

1My Road to Judaism.

July 1955, 6:35PM E.S.T. in Evansville, Indiana, I, James R. Jeffries came into the world. On Sunday, my grandfather's first grandson was in attendance at Mount Olive Baptist Church. My grandfather was an Elder and adult Bible teacher there most of his life. Four generations were in church that day. My siblings and I spent most of the next four years in church. The schedule was Wednesday prayer meeting, Friday evening service, Sunday schools, Sunday morning worship and Sunday evening worship. Every now and then there was a tent revival or, in the summer, bible school. Until my early teens I was usually an active participant in many of these worship services.

When I was three and a half, we moved from Indiana to Idaho, near Boise. My grandfather, whom I loved very dearly, and I exchanged letters. He wrote to me, and my Mom would read the letters and then write my reply. I wanted to read and write to Pock(my name for him) myself, so Mom helped me learn to read and print.

When I was about five years of age, we moved to Declo Idaho. The church across the street from where I lived had arranged a game in which children could win a New Testaments if they could memorize a randomly selected Bible verse within two weeks. Players were to be first grade and above, which would have left me out, because these children could read or were learning to read. But I wanted a

New Testament of my own and because I could read already, the church gave in and let me play. The Bible Verses were dumped into a bowl, and a verse was drawn for each child. I knew my verse in two days and so I got my first New Testament. The next year the game was ten verses for a King James Bible with concordance. I got mine that time also.

Sitting in church as a six-year-old was boring, but I could read and had a Bible. I started looking up passages that the ministers were quoting. I could not read as fast as they talked, so I would find the first reference and when I got bored I would start reading the Bible. Soon the need to start reading further back and to read the many verses beyond the reference became apparent. However, what was explained in the service seemed to have very little to do with the portion I was reading. In looking for away to see other examples of the words, the Concordance was a great help. I saw that there were discrepancies between what was being said and what I was understanding. As I grew and continued to read these passages, I saw different meanings in the text than what was being presented. This troubled me greatly, but being young I doubted that I could know enough to challenge what I was hearing.

Reading and cross referencing in the Concordance meant that by the time I was eight or nine, my understanding of the service and how to use the Bible had grown. I began to question and discuss the text and the meanings, always trying to

understand: “Why do we never spend any time in the Old Testament?”, “What happened to God?”, “Why do the rules only apply sometimes and not at other times?”, “Should rules apply for some people and not for others?”

I read. I questioned everything. I sought to understand and to discuss what I have learned with someone, anyone. There seem to be “Fences and Walls”<sup>1</sup> that most people cannot or will not look over to get a better understanding.

By the time I was 11, we lived in Illinois, and attended Nevins Church of Christ at Nevins, Illinois, ten miles south of Paris. This church got pastors from the Lincoln Christian College, and belonged to a group of 15 or so other churches in a four-county area. I liked the leaders of the church and they were willing to discuss with me and argue the Bible with me. I learned a lot and I taught a lot and I became entrenched in the church structure. It should have been really easy for me to stay on this track like some of my family had done for generations. But I KNEW there were some things missing, some things of great importance. What was wrong?

The minister at Nevins took me to High School Church camp as a seventh grader. He was teaching the Senior Classes and agreed that I could attend. I was very comfortable in the class discussions and in discussing the bible with the other ministers attending the camp. It seemed to me that the “Fences and Walls” I had perceived were still valid. No answers were forthcoming and others did not seem

to be interested. I thought I must be wrong about something.

The Monday following my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, I completed my enlistment papers for the US Navy, and headed for Vietnam. I returned from active duty in 1976, when I went to Alaska. From 1972 to 1982, my life did not include religion very much either in church or in thought. There were exceptions, though. I listened to other people, watched T.V. shows, or sometimes got approached and then fell into discussions about God and Jesus. This was always from the New Testament side. I knew that there were problems, inconsistencies that caused me to doubt the truth of these messages, but I had given up trying to resolve them. I was reading a book a day for a while, anything except religion. One day in the Summer of 1981, I was looking for a new book to buy, and picked up something I thought was science fiction. The book was "Battle for the Planet Earth, from Abraham to Armageddon" by Mike Russ and being in a hurry I did not read the back of the book. That night I was surprised at what the book was about, but it started me thinking about G-D and the Bible again.

Between 1977 and spring of 1982, I worked in Alaska at a bank. At night I dreamed of operations on the flight deck, my past Navy life. It seemed as if I was living it every night. When I got up in the morning I was worn out and went to work un-rested. So, In December 1982, I reenlisted in the Navy. As soon as I was

back in the service, the dreams stopped and I got some rest. The Navy was comfortable for me, and I got to see the world again. This time, unlike my first enlistment when we had worked constantly, I had time on my hands after work. I started reading the Bible from beginning to end and discussing with those friends who were willing to talk about it. I discovered the Covenant at Mount Horeb, I learned about the troubles in the desert, and about a stiff-necked people. I got insights into the text, the people, the Law and G-D. I read for the stories, for the fun, for the insights, and for the understandings that I was getting. My faith began to return and I desired to know and understand.

On July 5, 1984 at an Alameda beach, at 9:30 A.M., I met a girl and she was immediately part of my life, as if I had found a handmade cowboy boot that just fits. I found out weeks later that she was Jewish. This was great, because I thought she could show me what I did not know how to see. In addition, I loved her. I spent the next 22 years with her, and sought G-D in the Torah and Tanach. When my daughter, Rebecca was born we moved to Sunnyvale and started exploring congregations in the South Bay and Peninsula. I decided that Beth Am is where I need to be.

At Torah Study, approximately six years ago, it occurred to me that, while I have great faith in G-D, what proof do I have? Is there a way for others to know G-D? I

know no way to help anyone else know G-D. Each of us have the Torah and Tanach, along with history and prophets. But if they are not seen or believed, what can I do? I can seek my own proofs, for my own comfort and understanding. I can also live what I believe and know to be true.

Below I will describe some of the events (not the only ones) which I understand as evidence of G-D's wonders in my life. Although it is many years since experiencing these events, and striving to understand them, I have never presented the details to another person. I request that you please keep these private, and do not judge anyone, just the events.

When I was six, I was helping someone as they repaired a camper shell. I was asked to hand over some nails from a group of coffee cans on the ground. I handed the wrong nails, and received the claw of the hammer in the top of my head. No hospital or medical attention other than home first aid was received. I lived, probably without brain damage :) (a small joke.)

When I was fifteen and by myself, in the gold mine area 20 miles north of Yuma, AZ, I fell off a cliff which was an overhang. I was climbing the hill to get to the top and the rock I was holding gave way. I was falling in free space, and suddenly amazingly, I was holding onto another rock on the face of the hill, near the top, hanging by my hand. I climbed back up hand over hand.

Several such miraculous events happened while I was in the Navy, In the fall of 1973, on the USS Oriskany CVA-34, a United States Aircraft Carrier. First, in October 1973, we were pulling into Subic Bay, Philippines, I was working as a Blue Shirt<sup>2</sup>. The last plane was finally ready to taxi to launch to the Cubi Point. A chain had been rapped around the tail hook to keep it up near the tail of the aircraft, which was over the side of the ship. As the A-7 started to move forward the chain was retrievable and needed to be removed prior to rolling up the deck. I went to get the chain, approaching from the AFT<sup>3</sup> side of the aircraft. This position placed me in an area not viewable by anyone I could see, but I thought I would be O.K. so I went in. After I retrieved the chain, the aircraft rolled a few inches while dipping the aileron. This caught me in the top of the head where the sound attenuator is attached to the helmet which is strapped under my chin by my throat. This effectively trapped me by jerking my head back while I was in a squat position, and I could not release myself. Had the aircraft moved any distance forward, it would have broken my neck. The ship rolled a little to the port side, causing the aircraft to roll backwards slightly releasing me, at which point the pilot applied power and raised the aileron, I rolled flat and grabbed a pad-eye because the jet blast would blow me off the side of the ship. I held on and did not go flying, my neck was fine, and life continued.

On November 29, 1973, we were headed to the Indian Ocean, as a result of a

Sheik in Oman declaring that the oceans would run red with American blood if Americans came into the Gulf of Oman. The aircraft carrier, USS Oriskany, CVA-34 was preparing to transit the straits of Singapore. Today was payday, and I was feeling very good. We would be going south of the equator on this trip, Flight Ops<sup>4</sup> were almost over and it was only 1:00 P.M. local time, an early day. As a Blue Shirt, I went to walk chalks<sup>5</sup>, meaning to take the chalk from the Fly 1 Blue Shirt and walk along side the wheel of the aircraft as it went towards the Fly 3 area (aft). I thought, "the sooner this aircraft goes to Fly 3 the sooner I am off duty." But the blue shirt I went to relieve was high on drugs, and had a mean attitude. He declared that he would walk the chalk all the way to Fly 3. Great I thought, I'm free to go, off early, but when I stopped walking beside him, WAIT, something had my left foot! I looked down and saw that the aircraft wheel was starting to roll over my foot. Then I realized that he had been walking in front of the tire not beside it and so he was beside the fuselage. Many things went through my head when I realize what was happening. "Don't pull on the foot, You cannot get out. Don't shout or the plane will stop on you, just wait." I started to talk to G-D, and waited. When the plane finally left my foot, I shouted, and the aircraft stopped just past my foot. My foot was flattened, and the steel from the toes was sticking out of the sides of the boot. --The F-8 fighter jet weighs 32,000 pounds launch weight, fueled and armed. This one was a defensive alert Fighter which was ready to launch in 15



minutes. I could see where the aircraft appeared to have slid up my foot, almost to the shin. They came with a stretcher to haul me down to sick bay, six decks below. This has already been a long story, so I will tell the end now. There was no medical operation on my foot, save to remove a toe nail, and the Doctor had no idea what else to do. The steel toe of the boot was flattened and the soft tissue was mashed, but the bones were all right except for some bone fragments that have floated in my foot ever since. The foot has healed, as evidenced by my being able to walk on my own two feet. Praise G-D.

My ex-wife and I would not have met had each of us not made unusual decision to go to a place we did not usually go on a day of the week that was not usually available for us to go there.

My daughter Rebecca is a miracle, one try when Marci was 39, when we were told there were no good eggs.

Another event occurred which I understood to mean that G-d spared me for a purpose. When I started to come to Torah Study, I would sit in the back on the South side of the group. I felt as though, “these people know the Torah so much better than I, what could I say that would be meaning full to anyone here?” When I did raise my hand to say something, someone almost always came to me afterward and told me how what I said helped them, or some such thing. About seven years

ago, on Thanksgiving weekend, I had a nagging feeling that I was supposed to say something. I made a feeble attempt to raise my hand, but did not try very hard to get seen. After all, this was not that important. It is or has been very easy to talk myself out of saying anything for the reasons already given. Today, I do not really what I wanted to say. But, I understand the subsequent events of that as evidence that G-D is watching over me for a purpose, and that I am supposed to share my insights about Torah. I went home, and started to not feel well, so I lay down. Over the next 36 hours, I developed a progressively higher and higher fever up to 104 degrees despite trying to control it constantly with maximal doses of Advil and Tylenol. I went to Kaiser Monday morning and spent four hours getting blood work and x-rays while they try to discover what is going on. Finally, at Monday noon, I was sent home with instructions to continue what I have been doing and call back on Friday if it doesn't get better. My temperature was still 104 degrees with the medications. I had a hard time keeping fluids down. I really didn't know how I would make it through this. I had another heart to G-D talk. About 3PM, I received a call from the Kaiser Pharmacy that my prescription was ready for me to pick up. The bill was \$130.00 for the prescription. I thought, "What is this? We have a \$5.00 co-pay. Oh well!" I started taking the little pills at 4PM, 4 a day, for five days. Mid-afternoon Wednesday my fever broke and I started to feel better. I was so happy that the doctor put me on the prescription. I called to talk to the

Doctor. She says that she did not prescribe anything for me. She checked the record – there was no prescription in my record. I investigated and found that the normal dose was three a day for 36 hours or five pills. A year later I was at Kaiser for something else, and asked the new doctor about the prescription. I was informed that there was no record of a prescription, only an order to return for a follow-up x-ray in six weeks, which I had not done. I told her that I have never felt better.

I have thanked G-D many times, and now when I hear that little small voice or have that nagging feeling that I should say something, I pay attention to it now. I sit in front when I can, and try to speak when I have something to say. I know that G-D is watching over me, but I don't always understand what is going on until sometime after the event, when I can look back, seeking to understand. If you are seeking G-D and evidence of Him, a personal review of your life may be a great place to start. What did G-D tell Moses when he placed him in the rock?

### **My Jewish Life**

I started going to Jewish services about 25 years ago. I don't know where, but it was a very large place on the south west side of the bay. It looked more like an auditorium than a church. I did not understand the language(Hebrew) and so attempted to follow along in English. Why was I there? My cousin by marriage and

a college room mate of his, had tickets to High Holy Day Services, and Marci and I were invited. I remember two main things from this event: First, they were asking for a Messiah, which where I came from had already come. Second, there was a story inside of the little paper prayer book. It was a story of a farmer who was talking to G-d walking behind an ox. A rabbi chastised him, saying this was no way or place to speak to the Almighty. However, G-d then told the rabbi that He liked the way the man talked to him, and that the rabbi should go and fix what he had done. I liked the story, and I remember it well.

When we left and went home, I was troubled a bit. This was a different perspective of the Bible, one that seemed to solve many things, but it also had a lot of holes. Over the next 15 years there were weddings, including ours(which I wrote the ceremony to bridge the Jewish, Christian and Other attendees), Bar and Bat Mitzah ceremonies and, High Holy Days in Jewish groups around the USA for the Jewish Side of my family. I have only felt the need to step inside any non-Jewish religious building for two funerals (my Dad and my brother), one Christian Service when my dad was alive (his church and at his request), and a Catholic Confirmation where I would not go into the service area.

I was frustrated with all religions prior to beginning to explore Judaism. When I began to experience Judaism, Judaism at least has the Torah in the original format,

and Jews seek to understand the Word of G-D from the Torah. They are the last known remnant of the chosen people. I am looking for G-D and to learn what I am suppose to do for the G-D who watched over me and took care of me before I knew enough to choose better. I knew the New Testament, and I knew that G-D is G-D. I knew that what I had been told was flawed and not just by accident, but by those who use it for their own purposes. I knew this was an abomination, but where should I go? What should I do? I waited to discover a direction and a purpose.

### **Things I have learned from multiple readings of the Old Testament or Tanach.**

My daughter was born, in August 1, 1997, I knew she was coming in early January. We had the test done because Marci was older and there could be problems. We agreed on the name Rebecca almost immediately, and I started talking to my daughter then. Having talked to Rebecca from early on was a help when she was born.

Getting ready to be a Dad, I thought “what do I know about being a Dad?” I thought a lot about where I had been, and what the effect has been on me and on the world. I didn’t find any good role models whom I wanted to be like. I knew

some really great guys, but not great dads. Then I thought, “maybe I do know one.” “They will call me Father.” What about G-D? What if I read the Tanach as if this is a story about a Father and his children? Would that work? How would this work?

In Genesis, Adam and Eve were created and placed in a garden, (a crib) but G-D in Chapter One said that He blessed them and told them to be fruitful, multiply and fill the Earth, and Master it. How could they do that in a garden or crib? They were sent into the world, like from the crib to a play pen, maybe then to the yard. These children don't play very nicely. They don't know their Father and cannot treat each other with respect or kindness. They seem to tend more toward being the dirt from which they came than toward being the Spirit which would make them Holy.

Every once in a while, one or two come along who are impressive. One example is Enoch. What kind of conversationalist was Enoch that G-D took him when he was 365 years old? Our Father really threw the world for a loop when He gave that Flood to the earth and saved a couple of good ones. Even after that, the children still went downhill, really quickly. *Rule One: If you don't tell your children what is expected and how to behave, you will get chaos. Say what you mean, mean what you say, and do it. Rule Two --Do Rule One with love and patience.*

After the Tower of Babel, it appears that we Humans really need a role model of how to behave. G-D calls Abram, makes a deal. If you will do what I tell you, I will make you the father of many nations, curse any who curse you and bless those who bless you. This is quite a deal, going to teach people to at least be nice to this man or G-D is going to step on them.

But Abram and his descendants don't seem to understand that they are the role models for the world, and proof that the Father(G-D) is real. We are still made from the dirt of the earth, which has a great heavy pull on us. I don't know why, but we really do act like dirt, if we don't try to control ourselves. G-D puts this little group(70 people total), in a protected state until they have become a large number of people, just the men leaving are numbered more than 600,000 (fighting age) men. G-D fulfills his promises to Abram. But, the whole world is talking and will talk about what happened to Egypt more than 3,500 years ago. It seems there is a role model for the world. The history says that with the Father leading them day and night, they still tend to act like dirt(a lot of them did). When they get to their own land, they still go astray, so He sends tutors (Prophets) to inform them and to make the rules and laws clear to the children in the manner of the time. It seems to me that with some really great teachers, role models and tutors in the Tanach, our Father has been striving to teach his teenagers who continue to rebel. We will see if they get smarter in their twenties. I must concede that having

children is not an easy task, but when they love you back and try to do that which is right, everything becomes easy to forgive.

Where does that leave me in this search for G-D? I know that G-D IS. I know that there is only One. I know that I am to Love G-D with all my heart, my soul and with all of my being. I know to choose G-D.

I want to give a sacrifice<sup>6</sup> to G-D, but what can I give that is mine? Everything was or is created by G-D, it then follows that He can make us do anything He wants. If He wanted everybody to bow down to Him, it will happen. If you created everything and had all of the power and all of the wisdom and TOTAL CONTROL, you could make and create or force what you created to perform anyway you want. But G-D gave US the power to choose. He will not violate that gift. That gift makes us more than just something created. It takes a lot of love on His part, to let His creation act on its own. If I want to give something to G-D, there really is only one thing I have found that is MINE to give and it cannot be taken or created or stolen even by G-D. It is MY CHOICE, the gift He gave me, that allows me to lift myself up above the dirt. IT IS MY CHOICE! My Choice is G-D, above everything and everybody. Why? Why do I make that choice? Because



He has taken care of me even when I did not know it. He gave me the desire to know and drive to understand G-D. If this life is just a personal test by G-D, to see what I will do, how much greater will it be to live with G-D in whatever He has planned NEXT for me and His children? I choose to live the example of loving G-D and trying to keep His Laws to the very best of my small understanding. I chose many years ago to accept the Covenant at Mt. Horeb. I choose to be a Jew and thereby to say that G-D IS. That it is the greatest thing I could do, is to join with the tribe of Judah. I know that G-D is and that as a Jew I am bound by the Blessings and Curses of the Covenant with community. Maybe by living as an example, it will also help others to know that it is really important that we live by G-D's Laws and not to give up on G-D, the Law or to give up on being a JEW.

--James R Jeffries

End Notes

<sup>1</sup>. “Fences and Walls” refers to only the ability to see or hear that which is in line with what we are taught. That which does not conform to what we were taught cannot be considered. This has nothing to do with whether or not what we are taught or told is true. Either we are taught to not question certain sources(print, school, news) or we simply no longer seek the truth, so we do not test and think for ourselves. One of the operations used for propaganda is: Say it many times and it will be believed as true.

<sup>2</sup>.Blue Shirt is a flight deck menial laborer, also known as Aviation Boatswain’s Mate Handler

<sup>3</sup>.Aft is toward the back of the ship. The front is called the bow and the back end is called the fantail. When facing the bow, the left side is port, the right side is starboard.

<sup>4</sup>.Flight Operations: Refers to all operations in support of aircraft operations including but not limited to: flight preparations, launch, recovery, crash, rescue, firefighting and general.

<sup>5</sup>.Walking chocks refers to a person accompanying each main mount of an aircraft, carrying what was a pair of blocks attached by a rope, designed to be shoved before and after the wheel in question, to attempt to stop movement of the aircraft in an emergency. In the 1960's chocks became metal blocks on a steel bar with a ratchet mechanism to lock the device to the wheel.

<sup>6</sup>. Sacrifice: The act of reaching up to G-D, our Father, to get his attention. Maybe to say “I am sorry”, or “thank You”, or “bless me/ help me”.... Much like a young child reaching up to an adult to be picked up.