

SEARCHING FOR TRUTH

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

Like many young Jews who grew up estranged from their heritage, Suzanne felt a painful void in her innermost core that nothing could fill. She had spent a number of years completing a doctorate in astrophysics; her thesis focused on the origins of the universe, especially the Big Bang theory. With her doctorate completed, she set out to find true meaning in her life.

Her friends advised her to go to India and seek truth there. While traveling in the Indian countryside she encountered members of a strange and ancient religion - Zoroastrianism. She was fascinated to learn their theological view that a "good god" is engaged in an ongoing struggle with an "evil god." While she thought these ideas were intriguing, she did not feel that they satisfied her burning questions, so she continued on her quest.

Soon after, she encountered some church missionaries who were working in rural India. They were more than happy to share their religious philosophy with her. Suzanne listened politely, but she did not feel attracted to the idea of praying to a savior who had died 2,000 years ago.

Finally, Suzanne traveled to a remote mountaintop where she found what she thought she was looking for: a guru who promised to unlock the mysteries of the universe and help her reach ultimate spiritual enlightenment. But after several weeks of trying to meditate and clear her mind of all worldly cares, Suzanne found that she felt more lonely and confused than ever.

When she went to bid the guru farewell, he asked her: "Which religion were you born into?"

"I am Jewish by birth," replied Suzanne.

"If you are searching for truth you should investigate your own religion in Israel," said the guru. "The Jews have truth; they believe that G-d is One. If you go there I think you will find answers to many of your questions."

Figuring she had nothing to lose, Suzanne packed her bags and traveled to Israel. In Jerusalem she attended some classes and spoke to some rabbis. After just a few weeks in seminary, she realized that she had found everything she was looking for and more. This was the life that she had been born to lead.

Suzanne's quest is typical of many ba'alei teshuva whose yearning to get close to Hashem leads them to investigate other religions before finally bringing them back to their own religion. But all of us get a taste of such a journey when reciting the blessing that precedes the Shema in the morning

prayers. Before accepting Hashem's Absolute Oneness and Sovereignty, as we do when reciting the Shema, we first declare the falsehood of all other beliefs.

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