

MELECH YACOV, EX-JEW, USA (PART 2 OF 2)

Rating: 4.5

Description: In college, Melech studies various philosophies and involves himself in the political left, only later to move on, but still in support of the Palestinian Cause. After September 11, his open-mindedness allows him to disregard all propaganda, and after reading the Quran, finally finds the truth he was searching for.

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I was fascinated with Native American culture and their bravery in the face of the white settlers who stole their land. The Native Americans had over 250 treaties broken with them, and they were given the worst strips of land that no one wanted. The story of the Native Americans is similar to that of the Palestinians. The first Palestinians were living in Palestine for thousands of years and suddenly Jews replaced them, and the natives are forced into refugee camps in which they still live. I asked my parents how the Palestinians are different from Native Americans, and the only answer I got was “because they want to kill all Jews and drive them into the sea.” My understanding of the Palestinian people put me above any of the Jews, their leaders, and Rabbis whom I once viewed as wise men. How could any good Jew deny that Palestinians were killed and forced from their land to make way for Jewish settlements? What justifies this act of ethnic cleansing – the fact that many Jews died in the Holocaust! Or is it because the bible says it’s “our” land? Any book that justifies such a thing would be immoral and hence not of God.

When I reached high school, I became interested in philosophy and read many of the great thinkers of the past. I spent time with good friends who read philosophy and who went along with me through the bumpy paths to Truth. One of the philosophers who had an impact on me was the Jewish-born Spinoza. Spinoza was a 17th century Talmudic student who questioned everything he was taught such as the belief in life after death, a belief that is found nowhere in the Torah. In fact many of the early Jews didn’t have such a belief. Spinoza was expelled from the Jewish community for his views. I enjoyed reading his views on the Bible, which he said could not be taken literally without a boat-load of contradictions and problems.

Then I read two significant books that completely swept away any ounce of sympathy I had left for Judaism. The first book was called “On the Jewish Question” by Abram Leon. Leon was an underground Communist organizer in Belgium during World War II, and later he was caught and died at Aushwitz. His book answered the age-old question: Why did the Jews survive for so long? He gave a superb historical account of

the Jews from the age of antiquity to the modern day and shows that their survival was by no means a miracle. In the words of Karl Marx, "It is not in spite of history that the Jews survive but because of it." First, he shows how much of the Jewish community left Israel on their own accord before the destruction of Jerusalem. Then he explains that the Jews were valuable to the kings and nobles of the middle ages because of their status as middle men. Then he shows how during the process of capitalist accumulation the status of Jew finally took a downward turn and they were subsequently persecuted for their usury.

The second book that affected me greatly was called "Who Wrote the Bible?" by Elliot Freedman. It takes up the historical task of Spinoza. The book proves that the Torah is actually written by 4 different people. Freedman explains to us that there were 2 different traditional accounts from the Kingdom of Israel and Judah, and that a redactor intertwined them together to get the Bible we have today.

Besides reading philosophy with my friends, we also took up many different political causes in our youth. We experimented in everything from Republicanism to Communism. I took up reading all the works of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Mao and Trotsky. I found in Marxism what I felt was missing in my life. I believed that I had found all the answers to everything and hence felt intellectually superior to everyone. The philosophy bandits (as I like to call us) got together and formed our own little Socialist club. We went to different activist events like protests and labor strikes.

After meeting all the different cult groups that surrounded the political left in America we all became disgusted at the way they acted and denied reality. No revolution would be made in a country by this type of people. Fighting for social change cannot win by using methods of the past.

Although I gave up the fight for revolution, I became an active pro-Palestinian organizer. This is the one cause about which I was very passionate. We were very small and attacked by the mainstream which gave me a sense of pride. I wanted the world to know that not all Jews are bad people. It shames me to see people whom I once looked up to support the aggressive regime of Israel. The lies coming from Israel are nothing less than holocaust denial.

Although I gave up Judaism and looked at this world as the ultimate aim of man, I was never really an atheist. However, I had a strong hatred of all religion and believed that it was a tool of the people in charge to use to keep everyone else in check. When you see the way fundamentalist Christians act in America, doing things like denying science and upholding values of old white men, you can understand why I was skeptical of all religions. The way Jews acted toward Palestinians did not help either. Nevertheless, I still believed in God in the very back of my mind. But with religion gone, I had a big emptiness left in me. I sometimes even wished that I was a religious person because I felt that they lived happier lives.

Honestly I do not remember what got me interested in Islam, especially after many years of strong anti-religious feeling. As a child, I remember hearing my mother talk about Islam, and how Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, worshipped the same God as us, and also how Jews are related to Arabs through Abraham. So in a way I kind of accepted Islam as just another religion that worships God. I have a faint memory of my cousin (a Chasid) who said to me that if a Jew gives up his life as a Jew and lives like a Muslim, he wouldn't be committing any sin! Looking back I am astonished to have heard such a thing.

When September 11th happened, there was a surge in anti-Islamic propaganda in the news. From the very beginning, I knew that it was all lies because I already had developed the perspective that everything in the media protects the interests of those who control it. When I saw that the most militant people in attacking Islam were fundamentalist Christians, Islam started looking more attractive to me. I thank God for what I learned in my activist days, because without the knowledge of society and the media, I would have believed all the garbage that I heard about Islam on the television.

One day I remember hearing someone talk about scientific facts in the Bible so I wondered if the Quran had scientific facts in it. I did an Internet search and I discovered a lot of amazing stuff. I subsequently spent a great deal of time consuming articles on various aspects of Islam. I was surprised of how logically consistent the Quran was. As I read the Quran, I would compare its moral message to that of what I learned from the Bible and understood how much better it was. Also the Quran was not nearly as boring as reading the Bible. It's fun to read. After about 5 months of intense study I said my *shahada* and officially became Muslim.

Unlike my old religion, everything in Islam made sense. All the practices like prayer and Ramadan I understood already. Although I imagined Islam to be like Judaism in which one follows a series of different rules dogmatically, I was wrong. My understanding of the world also matched what Islam taught me – that all religions are basically the same but have been corrupted by man over time. God didn't make a name called Judaism and Christianity and tell people to worship him. God taught the people only Islam; that is submission to Him alone. It is as clear and simple as that.

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