

SHALOM

at Last

AN ISRAELI'S JOURNEY TO JESUS

SHLOMY ABRAMOV

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BY SHLOMY ABRAMOV

Edited by Ruth Rosen



A Purple Pomegranate Book
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A bit of background

It is not every day that a *sabra* (an Israeli-born Jew) sees that the Messiah of Israel is none other than Y'shua, Jesus Christ. Here is my story.

I am of the Kurdish Jews,* the ones Saddam Hussein tried to wipe out with mustard gas in the late 1980s.

Just as the Eastern European Jews (Ashkenazi) were persecuted by Hitler and his kind, the Sephardic Jews have faced blind hatred in the Arabic countries in which we have lived. The persecution was extremely dangerous for my grandfather in the mountains of Kurdistan. He feared for his family's life, and longed for Israel as all Jews do. He brought the family to Israel in 1933. My father was four months old.

My mother is a fourth generation Israeli with Kurdish and Turkish roots. She grew up in Rishon le Zion, Israel. Rishon le Zion, which means "the first to Zion," describes my mother's family, who came to Israel before the rebirth of the state. My mother remembers when life was different in the Promised Land—innocent. These days she tries to make me promise I will not travel, being fearful I will run into terrorism.

*The Kurds were among those helping American forces in Iraq to find Hussein. They also assisted in sealing the border in Northern Iraq, helping to topple his regime.

My parents met through my mother's brother. He and my dad were friends. Every day after school my dad would pass through their garden on the way home. Mom was 15 and Dad was 20 when they fell in love. The family asked him to marry Hanna, the elder sister, but his heart was for my mother—not unlike Jacob and Rachel. (The culture says to marry the older one first always. When they wanted to marry, Mom lied about her age because she was too young legally!) When my mother's family saw that my father would not change his mind about which daughter to court, they agreed to the marriage. My parents married in 1955 and are still married to this day.

I was born in Israel in 1959. I have two sisters, Roslyn and Tamara, and one brother, Ilon. I have numerous uncles and aunts, so many in fact that my wife jokes that we are the 13th tribe of Israel.

My boyhood was not unusual. Israel is no different than many other places where boys engage in small rivalries and neighborhood fights. But in Israel we learned a more serious enmity for those who seemed determined to hate and destroy us. We grew up wanting to fight our enemies, the Arabs—well, I did especially.

I was a good student all through school and particularly excelled in Torah (Bible) and in singing—probably because I enjoyed them so much. We sang lots of folk songs, mainly about Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel). We all learned to appreciate and love our land very deeply. I felt a great oneness with the land and the people when we sang. I loved being able to express my own feelings for Israel through music.

We also learned about the Bible from an early age. Perhaps God chose Abraham knowing that he would teach his children, and their children's children and so on. Perhaps that is why we learn about the Bible at a young age, even today. I don't think anyone will throw the Bible out of Israel's school system the way they have elsewhere.

Along with the Bible lessons, we learned about the holidays. The holiday I recall most vividly is not commanded in the Bible, but is based on the book of Esther. That is Purim, when we commemorate how the Jews were saved from wicked Haman. It is a joyous celebration of survival, during which children dress up in costumes. It is also a holiday for pranks and humor, almost like April Fool's Day. One year at my school they had all the little boys dress up in ballerina costumes and asked us to twirl for the whole school and parents' assembly. They especially wanted boys with chubby, hairy legs—that was me!

A man at 13?

I began attending synagogue at age five; every weekend I went faithfully with my father. As I got older, the weekly synagogue services were supplemented with lessons to prepare me for my bar mitzvah.

The bar mitzvah is a Jewish rite of passage into manhood at age 13. The bar mitzvah boy leads the worship service, saying the Hebrew prayers, reading a portion of Scripture from the Hebrew scroll, and addressing the audience with a brief homily.

For my big day, I recited the first chapter of Jeremiah. I had studied hard, learning to read the Hebrew words and also how to sing them exactly as the rabbi taught me. When the day came, I was able to show how well I had learned and my whole family was very proud. As was our custom, everyone threw candy to symbolize God's sweetness and the goodness of his Torah. After the service, all the children ran to gather the small pieces of candy.

So I became a man at 13—at least in the traditional sense—and my father was ecstatic. I can still remember his face. He had big plans for me to be religious, like my uncle, who is a big shot in the local "Beit" Knesset (synagogue). Sephardic Israelis rarely go against their parents' wishes. We are expected to do what the tribe leader, that is the father, wants. And I did attend synagogue quite regularly for a while.

I wanted to please my father; nevertheless, things began to change after the bar mitzvah. Friends challenged me, asking if I had seen God. Next they wanted to know how I could believe if I hadn't seen him. I became stubborn and I began to doubt God; I wanted to "see" God because of what my friends said to me. So I asked God to show himself to me. As I lay upon my bed one night I said, "Father in heaven, if you really exist then come down and show yourself to me; then I will believe you." I actually expected God to show himself, to come face-to-face with me. To my surprise no one came. I waited still. But no one came.

In my stubborn ignorance I concluded that because God did not "show up" at my demand, he must not exist. Within two months of my bar mitzvah I stopped going to synagogue altogether.

A real man now, army days

Service in the army is mandatory for all Israelis, women and men. I faithfully enlisted for my duty at age 18. I was hoping to be a great fighter. I wanted to avenge Israel—as do many 18-year-olds—to "pay back" our enemies for each life that had been taken. To my disappointment I was instead assigned to manage a warehouse on the base! The only fighting for me was fighting my own frustration as I folded clothes and kept lists of everything going out of the warehouse, from gardening tools to tanks.

It was not such a bad assignment, really. I supervised many people and delegated responsibility. People came to me for everything from uniforms and shoelaces to tools and weapons. Everyone, it seemed, wanted to be my friend because I could get them what they wanted. They gave me the best of the food in the mess hall and it made me feel important. When my mandatory service ended, I continued for another year, in officer's training. I then applied for the police academy. I was accepted and became an officer in Rishon le Zion, my hometown.

I really enjoyed being part of the police force, especially in the beginning. I patrolled neighborhoods, and did crime investigation. I broke down doors of suspicious people. I also did some undercover work. I felt respected. I loved the work so much that I volunteered many overtime hours for free!

However, there were aspects of the job I found discouraging. Some of my co-workers seemed tougher than what I thought was necessary, and there were those who were out for themselves rather than the people they were serving. I think this is a problem faced by police forces the world over. It is tempting to allow oneself to be corrupted by the power.

Looking back, I realize that I had a strong desire for righteousness without even knowing it. Deep down I was hungry for good things, honest people. My soul was dry and I thirsted for spiritual truth. I resigned from the force and went into high-level private security work.

I became sought out as a good bodyguard; some in Israel have said I was the best. My first jobs were in nightclubs featuring celebrity entertainers. Always there would be some drunk trying to get close enough to touch the famous singer. I made sure they kept their distance. I enjoyed feeling respected and needed, and it made me feel important to guard some of Israel's most famous people. I earned the nickname "Rambo" while playing an extra in Sylvester Stallone's *Rambo 3* that was filming in the Holy Land. It was a good nickname for a bodyguard.

Whenever an Arab/Israeli fight broke out at a concert or in a bar, I was called onto the scene. I also had the privilege of protecting the late Prime Minister Isaac Shamir as well as Ariel Sharon. And I was the manager of security for the sports stadium in Jerusalem, Teddy Stadium. Everybody in Israel is a sports fan, so I made lots of friends. Occasionally, people who remember me from those days will still say, "Hi, Rambo" when they see me on the street.

These jobs were lucrative and gratifying to my ego . . . so why did I feel empty and frustrated? I could not find answers to life. I began searching for spiritual answers. One person told me to try tarot cards, another pointed me to astrology, and another still told me to have the grounds in my coffee cup read. I would see a sign on the street promising some spiritual awareness and I would go inside. Sometimes people told me things about myself or my life that were true, but there was nothing compelling about their words. I needed real truth and conviction, and I wasn't finding it.

The things I expected to make me happy were somehow meaningless. I spent my 20s chasing after things that could not satisfy me. I wished that God had shown up as I, in my arrogance, had demanded at my bar mitzvah. I went here and there, always hoping for some touch, some interaction with God. I tried to forget by drinking, but that only made things worse. After a while, I could not even feel the effects of the alcohol. I had drinking competitions with a friend, and more than once we drank so much that I had to drive him to the hospital. I was slipping very fast into darkness. The celebrity nightclub scene only added to that darkness. In fact, they fit together like a glove—a boxer's glove that was readying for the knockout punch. I knew that I was headed for a fall and there was no one to catch me.

God still didn't come. Was I still waiting?

When I reached my 30s my search brought me full circle and I decided to go back to my roots. I began attending the synagogue once more. One rainy day I walked to the synagogue with my umbrella, which was doubling as a cane following a surgery I'd had. As soon as I entered, one member, a friend of my father's, began yelling. In angry tones he told me that I was violating the Sabbath and offending God by carrying the umbrella. His words really stung because I was trying to find my way back to God. I had not

intended to offend him; moreover, I could not understand why God would be offended for me to carry something as small as an umbrella in order to keep myself dry as I entered to worship him. Was God really like that? I thought he was supposed to be a God of love. Was I a fool to seek out such a God?

A turn for the better

One day my good friend Danny asked me to go to Tiberius, on the Sea of Galilee, for the weekend. I was to bring my girlfriend and he would bring his wife. It was Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. But my girlfriend and I had a misunderstanding, and the next thing I knew she was breaking up with me. I was miserable and in no mood for a holiday, but I thought, "I am tough, I am Rambo, and I made a commitment to my friend." I told Danny that he could count on me to go to Galilee despite the circumstances.

We checked into our accommodations: a small mobile home on the Kinneret (Sea of Galilee). Then we went to the local kibbutz to buy food. It was a large kibbutz and we could not find the market. Finally we asked someone with a kind face which way to go. She politely pointed us to the market. Later we saw her again, an attractive young woman with whom I wanted to strike up a conversation. We started talking and somehow the subject of God came up. Then she started telling me about Y'shua, whom she had the nerve to say was the Messiah of Israel. Further, she told me I needed to be pointed in his direction! I told her that I was a Jew, and an Israeli at that, and that Jesus is not in my vocabulary. Furthermore, I told her that if she were a man I would break her in half. But Miriam was not the least bit intimidated. She just kept talking about him.

Guess who's coming to dinner?

I was accustomed to having my way. Normally, if I asked people to stop what they were doing, they did. I expected the same of Miriam, and was pleasantly surprised. I admired her nerve and we

became friends. She was so nice and polite, this girl, but she had a certain wisdom and strength. She was very different from the other girls I knew, which gave my parents cause to like her very much. They invited her to Sabbath dinner every Friday night, and funny things began to happen. Miriam would talk about Y'shua, and would get my parents talking about Y'shua, and their friends, too.

When my parents first realized I intended to marry this woman, they were upset because of her faith in Jesus. But when they saw how determined I was, and as they came to love her for the very qualities I saw in her, they softened. My mother assured me that this girl would “come around,” meaning she would turn her back on Jesus so that we could get married. My father promised he would give me his blessing when the time came, which was very important to me.

And so Miriam continued to come and discuss Jesus with whomever else was invited to our Shabbat dinners. One of my father's friends even went so far as to say that Jesus was King of the Jews. After all, he pointed out, they crowned him as such on the cross, so why not just be Jewish and leave out the part about him being Messiah? At that moment something moved in my parents' hearts: he was King of the Jews, hmmm, we pondered—interesting how he was crowned with that title at his death. They had not heard that before.

God goes after me

I began to thirst for God all over again. In fact, I realized that the thirst had never died; I had just pushed it aside. But with Miriam the topic was always God, and she would not let me push it aside. In fact, she gave me a New Testament to read. At first I refused, but she knew I loved history and challenged me to read it as a historic book that has influenced millions of people. She also challenged me to read the Old Testament prophecies and compare them with the New Testament. I agreed, confident that I could never be deceived as long as I had my own Bible. Like many

Jewish people I had been taught that Christians twisted the Old Testament to speak of Jesus. So I got out my own Bible and I read and read. And I began to search with all my heart.

Miriam left Israel for six months. When she returned, she would not see me, and I did not know why. Perhaps she began to realize that my family and I were all hoping for her to give up on Y'shua so I could marry her and she did not want to encourage such a false hope. At any rate, I finally invited her to a family wedding. This she accepted. Oh yes, and there was one other place she agreed to see me . . . the Messianic assembly (of believers in Y'shua) at Mount Carmel!

So because I wanted to see her, I came to the congregation. The warmth I felt there was amazing. Everyone was so friendly. Then they started to sing. I had always loved singing, but this music seemed somehow special. It drew me in as they sang about Jesus—but they called him Y'shua, which is how you pronounce it in Hebrew. By then I had begun to realize that the New Testament is, so, well . . . Jewish. I still didn't quite understand how that could be.

What I did understand was that I wanted very much to be with this girl, and also that I wanted to pay these nice people back for their kindness by doing something that would make them happy. At the end of the service they asked anyone who never knew Jesus' love and forgiveness for sins to come forward. I quickly seized this opportunity. Like Rambo, I pushed the chairs to each side and made my own path up the middle! I of course did not know any church etiquette. I repeated the prayer as the pastor invited us to do, to receive Jesus in my heart—not because I was fully convinced, but because I saw it as a kindness that I could do for these people whose love and good will I so appreciated.

World War III: internal struggle

I got home that night and found myself with a new internal struggle on my hands. My own thoughts seemed to storm against



Above: Little Shlomy at home



Above: Shlomy at his bar mitzvah

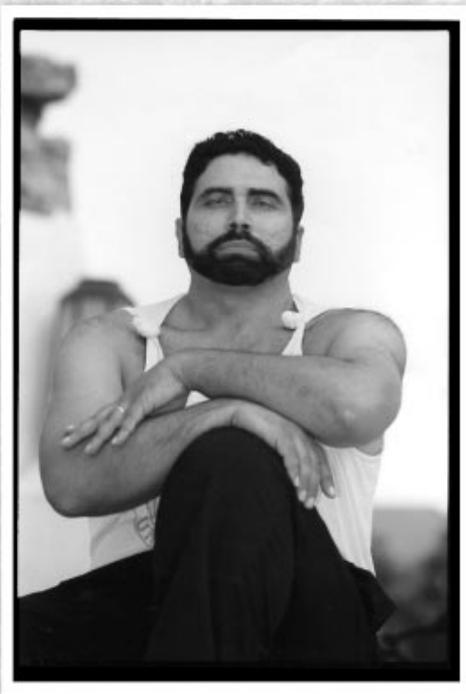


Left: Playing the king in a Purim play

Right: Army days: Shlomy on left



Above: Shlomy's parents celebrating after the bar mitzvah



Right: "Rambo" days



Above: Baptism at the Sea of Galilee



Right: Rejoicing after the baptism



Left: The wedding day-
Miriam's mom on the right

Right: Graduation



Above: Handing out gospel tracts



Right: Shlomy and Miriam

me. You are a Jew, what have you done? Your family will kill you. As a Kurdish Sephardic Jew I could not imagine doing something that would be so mortifying to my family. I didn't know what to do.

I continued to attend the congregation. I felt embraced with arms of love whenever I came. I never had felt like this before. These people showed genuine concern and they drew closer to me than most people in my circles. Their love for me combined with my love for Torah to keep me coming back.

And I found myself doing something I had not done for a long time. I went back to reading my Bible. I read for hours, for days. I came across the part I had learned for my bar mitzvah. God knew me before I was even in my mother's womb. He knows me still. Suddenly, as I read, a bizarre thing happened. As I held the Bible, it was as if a person appeared, walking out of the pages, coming closer and closer to me. It occurred to me that Y'shua himself was alive and stepping out of the pages of the Bible.

I was stunned. I felt as though a ten-ton brick had struck me. I realized that I'd had a very personal encounter with the Son of the living God. That whole week I was dumbstruck.

The following week I returned to Miriam's congregation, and this time when the pastor asked if anyone wanted to know Jesus in his heart, I answered the call—not because I wanted to make the people of the congregation happy, but because I knew who Y'shua was. My Messiah, a Jew who was more than a man, but God in the flesh. He died because of my sin, but he rose from the dead. I understood that he came to be my atonement, if I would recognize my sin and my need for him. I had no thoughts of Miriam or the other friends I'd made as I went forward to receive him.

A few weeks later I realized something as I recalled my bar mitzvah and how I had demanded that God show himself to me. Twenty years later he did exactly that. Twenty years is nothing to the eternal God. He was so gracious to help me understand his truth at a time when I was ready. Hope welled up inside of me. What a feeling, to know that God is alive, and he is real. He heard me 20 years earlier and he was with me all the time. The 20 years I had waited for him were as less than a second from his perspective! I know that he will be with me forever.

A postscript or two

Miriam, the woman who first shared Y'shua with me, became my wife. We went on to graduate from Israel College of the Bible, where we each obtained a four-year degree in Bible. I became the first *sabra* to obtain a Bachelor of Theology degree in the history of the College.

My wife (who is also an Israeli citizen) and I now work with Jews for Jesus to share the hope of our Messiah throughout Israel. And I have a little story to tell about that.

Shortly before I received Y'shua as my Messiah, I told my good friend Ronnie about a strange dream I had. I dreamed I was standing in a little building with a Moorish style window. I looked down and saw a beautiful picture at my feet, with some writing that I couldn't quite read.

The time came for me to be baptized. (Contrary to what many people think, baptism is not a renouncing of one's Jewish heritage, but an affirmation of one's identity with the Jewish Messiah.) I went to the Jordan River with my congregation and was baptized there with another believer named Avi. My friend Ronnie, who knew of my dream, was present. He told me he had a surprise for me.

After the baptism we all walked up to the small chapel at the YMCA and sat in the pews. The pastor asked me to tell how I

came to believe in Jesus. I walked to the front of the chapel. As I searched for words to share with the group, I looked at the floor for a moment. And that's when I saw it. It was the same picture I had seen in my dream, and then as I looked up I noticed the Moorish arch, the window that I had also seen months earlier in the dream. I was stunned beyond words.

Some time after, my wife insisted we go back and see what was written. (She was not present at my baptism.) You see, the writing was in English and, well . . . I speak Hebrew.

So we went to the Galilee where I was baptized, back to the little chapel. There we saw the words on the floor where I had stood. They told about a man who had given his whole life for the service of the Lord. It was at that moment I realized that God was calling me to serve him just as he had called the man described in the writing. Why else had God given me this dream? It made up for 20 years of waiting.

Speaking of the baptism, it was a show of God's power in more than one way. You see, I was baptized with a Palestinian (Tassir is his name). It is unusual to see close friendships between Jews and Arabs in Israel these days. In my family, for instance, my mother and father each lost a brother in the fight for Israel's independence. We all have friends or friends of friends who have died in terrorist attacks. But I found that when people come to Y'shua, they change. I changed. God softened my heart so that I love my Arab brothers and sisters who know Y'shua, and I can have the compassion to pray for those who don't.

One last thing I want you to know. My mother came to faith in Y'shua in 2004! For ten years she had heard of Messiah from me. She got to the point where she began asking for prayer for her own health, as well as my dad's, in Jesus' name. She watched God

answer various prayers for family members over the years. In particular, when my niece was having severe emotional problems, Miriam and I asked our supporters to pray for her. They did and she was restored! That touched my mother's heart for the Lord.

All this brought her to a point where she was willing to come along when we invited her to a special prayer meeting. This in itself was an answer to prayer because when she told my father she was planning to go, he said, "How can you leave me on the Sabbath?!" You see, in 50 years she had never left the house on the Sabbath.

This is a deep tradition here, not at all uncommon among my people. But Mom told Dad that I had tickets to this special meeting. She had lots of pain in her leg and had gone to rabbis for help with no success. They told her wear a ribbon on her wrist, they suggested she cook certain concoctions, lay things under her pillow at night and various other superstitions. Clearly, nothing worked. She was ready to ask Y'shua for help. She not only attended the function with us, but also went forward at the altar call to repent of sin and receive Jesus. Hallelujah!

If you are a believer in Y'shua, I hope you have been encouraged to see how God brought this *sabra* to know him. If you have not believed in Y'shua but are considering him, I hope that you will ask God to show you the truth.

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), write for more information or e-mail Shlomy at jfj@jewsforjesus.org.

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For titles such as those below, check out Purple Pomegranate Productions (www.store.jewsforjesus.org)

Books:

Testimonies of Jews Who Believe in Jesus, Ruth Rosen, Editor
Jewish Doctors Meet the Great Physician, Ruth Rosen, Editor
Last Jew of Rotterdam, Ernest Cassutto
Between Two Fathers, Charles Barg, M.D.
Bound for the Promised Land, Haya Benhayim with Menahem Benhayim

Booklets:

Drawn to Jesus: The Journey of a Jewish Artist, David Rothstein
Who Ever Heard of a Jewish Missionary?, Bob Mendelsohn
Loss to Life, Susan Perlman
Nothing to Fear, Karol Joseph
Hineni: Here am I, but Where are You?, Tuvya Zaretsky

DVDs and Videos:

Survivor Stories: Finding Hope from an Unlikely Source
Sam Rotman Concert Pianist: The Music and Testimony of a Jew for Jesus
Forbidden Peace: The Story Behind the Headlines

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.”

(Please print)

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Postal Code _____

Phone () _____

E-mail _____

- I have read the texts from the Bible and have prayed the prayer to claim the abundant and eternal life that the Messiah Y’shua can give me. I sign my name as a commitment to make him my Savior and Lord.

Signed

Date

- I really don’t understand or believe these texts yet. Please contact me, as I am seriously willing to consider and seek what God has for me.

- I am already a believer in Y’shua and want to know more about Jews for Jesus.

- I am Jewish I am Gentile

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