

JEWISH EVANGELISM IN THE NEW AGE: PERSPECTIVES AND RESPONSE

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By Scott Brown

A Kindergarten teacher was observing the children in her classroom while they were drawing. She would occasionally walk around to see each child's work.

As she got to one little girl who was working diligently, she asked what the drawing was. The girl replied, 'I'm drawing God.'

The teacher paused and said, 'But, dear, no one knows what God looks like.'

Without even looking up from her drawing, the girl replied, 'They will in a minute.'

You will not be surprised to hear that a lot of people are dreaming up images of God these days. But then, they always have been, haven't they? Solomon was right; there is nothing new under the sun. But there is one particular movement that is worthy of our attention as lovers of the Jewish people, because it is numbing their discernment between truth and error.

Tranquilizers and pain suppressants work. They numb the senses and mask the pain long enough to give one a momentary sense of relief and tranquility. In much the same way, the New Age Movement and related philosophies work; they mask the problem of sin long enough to give their followers a false sense of peace and tranquility. It is the perfect deception, allowing sin and death to perform their morbid task. While the New Age promises enlightenment, the payoff is darkness.

Of course, there's nothing really new about the New Age Movement. It's just the same old occultism, naturalism, polytheism, pantheism and humanism we have been dealing with as long as folks have been seeking "a way which seems right unto a man" ...the end of which is the way of death. Huxley called it the "perennial philosophy." Timothy Leary, speaking at an annual convention of the Association for Humanistic Psychology, pointed out that this movement has been around forever, and that all of history consists of a battle between those who believe in the "divine spark" within, and those who don't. He then offered three cheers for Eve, the very first humanist psychologist.

The basic tenets of the movement are straight from the mind of the serpent in Genesis chapter three:

1) *God is an impersonal force.*

If God is not personal, but merely a force, then there are no moral absolutes. This may be the most appealing lie in the whole of the New Age Movement, because a force requires nothing of you. Rub a crystal, chant a mantra, and you're in! You are not accountable to any authority for any wrongdoing because there *is* no authority and there *is* no wrongdoing...only alternatives.

2) *The force is in everything, therefore there is no cessation.*

This lie is predicated on the first one. Since you are part of the force, you do not die but are “recycled” through some metaphysical facility such as reincarnation. Again, the serpent’s deception (“You will not surely die...”) comes to mind. While the Bible teaches that “...it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27), in the New Age it’s simply try, try again.

3) *You can become a god.*

The Bible, in Isaiah chapter 14, reveals Satan as the originator of this lie. Satan was opposed to the truth that there is only one “Elyon” (most high God). From his hatred for monotheism emerged polytheism, and the belief that the force within the universe is an endless source of power for those who would tap into its riches. The New Age is also called the “human potential movement” because it posits that each of us has the potential to attain to some form of godship. From this theory has emerged an enormous body of counseling models and therapies, such as Rogerian psychotherapy or “person-centered therapy.” This model applies “unconditional positive regard” to the individual, categorically rejecting the notion of inherent sin or moral absolutes.

4) *Knowledge is freedom.*

The idea here is that there is nothing inherently wrong with humankind except the way it *thinks*. Most New Age philosophies contain some element of the following proposition: *The problem is not sin, it is ignorance. You and I are suffering under the false perception that there really is such a thing as sin and death, when in fact, they do not exist. You are an unlimited being who has mistakenly come to think of yourself as limited. Change the way you think and you will not only change your reality, you will change your world. It's all about YOU.* Not surprisingly, this flies in the face of the Scriptures’ declaration that worldly knowledge apart from Divine wisdom and revelation leads to boastfulness (1 Corinthians 8:1) and contributes nothing toward the objective of understanding eternal truths (1 Corinthians 1:17 – 2:16)

Why are Jewish people so drawn to this movement? One thing for sure: It is not a recent phenomenon. In the mid 1980s, one Ashram reported that almost forty percent

of its community was Jewish. In the same decade over twenty one percent who participated in a study of ex-members of cults such as the Divine Light Mission were Jewish. In 1994, Rodger Kamenetz published *The Jew in the Lotus* in which he reported that “a third of all Western Buddhist leaders come from Jewish roots.” During the same era, Buddhist spiritual centers and meditation retreats in India reported that as many as fifty to seventy-five percent of their Western participants were Jewish. In the early 2000s as many as twenty percent of America’s Hare Krishna community was Jewish, *ten times* the percentage of Jewish people living in that country. And in our present day, secular Israel celebrates “New Age Festivals” as alternatives to her God-given holy days, each Festival sporting a marketplace for alternative spirituality.

These trends and statistics are consistent within major Jewish populations around the world, which suggests that the problem is not cultural, geographical or societal – it is supernatural. God’s unique relationship with the Jewish people seems to have planted in the Jewish soul a passion for things spiritual. But when this passion is misdirected – a “zeal for God, but not according to knowledge” (Romans 10:2) – Jewish people are especially vulnerable to the old lies of the New Age.

My own spiritual journey as a young Jew consisted of a vast array of visits to the New Age, and serves to illustrate the compelling aspects of the four philosophies noted above.

For a brief period immediately following my bar mitzvah, Jewish spirituality had an appeal. But that appeal lost its power to motivate me when I discovered no peers, no pathways and no mentors. Judaism seemed to be reserved for old men who had the corner on Jewish religion and spirituality.

In my mid-teens I bought everything I could find on witchcraft and voodoo, not to practice it, but to attempt to satisfy an intense yearning for spirituality that could be experienced. Enter Lie #1: “God is an impersonal force.” These spiritual counterfeits invited me to pursue a force to which I owed no accountability and no moral obligation.

A few years later, my entire family (culturally identified, non-religious Jews) became earnest followers of EST – Erhardt Seminar Training. Its Jewish founder, Werner Erhardt, a former encyclopedia and used car salesman, emerged on the Human Potential scene in the early 70’s, bringing with him an Americanized Zen with the added benefit of community. Your baptism into the community came the moment you “got it.” The genius of this cult was that “it” was indefinable, and any attempt to define “it” proved that you really don’t get it after all (does *The Emperor’s New Clothes* come to mind?). Erhardt’s mantra was that “you and I possess, at every moment, under all circumstances, the power to transform the quality of our lives.” It was a contemporary

vehicle for Lie #3: “You can become a god,” which positions me at the center of my universe, and gives me the power and authority to shape it at will.

When EST got too expensive and intrusive, I became a casual disciple of author Carlos Castaneda who, with the help of Peyote buttons, fashioned a whole new brand of Western mysticism that was completely void of religion. Castaneda’s stories were replete with magic, sorcery and pharmacologically induced visions. One advantage this mystical fad afforded me was being able to interface with all my hippy friends without having to smoke anything. But Lie #4 - “Knowledge is freedom” - was wooing me as well, suggesting that my false perception of the world was robbing me of benefits and powers that the cosmos means for me to enjoy.

But my deepest commitment to a New Age discipline began with my introduction to Silva Mind Control. Jose Silva, an electronics repairman with a penchant for parapsychology and hypnosis, constructed this scientific, logical approach to spirituality and the miraculous. Silva’s claim that he found a gateway to the subconscious and to a “higher intelligence” was irresistibly seductive to me in linking the mind and spirit for the purpose of everyday, practical problem solving. It was the least mystical and the most mysterious and supernatural of all my private excursions, because it yielded measurable results. I consistently experienced supernatural outcomes directly related to my self-centered goals. All four lies came into perfect convergence: (1) I tapped into an impersonal, amoral force; (2) having no accountability I experienced no fear of judgment; (3) I was in complete control; (4) I gained knowledge which afforded me the power to enjoy a totally self-centered freedom.

This summary of my brush with New Age philosophies provides a practical lesson for those who minister to Jewish seekers. Notice the disconnects among these various avenues, and how briefly they occupied my life. What can you conclude? I was not drawn to any particular discipline, and I demonstrated no particular loyalty or commitment to any one of them. I was simply desperate for a spiritual reality, and grasping at whatever spiritual carrot happened to be dangling within my field of view.

With this in mind, here are some suggestions for reaching out to Jewish friends and relatives who are tasting their New Age flavor of the month:

Kindly ignore apparent confidence (1 Corinthians 1:18-21) – Despite your friend’s glowing reports of spiritual transformation and inner peace, the truth remains that her spirit yearns for the Life that only Yeshua can provide. Do not assume their faith is settled or mature. It is almost a certainty that you are more secure in your faith than they are in theirs. Also, remember that the Holy Spirit is faithfully convincing them of their sin problem, their desperate need for righteousness, and the coming judgment

(John 16:8). Speak to the hungry soul *behind* the veil of self-confidence and remember: “God has chosen the weak things of the world [i.e., us] to put to shame the things which are mighty...” (1 Corinthians 1:27a). Art Katz, in the days of his Marxism and atheism, reveled in his ability to overwhelm Christian debaters with his intellectual prowess. While touring the death camps of Nazi Germany, a young German girl approached Katz with the message of the Gospel. Delighted with a fresh opportunity to crush a Christian witness, he challenged the youth to prove the existence of God. Without hesitation, the young girl simply said, “I know God exists. He lives in my heart.” God disabled Katz’s cerebral weaponry through the uncomplicated faith of a teenage girl, and ushered him into the Kingdom of His own dear Son.

Make room for mystery (Deuteronomy 29:29) – The age old Jewish fascination with “signs” (1 Corinthians 1:22) contributes to the high percentage of Jewish involvement in the mystical disciplines. While we, as followers of Messiah, are not pursuing mysticism, we are most certainly involved in a “mystery Kingdom” wherein the secret things of God remain veiled. By Divine prescription, our sight is temporarily but severely impaired. *"For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known"* (1 Cor. 13:12). Natural sight is unreliable for matters of daily living (2 Cor. 5:7) as is our cognitive understanding (Prov. 3:5,6), and the complete revelation of "what we shall be" and the privilege of seeing God “as He is” is presently forestalled (1 John 3:2). In fact, our vision is so impaired that the Spirit intercedes on our behalf, praying that "the eyes of your understanding being enlightened" may finally enable us to "know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe..." (Eph 1:18,19).

People beguiled by the New Age find it interesting that God keeps secrets, and that some mysteries are revealed while others are not. By discussing the mysterious aspects of our faith, we can build bridges into the lives of those who are exploring the New Age. And perhaps more importantly, we demonstrate humility in an age when religious dogmatism is most offensive. As the “Dome of Truth” crumbles under the weight of postmodern, post Christian paradigms, there is a mounting abhorrence for religious dogmatism among proponents of the New Age.

Avoid *unnecessary* dogmatism without compromising your convictions. Break down walls by humbly admitting that there are “secret things of God” that you simply do not understand. Cultivate the gentle art of naïve listening and gracious responding (Col 4:6). Make room for mystery.

Use evil for good (Gen 50:20) – An exalted Joseph consoled his terrified brothers, assuring them that he was not in the place of God, the God who used their intended evil

for good and “to save many people alive.” New Age philosophies all contain counterfeit elements of the truth which are surely intended for evil by the Deceiver, yet which can be easily redirected toward redemptive ends. For example, “enlightenment... transformation...contentment,” etc, are common terms in the language of the New Age which also happen to have profound relevance to our Gospel message.

As ambassadors for Messiah (2 Cor. 5:20), we will do well to communicate the message of our King using words and phrases that are meaningful to our hearers. The Apostle Paul deliberately used elements of the pagan cultures he addressed as bridges to truth. In my personal experience with “Silva Mind Control” I learned about the supernatural power of faith. In that context, the power to effect change through faith was geared toward purely narcissistic goals. Still, it was faith-driven power. When the day finally came when I read Jesus speaking about mustard seed faith and its ability to move mountains, I completely bought it; it was the language and paradigm of my pet heresy. God literally used what was meant for evil to move me in the direction of that which is good.

Highlight shared values (Acts 21:37 - 22:3) – Chances are, your Jewish friend is exploring a mystical path because of her earnest hunger for spirituality that works. That is something you desire as well, right? Do not be afraid to express your own passion for growing as a spiritual being, but begin the conversation in general terms and ideas that will invite, not alienate, your friend. Better yet, begin by asking sincere questions about your friend and “unpack” her responses (continue to probe without being judgmental). Sometimes this kind of gentle probing allows your friend to see that her beliefs are lacking foundation. Also concerning “shared values” – while you may value Jewishness, do not presume your Jewish friend does. In fact, if Jewishness were an issue to him, he probably would not be seeking occult spiritual experiences.

Suffer hopefully (1 Peter 3:15) – The New Age and Eastern religions promise to deliver a resource of peace and contentment in turbulent times through “at-one-ment” with a force within. It is a compelling promise that delivers...temporally and superficially. The deepest needs remain unfulfilled. So do not be surprised when God delivers an opportunity for *you* to demonstrate hope in a hopeless situation, and “be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). Many of us are eager and equipped to share our *faith* while unprepared to demonstrate our *hope*. This is a tragedy, because most of our New Age friends are seeking supernatural experiences, not out of longing for a faith, but out of a desperate attempt to assuage their fear of hopelessness. Your hope will quietly challenge your friend’s confidence in crystals, mantras and mysticism.

My family lived in one neighborhood for twenty-three years. During that time, we received countless inputs from “Nancy Lee Myerdik, your friendly neighborhood realtor.”

In addition to hundreds of mailers, we received Nancy Lee Myerdik calendars, Nancy Lee Myerdik magnets, Nancy Lee Myerdik jar openers, Nancy Lee Myerdik fly swatters... (you get the point). During twenty-two of those twenty-three years, I had absolutely no need for a realtor. But when the day came for us to put our house on the market, guess what name was indelibly imprinted on our frontal lobes?

Your friend may not need hope at the moment, but rest assured: The crisis will come. And in that day when she desperately needs a reference point for what it means to experience hope in the midst of a crisis, and she finds her guru wanting for a solution, whose life will come to mind? If you have faithfully endured seasons of hardship before those who are scrutinizing your life, you will find them eagerly asking you "...to give a reason for the hope that is within you..." His name is Yeshua.

KABBALAH AND THE NEW AGE

In discussing Jewish involvement in the New Age, we would be remiss to ignore the topic of Kabbalah. Kabbalah is not new, but what *is* new is the recent phenomenon of detaching it from the rest of Judaism and treating it as one more product on the shelves of the New Age aisle. And it turns out that some big names are buying the product! A few years ago, the New York Times covered Madonna's celebrated visit to Israel. The Times quoted Madonna as saying, "I'm here as a student of Kabbalah, because a kabbalist believes that he or she has the responsibility to make the world a better place."

Predictably, orthodox Kabbalists are not happy about this. Rabbi Daniel Olgin said, "The bottom line regarding the Kabbalah Center (the organization with which Madonna is associated) is that it is a New Agey distortion of Judaism. Hollywood stars simply make a mockery of Judaism." Yitzchak Kadouri, a well known Kabbalist teacher, says it is forbidden to teach a non-Jew Kabbalah, but the Kabbalah Center says otherwise, claiming it is open to all. After all, what's more Jewish than the Madonna?

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF KABBALAH

The word Kabbalah means "what has been handed down" or "received tradition." If you were to view Judaism as a river that branches into many streams, one of those streams is Kabbalah – the stream of mystical Judaism that deals with "hidden knowledge" having to do with the "concealed" meaning of Torah. One of the disciplines of Kabbalah is *gematria*, which claims that the Torah contains numerical combinations that have hidden meaning.

Kabbalah traces its roots to the Gnostic teachings of the first century, and possibly earlier, but the modern movement only dates back to the twelfth century. Its principal

sources are Sefer Bahir (Book of the Brilliant Light) from the twelfth century and Sefer Zohar (Book of Splendor), which was written a century later.

The Zohar, written originally in Aramaic, is the most famous Kabbalistic resource, delivered to the Jewish world in the thirteenth century by Moses De Leon. While most would agree that the Zohar is a commentary on the Torah, it is unlike most commentaries in its mystical mode of interpretation. Mystics will rely on the Zohar to reveal the Torah's otherwise hidden secrets concerning the laws of the universe and the ways of God.

Isaac Luria, an Israeli living in the 1500's, founded a school for Kabbalism which greatly enlarged the movement. But the father of modern scholarship on the subject of Kabbalah was Gershom Scholem, who died in 1982. Scholem produced a huge body of writings devoted to Jewish mysticism, but he dealt with the topic more as an historian than as a religious expositor.

It's not surprising that Kabbalah should gain momentum in a culture that exalts "spirituality" and scorns religious dogma. It is ripe for the picking among New Age constituents. You can wear your red string bracelet, which Kabbalists claim will ward off the evil eye. You can unveil hidden knowledge which will require absolutely no accountability on your part. And if you happen to be Jewish, you can satisfy your thirst for mysticism in a context that won't make your mother put her head in the oven, which is certainly an advantage.

Here are a few of the principles most cited among new age Kabbalists, and some responses from God's Word:

- 1) The Hebrew letters of the Tanach contain an encrypted code which, when deciphered, reveals the hidden truth of God.
 - "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." (Romans 15:4)
 - "But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for

they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one. For 'who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?' But we have the mind of Christ." (1 Corinthians 2:9-16)

2) Everything that exists, exists within man. Man is a microcosm of all creation. This is part of being created in "the image of the Divine."

- "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist." (Colossians 1:15-17)

3) Kabbalah is the oldest and most influential wisdom in all of human history.

- "Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: 'Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?' (Job 38:1-7)
- "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. (John 1:1-3)

4) The spiritual light of the Zohar banishes all forms of darkness from our world. The study of Kabbalah has influenced Abraham, Moses, Muhammad, Shakespeare, and Jesus.

- "Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, 'I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.'" (John 8:12)

5) The way to become one with the Infinite Being is to struggle to be moral and spiritual while in the world.

- “But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind.” (Isaiah 64:6)
- “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’” (John 14:6)

CONCLUSION

There is no denying the fact that the New Age Movement has had a numbing effect on the spiritual senses of the Jewish people. While the serpent’s deceptions have not changed since their Garden debut, hell has successfully marketed them to Jews in every generation, including this present one. How shall we respond?

Stand firm for biblical truth. There is a New Age within Christendom that is gaining momentum, and it’s not “good for the Jews.” Sloppy hermeneutics and an unbalanced concern for social justice have sparked beliefs and movements which demonize Israel and/or delete her entirely from God’s plan to redeem humankind. As more and more Christians yield to the tide of political correctness, the Four Lies are gaining easier access to pulpits all around the western world. These insidious influences are behind the thinking that has given rise to supercessionism, Christian anti-Zionism, and a host of other heresies that affect the Church’s view of Israel and the Jewish people. As God gives us opportunity, we must be about the business of aggressively, consistently redirecting the Body of Messiah back to the Bible to discover *God’s* mind on the subject of Israel.

But another dark tide has risen which has particular relevance to the subject at hand: In an effort to meet the challenges inherent to sharing the Gospel with a generation that is increasingly intolerant of moral absolutes, movements have emerged among evangelical Christians which seek to reconstitute foundational biblical tenets into something more palatable to postmodern/post-Christian seekers. The result is a cheery, intellectually stimulating message that is powerless to save souls from sin and death.

In thirty-one years of engaging with thinking, feeling people over the issue of sin and salvation, I have occasionally fallen prey to the temptation to compromise the message so as not to be regarded as narrow-minded or dogmatic. Whenever I was motivated by the fear of man and not the fear of God, I got what I wanted, and my message remained impotent. I have learned, at last, that starving souls will not benefit from hearing

sentimental messages about the love and grace of God apart from the wrath and justice of God. Stand firm for biblical truth and humbly deliver a clear and balanced Gospel.

Consider the Scripture's perspective on the problem. As mentioned previously in this paper, Paul the Apostle summed up the Jewish spiritual dilemma in a way which remains astonishingly relevant to this day: "I bear them witness, that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge" (Romans 10:2). That's not *entirely* bad news! Paul recognized the same yearning for God in his Jewish contemporaries as we observe today in ours. Perhaps this inherent longing for God accounts for the inordinately large percentage of Jewish people who immerse themselves in mystical disciplines. As a prominent Jewish lecturer noted, "The Jewish nature and soul needs to know God; it must be told about God. Our souls are looking for God and are trying to know God, and no one has told them." Our challenge is to prayerfully channel our Jewish friends' *zeal* for God toward an intimate and personal *knowledge* of God.

"He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not *know* Him" (John 1:10).

"For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not *know* Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets who are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them by condemning Him."
(Acts 13:27)

Praise God that the Jewish people have a zeal for God. Now it remains for them to know Him. Perhaps Yeshua Himself alluded to this fundamental component of disciple making when He charged His followers to make new disciples by "immersing them in the Name..." (Matthew 28:19). For centuries, *HaShem* (the Name) has represented far more than a mere substitute for the ineffable Name of God. From a biblical perspective, "the Name" represents God's very identity, person and power. The Name of God is the essence and core of God.

- Abram called on the Name of God (Genesis 13:4)
- The frivolous use of the Name is forbidden (Exodus 20:7)

We can apply this principle to the lives of Jewish friends who have a zeal for God by intentionally immersing them in the person of God as opposed to merely immersing them in Christianity or Messianic Judaism. It is consistently true that their longing is satisfied in the experience of knowing God intimately, as opposed to knowing about Him intellectually.

Declare your experience of God. To know God is to experience God, which just so happens to be the very thing our mystical mates are longing for. More often than not, they stepped onto this path because their felt needs were unsatisfied, or they were longing for some experience that would fill that hole in their heart, even if only for a day.

Enter: The God of the Bible. When God shows up in the biblical narrative and in our lives, people *experience* Him. He counsels, consoles, directs, convicts, convinces, confuses, terrifies, encourages, instructs, feeds, admonishes, rebukes, satisfies, saddens, threatens, angers, strengthens, prepares, inspires, illumines, darkens, angers, deprives, shocks, overwhelms, unsettles, heals, delivers, burdens, unburdens, blesses, curses, builds up, tears down, humbles, humiliates, exalts, empowers, shouts, whispers, provides, protects, shames, shelters, chides, challenges, delights, diminishes, increases, informs, questions, answers, plants, harvests, rescues, redeems...and that's just the beginning!

While it is certainly unwise to rely on feelings and experiences to drive or interpret our walk with God, it is tragic that we are not talking about the astounding, exhilarating adventure inherent to a relationship with the Creator. Declare the wonderful works of God in your life, and thereby provoke Jewish seekers who are following a lie to seek the Way, the Truth and the Life.