

Is It Time for a New Jesus Movement Among Jewish Millennials?

When I came to faith in Jesus in 1971 as a heroin-shooting, LSD-using, 16-year-old, Jewish, hippie rock drummer, I had no idea I was part of a worldwide spiritual happening known as the Jesus People Movement or Jesus Revolution. It even merited a cover story in *Time* magazine on June 21, 1971.

Interestingly, Jewish young people made up a conspicuously high number of these newly born-again hippies and rebels and radicals in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Today, a new poll commissioned by Jews for Jesus makes me wonder if we could be on the verge of a similar spiritual movement today, one that will especially impact Jewish young people.

Jews played a leading role in the counterculture movement of the 1960s, with names like Allen Ginsberg and Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin immediately coming to mind. Key leaders of the Weather Underground were also Jewish, including Terry Robbins, who died when his own bomb exploded.

Among the bands that played at Woodstock, the Jefferson Airplane, Sha Na Na, and Blood, Sweat, and Tears, had a number of Jewish members (in one case, as many as 5). Both Country Joe McDonald and Arlo Guthrie were born to Jewish mothers (and most of Country Joe's band was Jewish), while singing icons like Bob Dylan, Paul Simon, Art Garfunkel, and "Mamma" Cass Elliot were Jewish, just to name a few.

But the 1960s were not only marked by sex, drugs, rock and roll and rebellion. They were also marked by deep spiritual searching, and it was common to get high, listen to rock music

and talk about spiritual things, ranging from Eastern religion to human consciousness to Jesus (not so much in terms of the Christian faith but in terms of him being a cool, revolutionary leader). And again, during this time, Jews were at the forefront of this spiritual search, even making up the largest number of Buddhist converts in the West. That's why the term JewBu (or JuBu) was ultimately coined, to describe Jewish Buddhists.

I was even told by a Hare Krishna leader that, at the height of the movement in the 1970s, 75 percent of its world leadership was Jewish. Perhaps the best known example would be Hridayananda Goswami, born Howard Resnick. He joined the Hare Krishnas while at Berkeley in 1969, ultimately earning a Ph.D. in Sanskrit and Indology from Harvard.

What makes me think that something similar might be happening today?

We are certainly living in turbulent times again, with America deeply divided and radical student movements on the rise. And while it is true that many Millennials are dropping out of organized religion, they are still on a spiritual search.

That being said, I have no evidence that young people today are looking for spiritual answers at the same level we were during the counterculture revolution, nor do I have evidence of a growing groundswell of radical conversions among millennials, parallel to what happened when I came to faith.

Still, the results of a new Barna poll, commissioned by Jews for Jesus, are raising many eyebrows, producing headline like this in the *Jerusalem Post*: "STUDY: ONE-FIFTH OF JEWISH MILLENNIALS BELIEVE JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD." What a headline!

Bear in mind that, while this was poll was financed by Jews for Jesus, the polling was not done in that organization's name, and the Barna Group, which conducted the research, is highly respected. So, the results must be seriously evaluated

rather than discarded as religious propaganda.

In sum, "These young adults [born between 1984 and 1999] describe themselves as religious, and practice Jewish ritual, but are unaffiliated. They value tradition and family, but don't plan on marrying only Jews. They are proud to be Jewish, but don't feel that contradicts with practicing other religion."

Accordingly, there was ample evidence of assimilation and syncretism, with 42 percent of the respondents saying that they practiced Christmas. (A 2013 Pew Research poll, cited in the article, found that one third of its Jewish respondents celebrated Christmas.)

And when it came to beliefs about Jesus, the results were absolutely striking: "The survey found that 21 percent of Jewish Millennials believe Jesus was 'God in human form who lived among people in the 1st century.' And 28 percent 'see him as a rabbi or spiritual leader, but not God.'"

This means that a whopping 49 percent of Jewish Millennials see Jesus as either God incarnate or as a rabbi or spiritual leader, an extraordinary figure no matter how you parse it. This is not far from the Pew poll of 2013, which surveyed American Jews of all ages, finding that "34 percent said belief in Jesus as the Messiah was compatible with being Jewish."

Obviously, among very religious Jews, the findings would be radically different, but the fact that so many Jewish young people see Jesus as a spiritual leader, rabbi or more is incredibly significant.

I can't verify this from my own experience with Jewish Millennials, and, when it comes to Jewish assimilation, as indicated by the polling data, there is always cause for concern. But without question, for all who have eyes to see, there is much greater Jewish openness to Jesus the Messiah

than we have seen in the past.

This is wonderful news for those of us involved in Jewish outreach and should encourage all Christians to pray with special focus for Jewish millennials today. May they truly encounter Jesus–Yeshua their Messiah!