

Apples of Gold

Zvi Kalisher's life-changing spiritual conversations

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THE DESPAIR CORPS

I recently visited a synagogue where many men were studying the Talmud and other books of commentary. Most were young, and many engaged me in a long conversation about faith in God. They were friendly until I asked them, "Why do you come here day after day and spend your time with nothing but vanity?"

Then they became suspicious, and one of them said, "I have been here studying for three long years. I come here to purify my soul."

I replied, "Take a good look at yourself in the mirror, and tell me if you truly think you have purified your soul."

He looked at me strangely and said, "I was a fighter pilot, but now I am like a bird with no wings. I have come here to repent. Most of the others here have the same background. They were good fighters, but now they are weak before God."

"You are all making a great mistake," I told him.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because you are like helpless sheep who have gone astray, following false teachers," I replied. "You are always looking to see who has the longest beard or the longest curls because you think he is the most righteous. Your pious outward appearance is like a costume children wear

on Purim. Open your eyes and see how far you have fallen. Your only hope is to turn to God in the way He desires.”

They seemed to be listening intently. Then the chief rabbi of the synagogue came into the room, and he too listened carefully. Finally he said, “I am the chief rabbi here. Feel free to come often. Our door is always open.”

I replied, “My place is not among those who are committing spiritual suicide. There is no life here. It is like an open grave. The people are spending their lives in emptiness and vanity.”

The rabbi listened, and then he asked, “From which books have you taken these stories?”

I replied, “It is written in Ezekiel 36:25–27, ‘Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take [your] heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.’”

The rabbi took my Bible and examined it. When he realized it contained both the Old and New Testaments, he said, “This is not surprising. As soon as I heard you speak, I knew you were one of those who believe in that Man—you are one of those whom I do not like. But because you had the great courage to come here, I must admit I respect you. I challenge you to show me, from our Hebrew Scriptures only, where I have gone astray. Can you do that?”

I told him, “God has made the truth about Him plain for us in Isaiah 53, a well-known passage among Jews around the world, and you cannot deny it. You say you are waiting for the Messiah, but you are looking to the

wrong people, such as the rabbi from New York who is now dead!" I was surprised that after a long discussion, they were still very friendly. Even the rabbi said, "Because you have been so open and seem so sure of your beliefs, I would be happy to have you come back for a longer discussion. You are welcome anytime." This was a real fulfillment of the Lord's words in Luke 10:3, "I send you out as lambs among wolves." These people need our prayers, and so do I as I plan to visit them again soon.