox, bagels, smoked whitefish, sable, pickles, rye bread and halvah to bring as lunch for the rest of our family.

As the time for my bar mitzvah drew closer, however, I enjoyed Sundays a lot less. By that time I had Hebrew classes twice a week and the workload was increasing. Plus, our tight-knit group was slowly falling apart as, one by one, each member celebrated his bar mitzvah and never returned to class. I guess I did feel some joy for them, but mostly I was just sad to see them go.

On the positive side, I met Uzi Justman, an Israeli who came to my house each week to tutor me in Hebrew. I liked Uzi. He was passionate about Israel, our Jewish homeland. He loved to tell me about life there, and I loved to listen. Somehow, when I was around him, I'd "catch" his enthusiasm. He had served in the Israeli army in the first Sinai Campaign in the mid-1950s, and he told me about his experiences with great excitement. My love for Israel was born out of those animated conversations with Uzi as we munched on tuna sandwiches between lessons.

During this time, I read "Pathways Through the Bible," a Bible designed specifically for young people. As I read about my ancestors, the prophets, I was fascinated by the intimate relationship each one had with God. I wanted God to talk to me like that.

I also remember the dark, finely etched drawings of the Bible characters illuminating the stories. They captivated me, and I was often so distracted that I missed my teacher's instruction. The sadness and pain I saw in the eyes of those ancient people seemed to reach out to me with desperation. Years later, I discovered that

Arthur Szyk, the illustrator, was a Holocaust survivor.

The final step in preparing for my bar mitzvah was meeting with my rabbi, Joseph Gitten. These meetings, along with the ever-increasing demands of my Hebrew classes, required most of my free time. Eventually I had to drop out of Boy Scouts. At first, I was disappointed that I had to give up the outdoor activities I loved so much. But it wasn't too difficult to let it go; none of my Jewish friends were part of the scout troop, so I had always felt a little out of place.

At that point, I started to feel a certain depth to my experience. Perhaps all the attention I was receiving provoked me to think more about what was happening to me. Maybe sacrificing after-school activities made me examine the value of what I was doing. But it wasn't so easy to integrate the spiritual aspects into everyday life.

For example, Rabbi Gitten was a man of enormous warmth and intellect. He stood before the congregation in a long black robe with a white prayer shawl over his shoulders. His big black miter (the hat that symbolized the headdress of the ancient Jewish high priest) made him appear much taller than everyone else. In his official role, he was very imposing to me—larger-than-life.

My parents, however, knew Rabbi Gitten personally, so I also saw him outside of the synagogue. He and his wife vacationed with us at Lake Tahoe. Naturally, he wore a bathing suit. I remember feeling funny about that, uncomfortable even. The transformation from larger-than-life to mere mortal in swim shorts just seemed—well, wrong. I guess I had an innate sense that holy things should be separate from the mundane, though I would not have been able to express it at the time.

In the spring of 1960, my entire extended family came to California for my bar mitzvah. I was excited to see all of my relatives in one place, to feel part of something that was much bigger than just me. One night, my grandfather and grandmother held a ceremony in our living room. With great solemnity—in front of my entire family—they presented me with the yarmulke and tallis that I would use the next day for my bar mitzvah.

That night, they also told me the story of their coming to America. I had researched this story for a school assignment, but as they told of my great-grandfather's murder and my grandfather's flight for survival, it all seemed much more real. My world began to deepen and widen that night as I realized I was linked to a very distant past. I saw a life connected to people beyond my immediate experience. Even though I could not articulate it, I knew this connection somehow gave my life meaning and purpose.

On the evening of my bar mitzvah, it became "official," I was taking my place in the Jewish community. I remember a feeling of pride as I read the prayers with both my grandfather and father—each of us in order, generation after generation. My grandfather prayed a mile a minute in Ashkenazi Hebrew, which to me, sounded old-fashioned because I had learned the Sephardi style. I remember thinking, "Where did they learn to pray like this?" Then I recalled what my father had told me about his upbringing, and how he grew up saying those prayers daily as a young Orthodox Jewish boy. Once again, I realized that life was much bigger than my own experiences. A window seemed to open into the past—my father's childhood so distinct from my own. Yet at the same time, I could see the future in myself.

After we prayed, I read from the Haftorah portion in Isaiah, chapter 6. I read the story of the prophet's response to God's call. The Lord asked, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" and Isaiah replied, "Hineni," (which means, "here am I"). As I read those words in front of everyone in the synagogue, I felt a sense of anticipation, like I was the prophet, and somehow, I too, was calling out to God. Just like when I was six, lying on the lawn, looking up at the stars—I was reaching out to him again.

Afterwards, while the reception was under way in the synagogue's fellowship hall, I sneaked back into the sanctuary. I wanted to meet with God—alone. So there in the darkened sanctuary, I said the only thing that came to mind, "Hineni." But nothing happened to break the silence except my own breathing and the distant sound of people talking beyond the doors of the

dark room. “Here I am,” but where was he? I had sacrificed a lot of time preparing for this day. I had read and believed the prophets. I saw how God spoke directly to my ancestors, and now I figured, it was my turn. But where was he? I sat awhile in the darkness until I figured I wasn’t going to meet God there after all. I rejoined the party a disappointed young man.

After my bar mitzvah, my perception of what it meant to be Jewish in a mostly “Christian” neighborhood changed. What my parents had said about how “the Christians” felt about us Jews was no longer remote and irrelevant—I began to experience it personally. Once, I was eating lunch with some classmates when another student came over and asked them if they knew that they were eating with a Jew. His question was obviously not meant to gain a point of information. My lunch-mates looked back at him, as if to question whether, in fact, they were doing something wrong.

I’d heard the stories about how the “Christians” killed my greatgrandfather in Byelorussia and how the University of Toronto Hospital had rejected my father’s application because he was Jewish (even though he was the second highest graduate in his medical school class). I even sat through a meal once as a guest at a neighbor’s house while the father made comments about Jews having “killed” Jesus.

I kept close to my Jewish friends in high school, not merely to be with them, but to be *away* from others—much as my parents had done. But unlike my parents, who went as far as changing their names to assimilate into the Christian culture, we dared to be ourselves.

We even formed a folk music group called “Greenlanders” and wrote a song about a very human, teenage Jesus. Of course we got in trouble at school for singing it in a concert, but we got in even more trouble with our parents, who feared that our song would be seen as an insult to “the Christians” in our community. They feared a backlash—as though we had sabotaged the “ground” they had gained among the Christians in their lifetime.

The times when I felt freest were times I spent in the ocean—



surfing. I lived for the outdoors. Every day, I could barely wait for classes to end so that I could dash home, grab my trunks, my wet suit, my body board, a few friends and head over to Santa Cruz. Winter surfing was exhilarating! We would stay out as late as we could before it got too dark. It seemed like we had the entire ocean to ourselves. I loved being out there. I enjoyed the challenge of being a small speck in the vast waters. I loved the pounding waves that came in like blue-green mountains growing off of the horizon.

I often talked to God during those times. Far out in the ocean, my fears combined with ecstasy. I felt small, yet significant. I had moments of dread, and then I began praising God for his power, for his mystery . . . for his boundlessness! He created everything my eyes could see. He was huge. Bigger than the waves. Bigger than the ocean. Bigger than the entire earth on which the waters rolled! And yet he seemed so near.

The summer after I graduated from high school, my best friend, Mike Bluhm died. I was devastated. Neither my family nor my friends knew how to console or comfort me while I was grieving. I knew that the only one who understood me during those days was God. Even though I had no expectation of hearing from him, it comforted me to just know he was there.

I continued to speak to God during my college years. In fact, I began seriously seeking his presence through prayer. I was lonely.

I also worried about being drafted for the war in Vietnam. I was an immature college freshman (I had enrolled at seventeen), but I felt the pressure to stay in school because I didn't want to be forced to fight a war I didn't support. I knew God was the only one who could help me.

After classes, I often hiked in the nearby mountains, finding a rock where I could sit and pray. In those incredibly beautiful surroundings, I found the peace to focus my mind on God. In the quietness of nature, my heart found it natural to reach out to him.

I asked God to comfort and guide me; I wanted relief from the heartache of facing all the pressures of life on my own. I was hurting. And I wanted his help.

Of the 2,000 students at the University of Redlands, I knew

only ten (including me) who were Jewish. The school was originally affiliated with a Baptist denomination. Although they were in the process of severing their religious ties, all university students were still required to attend chapel convocations twice a week during my freshman year. My parents and I had discussed this and agreed I could survive the services for a year if I had to. I ended up taking my father's advice and brought my textbooks to chapel to "pass the time." Soon, however, my "chapel studies" became a silent protest against having to attend something that I didn't support.

I was known as Lloyd Carsen at the time, so it was easy for me to blend into the white, middle class Southern California atmosphere of which I was now a part. That is, it was easy for *them* to accept *me* since many assumed I was "one of them" unlike the other, more obvious minorities whom they tended to ostracize. But I never quite felt like I belonged. I felt alienated, especially during "the holidays." I was always nervous when I declined invitations to various Christmas programs. I hoped my classmates would not consider me disrespectful or standoffish.

On my eighteenth birthday, I found out I wasn't as well accepted as I had thought. When I returned from the library, I encountered a small gathering outside my dorm room. I didn't think much about it at first because it wasn't unusual for people to be hanging out in our hallway. Then it occurred to me that they might be planning to surprise me with a small party in my room. I entered and set down my books. Some of the guys pushed their way through my door and I expected them to yell, "Happy birthday!" To my great horror, I noticed a poster on my wall. Someone had scrawled in dark red letters, "If I had known it was your birthday, I would have baked you a kike."

I was both infuriated and humiliated. Turns out my roommate, a "friend" from high school, had let everyone in and helped them "decorate." Ironically, the one guy whom I'd sometimes heard make racist remarks had nothing to do with it. He and I had developed a mutual respect from shared success on the track team, so he refused to join in. Still, he didn't try to stop

them. The fight that erupted left me with two broken ribs. I spent the rest of my birthday in the infirmary.

The remaining month and a half of that academic year was perhaps the loneliest time in my life. I was learning what it meant to be part of a unique and peculiar people. At the same time, I was learning how to stand up to opposition, which helped me with my ongoing fight against the draft and the Vietnam War.



Above: Tuvya, aged 4



Above: Tuvya, aged 14



Left: Bar Mitzvah, June, 1960.  
Temple Emanu-El, San Jose,  
CA. Three generations; Tuvya,  
his dad and Grandpa.

Right: 1972 in Moishe  
Rosen's office in Corte  
Madera. Tuvya had just  
returned to the U.S. after  
two years in Israel.





Right: Ellen and Tuvya with Jesse,  
early 1989



Above: Ellen, Jesse, Kaile, Abbie and  
Tuvya, fall, 2000

Right: At West Coast Ingathering, 2003.







Above: *With The Liberated Wailing Wall, 1976*

Below: *Working in Boston during the mid-eighties*



Left: *Handing out broadsides at Independence Hall, Philadelphia, 1975*

Right: *Summer 1980 in New York with Susan Perlman's Uncle Simon – street encounter*









Greg Abbott

*Above: Explaining  
the gospel to a man  
on the steps of the  
42nd St. Library,  
New York, 1975*

*Right: New York, 1980*



*Left: Washing feet with Susan  
Perlman in Belfast, 1977*

Throughout college, I refused to submit to any policy with which I strongly disagreed. My resistance to the war developed from a high school friendship I had had with a South Vietnamese foreign exchange student named Ha Kim Vong. I'd gotten to know him pretty well. He was a real person, and Vietnam was his home.

From what I learned about his world, I felt the American policy was misinforming the American public and misusing the dedication and honor of our military troops—my friends and their families.

The government pestered and even threatened me with arrest if I didn't cooperate with the Selective Service System. After a protracted battle with my Draft Board, I was finally given a "conscientious objector" status and was released from the obligation. This was timely, since I had just become a prime candidate for the draft. That yearlong battle, as difficult as it was, changed me and made me stronger. I learned that it is worthwhile to stand up for your convictions.

During that time, my concept of God began to change. I had a deepening desire to connect with him and to know him intimately. I was going to the San Geronimo mountains more and more frequently to pray. I longed to hear from God, but the more I reached out, the more frustrated I became. As in my bar mitzvah days, I couldn't understand why he wouldn't talk with me the way he did with my ancestors, like Abraham, David and Isaiah. I kept anticipating his voice, but time and time again, I was greeted only by silence.

I dealt with my loneliness by turning to drugs, and I walked that road for the remainder of my college career. In April, on my twenty-third birthday, I became depressed, as the reality of how I was choosing to deal with my problems became too heavy for me to bear. I spent that evening talking with a former professor of mine who noticed my change in attitude and reached out to me. I never forgot her kindness.

Later that night, a friend of mine took me up to the

mountains. I wanted to walk in the snow until the sun came up, imagining that I could somehow walk out my feeling of despair. As I watched the beauty of the sunrise, I suddenly started to feel the weight of my hopelessness lift as well. I was talking to God. I asked him to help me find more beautiful sunrises. I wanted to experience all the breathtaking sunrises, and I knew if I was ever going to find them, he was the one to get me there.

I received my M.A. and was offered a job working with the local community in the war against drugs. Eventually, I became a counselor at a drug abuse clinic. It made me face some horrible realities about myself. First, I was trying to hide from the loneliness and frustrations of life instead of dealing with them head on. Second, I was a hypocrite—telling others to stop abusing drugs, while secretly I had used them to numb my own pain. I hated my hypocrisy and was fearful about my future. I wanted to live as I knew I *should*. I reached a moment of decision and I promised myself I would start living out my convictions.

I had a true desire to help those I was counseling, so I often looked to others in my field for advice. That is how I came to know Jean Zeller. I sought her professional advice, but somehow she always seemed to bring the conversation to a more personal level. I knew she was a religious Christian, and I never hesitated to tell her what I thought about “her type,” especially those who tried to influence the drug abuse program. She never seemed to take offense at my blunt remarks and we shared a mutual respect and appreciation.

I was surprised when Jean asked if I had ever come to God for the answers to my questions about life. I told her frankly how God had disappointed me ever since my bar mitzvah; how even when I sought him, he refused to answer. Then Jean told me about God’s promise: “Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you.” It didn’t occur to me to ask when or how God made such a promise. It sounded like God.

After all, there had to be some reason why I’d been calling out to him all those years; I must have already sensed the promise was

true to some extent without even knowing it. Jean encouraged me not to give up.

One warm summer night, I went back to the mountains. Seated next to a waterfall I called out to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—the only one God of the Jewish people. I told him that I was *asking, seeking* and *knocking* for two purposes: I wanted to know how I was doing in his eyes, and I wanted him to reveal himself to me.

Soon after, I realized that God had already been answering the first part of my request. In so many ways, I was very aware of my hypocritical behavior at the drug clinic as well as the cowardly way I'd chosen to run from life's difficulties. I was demanding honesty from people at the clinic while I continued to lie. How could I rightfully demand or successfully help others face reality if I was unwilling to do this myself? My own behavior was indicting me.

Around that time, the mother of a good friend gave me a gift. She had always treated me like a son. She was raised in Christian tradition, yet had recently come to understand God in a new and personal way. And she liked to talk about it. So I wasn't surprised when she sent me a book about religion. She even inscribed it: "I'm sending this to you because I cherish you." I leafed through the pages and quickly noticed references to Jesus. At that point, I dismissed the book as irrelevant and tossed it in the back of my closet.

However, six weeks later, while I was reading other spiritual material, I reached back in my closet for the book and began reading it. It was *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey. I remember being enraged with Lindsey's view of the Scriptures. He was trying to tell *me*, a Jew, that the Jewish prophets were the first to make reference to Jesus. I immediately concluded that Lindsey was an idiot. But I continued to read. And as I did, my rage gave way to curiosity. Especially when I started reading about his idea that God has a plan that has been unfolding since the beginning of the world.

I had actually been trying to open myself up to different worldviews. This one, however, was too unsettling. I had never given the slightest thought to the possibility that Jesus could be the Messiah and that the Jewish prophets might have been pointing to him. These were the things Lindsey was making me consider and I didn't like it. Yet deep down, I feared it might actually be true.

If Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, my whole frame of reference — my *reality*—was wrong. The mere thought of that possibility made me feel isolated. If I believed this, who would I be, what would I become? It seemed that I would be neither a Jew nor a Christian. I would be a minority among my own people—an outcast of outcasts!

I knew firsthand what people who (I thought) were Christian did to Jews, and I couldn't even imagine why I, or any other Jewish person, would even consider *their* Jesus. Nevertheless, I was driven to find the truth.

So when I saw a sign on campus the next day advertising: "Hal Lindsey, Author of *The Late Great Planet Earth*: Here Tonight!" I nearly had a panic attack. It seemed beyond the realm of coincidence, but if it wasn't a coincidence, what was it? Was God finally speaking to me? I felt like I had no choice; I had to hear Lindsey. I sat in the back of the meeting where no one could see me and listened to him give the same message I had read in his book. I was terribly frightened because I found myself considering that his message might be true. How could our rabbis be wrong? How could a whole people be wrong?

At the end of Lindsey's message, he invited people to respond. I wanted to know the truth and I was silently calling out to God, asking him to reveal it. I really didn't want anyone else to know. Afterwards, I approached Lindsey more privately, and said something like, "As a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, what you had to say was interesting." I wanted to talk with him in a casual, confident way, but I probably came across as an immature angry young man. When he tried to ask me my name, I

turned around and stomped out. Even so, there was something inside me that would not bow down to my fear. I felt like I was fighting for truth, much the same way I had fought for my convictions over the Vietnam War several years before.

I knew I either had to continue to pursue what I suspected was true or else turn away altogether. I chose to pursue my growing “suspicions” by reading the Gospel of John in the New Testament.

I was astounded at how believable it was and how credible Jesus was. There was no way I could logically dismiss what I was reading, but I wanted to dismiss it because I didn’t want to endure the consequences of believing. Yet all my rationalizing was getting me nowhere—and I knew what I had to do.

Eight months had passed since I had gone to the mountains to seek God. I went again, this time with a Bible in my backpack. My heart was filled with sadness as well as joy. I knew what I was going there to do, and I was agonizing over what would happen next.

Sitting in my tent surrounded by snow-covered wilderness, I read the Gospel of John again. Everything I read about Jesus convinced me that he was the Messiah. In him, I saw the fulfillment of the Scriptures. He lived as a Jew and understood Torah at its core. He taught it like no other rabbi I had known. I started reading by evening light. I finished by flashlight and when I finally hiked down the mountain, I knew I had encountered the truth—the Messiah of Israel. I was exhilarated. The winter breeze was awakening my senses, and I had finally found what I’d been looking for. But I was also chilled by the fear of what I had to do next.

For the next few days, I called out to God for direction. Then, the same kind professor who had sat up with me on my birthday the year before invited me to a Christmas pageant called, “The Feast of Lights.” For seven years I had avoided invitations to these programs, but this time, I finally accepted. I sat in the back, culturally estranged from the crowd, yet personally drawn to the message that Jesus was, “...the way, the truth and the life,” and

that, “No one comes to the Father but by [him]” (John 14:6). Still, I was resisting the one I had rejected all my life because I had always been taught, “Jesus is not for the Jewish people!”

At intermission, I repeated that oft heard phrase to the professor who was sitting near me. She told me that when Jesus spoke the words I was hearing that night, he was talking to a crowd of Jewish people who were just like me. With that, my last barrier fell. I left the Christmas pageant and walked into the cold December night. It was so still. And so was I, in many ways. I looked at the holiday lights in the windows, my heart torn between hope and sadness. I talked to God about my life and my sin. I told him I was afraid of being alone forever—afraid of being separated from him and from my people. But as I told God my fears, I was incredibly comforted by the idea that God was there with me. For the first time, I felt God’s presence as I had imagined my ancestors did long ago. That night I encountered God himself, *Emmanu-el*—God who is with us.

Later at home, I sat on the edge of my bed and recalled the path I had begun that summer. I remembered how God answered the first part of my request by showing me my shortcomings, my hypocrisy and my need for him. Now he was answering my second request as he revealed himself to me in the person of Jesus Christ. I recalled the gist of the prayer Hal Lindsey had suggested the week before. I bowed my head and told God that I wanted to turn from my sin and receive salvation through the Messiah, Jesus.

I immediately wanted to tell everyone else about my discovery and my decision. When I told Jean Zeller, she shared through tears that she had been praying for me the whole time. She had been asking God, “Make him the kind of Jew that you always wanted him to be.”

She urged me to get baptized. Two weeks later I did so in front of Jean and five very stunned friends of mine. A few days later, I bought a one-way ticket to London to begin my adventure with the Lord. I was headed for Israel where I felt I would be able to find answers to the unique challenges of both being Jewish and



believing in Jesus.

I arrived in Jerusalem in March 1971 and immediately started looking for information to help me better understand my new faith.

It made sense culturally to start using the Hebrew name my parents had given me. Tuvya, which means “God is good,” fit better with the family name of Zaretsky which I also began using. I eventually made it a legal change.

For eighteen months, I lived and worked in Israel, periodically renewing my tourist visa. I studied Hebrew and the Bible intensely.

I also met Mary Ann Slichter (now Miriam Nadler), a worker with the American Board of Missions to the Jews (now *Chosen People Ministries*). Moishe Rosen had trained her in New York and she was continuing her acculturation in Israel. When she heard my story, she put me in touch with Moishe, who at the time, was involved in the “Jesus People” movement that was taking place in California.

In the fall of 1972, I returned to the United States, met Moishe and began volunteering with him and other young Jewish believers in Jesus in the San Francisco Bay Area. When Jews for Jesus was incorporated as a non-profit ministry in the fall of 1973, I began to pray about switching my volunteer effort to a full-time commitment. In February of 1974, I came on staff as our first field missionary.

In 1979, I met Ellen Covett, a Jewish believer in Jesus who was also on our staff. We married in 1980. Ellen and I have three children who are 100 percent Jewish, but who would also tell you that they are 100 percent Christian.

I cannot imagine a more fulfilling life. I found what I had always longed for: an intimate relationship with God, my creator. Now, I understand the true destiny of my life as a Jew: to serve and to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, indeed the God of all creation.

If you suspect that Jesus might be the Messiah, but fear the consequences, here’s a word of encouragement. It’s not always easy

being a Jew who believes in Jesus, but no difficulty can overshadow the joy of knowing God in the same way our ancestors did. The truth will remain the same, whether or not we go looking for it or choose to believe it. Are you willing to ask God to show you the truth about Jesus?

If you would like to read other stories of Jews who are for Jesus, check out the Jews for Jesus web site ([www.jewsforjesus.org](http://www.jewsforjesus.org)), write for more information or e-mail Tuvya at [jfj@jewsforjesus.org](mailto:jfj@jewsforjesus.org).

Jews for Jesus International Headquarters

60 Haight Street

San Francisco, CA 94102-5895

Look for titles such as:

Books:

*Testimonies of Jews Who Believe in Jesus*, Ruth Rosen, Editor  
*Jewish Doctors Meet the Great Physician*, Ruth Rosen, Editor  
*Last Jew of Rotterdam* by Ernest Cassutto  
*Between Two Fathers* by Charles Barg, M.D.

Booklets:

*Drawn to Jesus: The Journey of a Jewish Artist* by David Rothstein  
*Who Ever Heard of a Jewish Missionary?* by Bob Mendelsohn  
*From Yeshiva to Y'shua* by Lev Leigh  
*Loss to Life* by Susan Perlman  
*Nothing to Fear* by Karol Joseph

Whether you consider yourself Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, religious or not, if you are looking for a personal relationship with God, please consider the following:

**1. God is concerned with every aspect of your life.**

*"Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands . . ." (Isaiah 49:15,16a).*

**2. You can't truly experience God's love because of sin.**

*"But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear"*

(Isaiah 59:2).

**3. God provided Y'shua (Jesus) to be your sin-bearer and Savior.**

*"But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).*

**4. You can receive forgiveness of sins and a personal relationship with God by asking Y'shua to reign in your heart.**

*"... if you confess with your mouth the Lord Y'shua and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9,10).*

If you believe these verses and want to follow Y'shua, there is a prayer on the inside cover that will help you begin a new life.

"God of Abraham, I know that I have sinned against you and I want to turn from my sins. I believe you provided Y'shua as a once and for all atonement for me. With this prayer, I place my trust in Y'shua as my Savior and my Lord. I thank you for cleansing me of sin, and for giving me peace with you and eternal life through the Messiah's death and resurrection. Please help me be faithful in learning to trust and love you more each day. Amen."