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THE MONEY BEHIND THE MESSIANIC CULTS

by D. Nussbaum Cohen

Messianic cults trying to infiltrate the mainstream secular Jewish community have more than just blank smiles behind their recruiting efforts. In many cases, they also have a blank check.

For example, Zev Isaacs, executive director and founder of United Messianic Jewish Outreach, spends \$ 300,000 in Chicago. The organization grew out of Isaacs' newspaper, *The Messianic Times* (Toronto). Isaacs is now moving to Chicago to launch a campaign in September. His goal is to "save" the more than 1/4 million Jews in the Chicago area by "reaching thousands of Jewish commuters daily." The plan is to target 1,000 Jewish families in the Chicago area with intensive evangelizing starting at the Jewish New Year. Each family will be mailed a Messianic Jewish New Year card, a book on *Yom Kippur* and a cassette of Messianic Jewish music in time for the feast of Tabernacles. Then each family will be telephoned by Isaacs and his supporters, "sharing the Gospel, answering questions and offering to pray with them."

Isaacs has four full-time staff members who are getting the campaign off the ground. He wants to start similar efforts in New York, Florida and California.

Chicago's Jewish establishment has yet not seen any signs of Isaacs' presence. However, it is getting ready for his arrival. The Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago (JCRC) is working with all Chicago's mainstream Jewish organizations and school groups "to coordinate our response and have an unified approach".

At the same time, Jewish groups across the religious spectrum have issued a national statement declaring that Messianic Jews are not part of the Jewish community. According to it, "Hebrew-Christianity is not a form of Judaism and its members, even if they are Jewish by birth, cannot be considered members of the Jewish community." "Hebrew-Christians are in radical conflict with the communal interests and the destiny of the Jewish people. They have crossed an unbreachable chasm by accepting another religion. Despite this separation, they continue to attempt to convert their former coreligionists." "When confronted with a group of Jews which has adopted another faith and seeks to convert others, we must stand firm in asserting that this other faith is not Judaism and that its adherents have forfeited their privileges as Jews."

Also, efforts are made in Chicago to target the area's Russian-language newspapers and radio stations to alert the Russian emigre population of

the danger of the Messianic Jews in general.

"These groups are a real threat," said Mark Powers from the anti-missionary group Jews for Judaism. "It's easier to prevent hundreds from going in to the Messianic groups than to get one out."

22.9.1995, Yated Ne'eman

STRUGGLING BACK FROM THE MESSIANIC CULTS

by D. Nussbaum Cohen

In Colorado, Jeff Brodsky, a former Messianic pastor, is struggling to make his way back to Jewish life, only to find that he is caught between two worlds.

Jeff Brodsky was born a Jew. As a teenager, he became a Moonie. Later, he converted to Christianity and became a Southern Baptist minister. Today, Brodsky, 39, is trying to live as an observant Jew. Yet his wife and their six children remain Christian.

The family got involved in the Messianic cults in 1988. Five years later, Brodsky began working as the pastor of *Kehillat Sha'arit Israel*, a Messianic cult in Colorado Springs.

He had been there several months when he decided that he did not actually know much about the very Judaism about which he was preaching, and decided to start studying it with Rabbi Twerski, who is well-known for his outreach work to non-religious Jews.

Soon after starting the studies, Brodsky preached a sermon asking: "By what right do we pick and choose what commandments of G-d's to obey and not to obey; do we know better than G-d? The Torah is not a Chinese menu."

The sermon upset the congregation. Soon he was fired.

"They told me I was fired for being argumentative, arrogant and divisive. That's when I returned to Judaism," he said.

Brodsky moved his family from Colorado springs to Denver and his family began spending more time with families connected to Rabbi Twerski's synagogue. It was not a comfortable fit, his wife and children, after all, were not Jewish.

After a time, he moved his family back to Colorado Springs, where they began attending an orthodox-style Messianic congregation.

"It was a way to keep peace in my home," Brodsky said.

He also opened up a school, the Center for Judaic Studies, with a Chris-

tian friend. The school still exists, offering classes in Talmud and other Jewish sources.

Some in Rabbi Twerski's community doubt Brodsky's intentions. "If he doesn't feel accepted here it can only be because he doesn't understand the basic distinction between Judaism and Christianity, notwithstanding all the learning he's done," said Rabbi Hillel Goldberg. "I don't think that he's an honest person. He wants to be an Orthodox Jew and a Messianic Jew."

Rabbi Twerski, who has been working with Brodsky for three years now, acknowledges that "having enough patience isn't always easy." Still, he believes that Brodsky will be able to make the transition. "For him the move back to Judaism was simple. For his wife it's been very difficult and she hasn't yet quite figured out if she really wants to do it," said Rabbi Twerski.

Brodsky knows that the way back to Judaism continues to be a struggle for him. "I realize that you can't walk in both, and I am choosing Judaism," he claimed. But he's "not sure" where his wife will end up. "The Christians have treated her very coldly," he said. "She's hanging onto that thread called J. [=Jesus], which she won't give up today or tomorrow."

3.10.1995, Yated Ne'eman

U.S. MESSIANICS TARGET RUSSIAN IMMIGRANTS

by D. Nussbaum Cohen

At the Hope of Israel Messianic Center in Brighton Beach several dozen students attend English as a second language classes, while they also receive instruction in Christianity.

The teachers were all born in the former Soviet Union as Jews. However, today they describe themselves as "Messianic Jews." They offer the Russian Jewish students help finding apartments and jobs, give them gifts at holiday time and shepherd them into the Messianic Jewish and evangelical Christian churches in the area. Outside of class, they hand out literature on Brighton Beach Avenue and visit Russian Jews in their apartments to "counsel" them.

An estimated 80,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union live in the Brighton Beach neighborhood. Although the majority seem to remain indifferent to any religious group, a substantial number are attracted to the missionaries' efforts, said Craig Miller, who until recently was the director of the anti-missionary Jewish Action Group.

Similar activities exist also elsewhere in the USA. In Richmond, Va., for

example, Congregation *Tikvat Israel* runs Russian Immigration Services, which helps emigres with legal advice and government paperwork to get visas, social services and drivers education, in addition to providing English language instruction.

Also in the CIS, Messianic Jewish missionaries have actively targeted Jews for conversion with large-scale musical shows held in major cities. For ex. Jonathan Bernus, a Messianic preacher, and his Hear O Israel Ministries ran the "Revival in Russia Messianic Jewish Festival" in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other cities in 1994 and 1995. In Moscow alone, 13,000 people came to his revival and several thousand Jews were converted over a run of several nights.

In Brooklyn, the missionary groups began to offer English-language training to Jews after the yeshivas and women's seminaries that were providing English and Judaic studies classes to more than 10,000 emigres, lost their federal funding. Late last year, Mrs. Hornig founded a program that offers English language instruction in a Jewish environment. She intends to provide the emigres with what they need, so that they do not end up sitting in church. Mrs. Hornig's program offers English and Jewish studies courses to about 1,800 emigres, most of them older than 50, who are eligible for other English as a second language courses that train immigrants for the workplace.

Although the New York Association for New Americans as well as local Jewish agencies also run brief English programs, which have long lists of emigres waiting to enroll, Hornig and her colleagues say that it is crucial to reach as many Jews as they can. The Messianics "are not stupid and do whatever they can to grab a Jewish *nes homo* [=soul], said Hornig. "The ESL classes are the most effective tool to fight against them."

20.9.1995, Ha-Tzofeh

JEWISH MISSIONARIES THREATEN THE JEWS OF ST. PETERSBURG

The activity of Jewish missionaries causes much worry among Jews in St. Petersburg in Russia.

A member of the Jewish community, Alexander Frankl, told that during the last months missionaries came not only from the USA but also from Finland and Sweden. They held "Festival of Messiah" in St. Petersburg. They also advertise movies for sale in the local television.

During the last years, more than thousand Jews have converted to Christianity in St. Petersburg.

29.9.1995, Kol ha-'Emeq ve-ha-Galil (weekly, Natsrat Illit [=Upper Nazareth])

A YOUNG AND COMELY MISSIONARY FROM TIBERIAS CAUSES LOCAL MEN TO FALL BY HER CHARMS

By Orna Yosef

1.10.1995, Yedi'ot acharonot

"A BLONDE IN TIBERIAS SEDUCED/ENTICED MEN IN ORDER THAT THEY WOULD CONVERT TO CHRISTIANITY"

By Israel Moshkowits, reporter of "Yedi'ot acharonot"

The blonde beauty, who caused many men to fall into her net in Tiberias, is a missionary, succeeding with her charms to attract men to Christianity - thus claimed religious factors in the city.

The 24-year-old Finnish girl found an original way to attract Jewish men to Christianity. She used to spend time with a number of men simultaneously, and to have romances with them, during which she also preached to them Christianity, and took them to lectures on the New Testament.

According to Rabbi Rapha'el Cohen (Shas) from Tiberias, the girl belongs to a missionary sect, and she holds connections with men as part of what she sees as her religious duty, for the purposes of camouflage. He turned to the Ministry of the Interior, asking them to check if she has a valid entry visa. In case she does not, he will ask for her deportation.

During the last months missionarism has got stronger in Tiberias, and tens of young people, most of them in their thirties, use to distribute material in central places of the city.

Rabbi Cohen and the members of the faction of Shas declared a war against them, sending their supporters dressed as secular Jews to ask to get books. According to him, they have by now succeeded in taking hundreds of books, and have destroyed them.