

# Apples of Gold

Zvi Kalisher's life-changing spiritual conversations

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## MOURNING THE CHILDREN OF MY YOUTH

I often go to Mea Shearim, the ultra-Orthodox section of Jerusalem, because I know how deeply into sin these people have fallen, and the Word of God has charged me to warn them to come to God before it is too late.

Recently I was walking along the street in that area when I heard children singing an old song I had not heard in more than 50 years. The singing was coming from a religious elementary school. The song reminded me of the children I sang it with in Warsaw in 1938. Most of them perished in Nazi death camps.

As I listened, I mourned for the children of my youth. The sorrowful lyrics are from Psalm 44:23–24: “Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord? Arise! Do not cast us off forever. Why do You hide Your face, and forget our affliction and our oppression?” The more I listened, the less peace I felt in my heart. Finally, I went inside to speak with the rabbi. The children stared at me as if I were Tarzan in the middle of New York City. The rabbi, a very old man, approached me and asked, “Where are you from?”

I told him I had come inside because I heard the class singing. I asked, “Why are you singing a song of such deep grief and exile?”

He replied, “Because I like it.”

I said, “When I was the age of these children—in 1938, before the

Holocaust—I sang that song many times. But I do not sing it anymore because I have believed in God, and now I know the Lord will never hide His face from me. God says in Psalm 50:15, ‘Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.’”

The rabbi asked the children, “Should we continue our lesson or listen to what this man has to say?” There were about 40 children in the class, all boys with long side curls. I felt as if I were in the lions’ den. I silently prayed in my heart, “O Lord, guide me, give me the words to say.” At the same time, the rabbi called several other rabbis into the room.

I began to tell them about myself—my life in Poland before the war, my experiences during the Holocaust, how I lost my family in the Warsaw Ghetto and the concentration camps, my time in the internment camps on Cyprus, my arrival in Israel, and my participation in all the wars through 1973. Then I began to tell them about my faith. I could not start by declaring I believe in Jesus. I wanted them to mention His name first. I quoted several passages from Isaiah, Micah, and other prophets about the Messiah, all the while waiting for the outcry when they realized I was speaking about Jesus. One of the teachers soon asked, “What books have you read?”

I responded, “The book I have in my hand—the Holy Bible—the book I love best. Is it sin to love God’s Word?”

I continued to speak for about 35 minutes, and everyone—students and teachers alike—listened carefully. When I finished, one of the students asked, “Why did you come here?”

“Because of the sad song you were singing,” I replied. “I wanted you to be able to rejoice in the Lord with me. The Jewish people have lamented long enough. It is time to call upon the Lord. Then you can say with Isaiah, ‘We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation’” (Isa. 25:9). The rabbis just looked

at each other in silence.

I left the school with a good feeling. I believe many of those I spoke to were seriously considering the things I said. I trust they will read the Bible passages for themselves and see the Lord alone can bring them out of sorrow and into joy and peace, if only they will trust Him as their Messiah and Savior.