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# Spirititan NEWS

MISSIONARY



**Francis  
Libermann**  
A Jewish Christian Vision

# Chosen by God



Larry Trafford, in his book *World Religions: People and Faith* (Maxwell Macmillan Canada), introduces the chapter on Judaism as follows:

"The great religious traditions have all addressed the question of suffering, but perhaps none has been forced to wrestle so continually with it as Judaism. Judaism is a religion that celebrates the goodness of life, and yet in many lands and at many times Jews have been forced to endure great suffering because of their faithfulness to God and their particular identity as His "chosen people."

This struggle to be God's "chosen people" does not refer to any superiority or special rank on the part of the Jewish people. Rather it refers to a task in life — to be God's witness in the world. This entails the responsibility to recognize and bear witness that human beings are partners with God in the stewardship, repair and perfecting of the world — what is known in Judaism as *tikkun olam*. It entails a way of living that expresses God's law, accepting the struggle to be God's people in all areas of life, so that religion and life are one.

The Jewish scriptures tell the story of a people called into a personal covenant with God, and their efforts to be faithful to this covenant... In fact, one of the names for the Jewish people, Israel, means "struggle with God." Jewish tradition suggests that this refers to the tendency of the Jewish people to struggle with issues of God, morality, conscience, and faith.

Struggle and sacrifice have been a continual theme in Judaism because of the suffering the Jews have endured. The history of the Jewish people and the Jewish religion is marked by religious persecution, forced conversion to other religions, the removal of political and economic freedoms, violence against body and property, and most recently, the systematic attempt to murder the entire people in what is known as the Holocaust."

And it was into this religious tradition that Jacob Libermann, son of the Rabbi of Saverne in the French province of Alsace, was born in 1802. His life's journey brought him on a road involving much suffering, rejection, doubt, illness, depression, failure; a road that at least once brought him to the verge of suicide.

But the religious training he had received at home and in the yeshiva of Rabbi Scholom, coupled with the good news of Jesus which he discovered when darkness had almost overcome him, enabled him to synthesise the Torah and the Gospel into a faith that sustained him to the end.

A study of his letters and other writings shows that he was a man of peace and joy. Unlike most spiritual writers of the time, he saw the world and the challenges it offered and even the obstacles it presented, in a positive way. He was never harsh or judgmental; he urged his fellow Spiritans to be tolerant, patient and forgiving.

The language of his writings may be a little stilted and archaic, but the message is buoyant and hopeful. It is a message that we all need to hear at the beginning of the new millennium, nearly a century and a half after Libermann's death.

He truly benefited from enjoying the best of both worlds. So can we if we come to a knowledge and appreciation of the Jewish faith, the faith on which Jesus and Jacob built their message of love and forgiveness.

Gerald FitzGerald CSSy

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# Giving Voice to the Spirit — a Reflection on Ordinary Life and Spiritual Growth

Faye Huber

One of the tasks in my mid-life has been questioning and appreciating the mystery of life. Questions centre on, What is the purpose of my ordinary life? Where am I going in this life I have chosen? How do I make a difference in the world? Do I believe or merely want to believe?

Adult development theorists would say that I am beginning to confront my sense of nothingness, my mortality, that I am taking stock of my spiritual life.

What causes this upheaval in mid-life? In my case, ordinary events provided the catalyst calling forth a need for change. I was preparing to retire from a career in education. I was dissatisfied with my role as the listener in my marriage and hormonal imbalances were causing despair-like symptoms. All of these prompted me to seek assistance since I was losing perspective on the value of my life.

My belief in the spiritual journey as the human journey led me to two courses at St. Michael's University to reflect on the issues compelling me to action. I began a writing course titled, Giving Voice to the Spirit. Each participant would prepare a poem for weekly presentation and discussion. We learned to actively respond to the concerns raised in each of the poems, but most importantly, we supported the voice of the other writer. These voices spoke of dealing with cancer, the loss of a child, mortality, reconciling the past to the present, among other issues. An inner wisdom was being honoured through poetry.

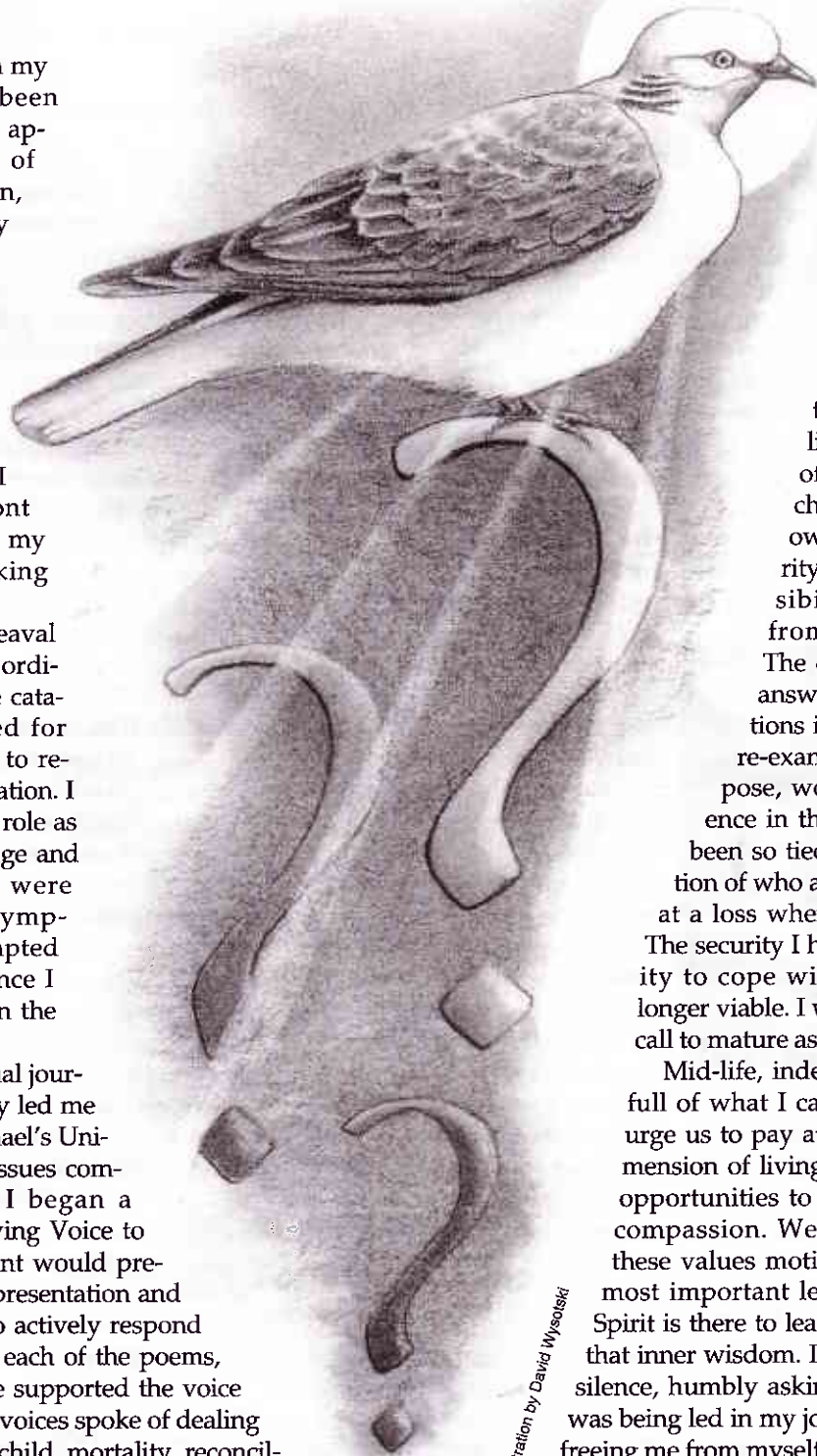


Illustration by David Wysocki

## A wake-up call

The second course was Spirituality. We were led through a series of lectures on spiritual development. Key principles were: trust is the basis of any personal belief and the mystery of life is within the person. We were given questions to stimulate reflection on listening to that inner voice of the spirit. Had we made choices in our lives from our own egoism, greed, immaturity and lack of social responsibility or were they made from love and compassion? The challenge was to honestly answer what motivates our actions in everyday life. I began to re-examine my questions of purpose, worth and making a difference in the world. My identity had been so tied to my work, my perception of who a good listener is, that I was at a loss when these realities changed. The security I had placed in my own ability to cope with everyday life was no longer viable. I was being given a wake-up call to mature as a spiritual person.

Mid-life, indeed all of life, seems to be full of what I call ordinary events, which urge us to pay attention to the spiritual dimension of living. Everyday actions can be opportunities to act from forgiveness and compassion. We do make a difference if these values motivate us to act. One of the most important lessons is to learn that the Spirit is there to lead if we let go and listen to that inner wisdom. I needed to learn to pray in silence, humbly asking for help to see where I was being led in my journey, feeling the Spirit ... freeing me from myself! ♦

Faye Huber, educator and wife, confronts mid-life upheaval.



# Judaism: The History of a People

**T**he Jews are an ethnic group whose story goes back before the beginnings of written history. The Torah records their emergence as a separate people in about 1800 B.C. when Abraham and his family migrated into the region now known as Israel. Despite a period of exile in Egypt, they established themselves in their Promised Land. About 1200 B.C. Moses was their leader, and brought them the Law by which they should live. Under David they enlarged their kingdom and strengthened their hold on it. Solomon constructed the first temple about 940 B.C. Another period of exile in Babylon followed in the fifth century B.C. after which they returned to the Promised Land to a period of relative calm and prosperity when they built a second temple to replace the one destroyed by the Babylonians. But the Greeks under Alexander the Great made them a subject people again about 300 B.C. and Jewish religious practices were prohibited. In the Roman era, during which Jesus lived, died and rose again, the Jews were unhappy under the severe yoke of Rome and an unsuccessful revolt led to the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. and the scattering of the Jewish people to many foreign countries. Very successful colonies of Jews were present in most cities of the Roman Empire and by 650 A.D. the Talmud, a compilation of Jewish traditions and practices, was completed.

## The Modern Age

In the Islamic countries of North Africa and especially Spain, the Jews as a people flourished. Jewish trade, Jewish crafts and Jewish scholarship enriched the Europe of the Middle Ages but jealousy and hatred on the part of their neighbours led to persecutions and expulsions. By the

nineteenth century, when Jacob Libermann lived, Jews were segregated and discriminated against in nearly every aspect of public life. This led to the emergence of the Zionist movement at the end of the century. Its goal was to secure an independent country for the Jews on the site of their ancient homeland. Progress towards this goal was slow until the unleashing of anti-Jewish hate by the Nazis which resulted in the deaths of six million European Jews, opened the eyes of the world and evoked widespread sympathy for the survivors. In 1948 the State of Israel came into existence and survived all-out wars to destroy it. Today, peace talks between leaders of Israel and of the neighbouring Arab peoples are taking place. All good minded people pray with the psalmist, "Peace upon Israel" (Ps 125,5).

## Jewish Religious Traditions

During its long history, three main traditions have evolved within Judaism. Orthodox Jews observe the regulations of the Talmud strictly. The Sabbath and other holy days are celebrated with traditional prayer and ritual. The dietary laws are followed to the letter. God and His Law are ever present, even in daily life, as the faithful await the coming of the Messiah. Reform Judaism is a modern tradition which attempts to integrate ancient beliefs with modern society. There is no segregation of the sexes in worship, women can become rabbis and the awaited Messiah is an era of peace and freedom rather than a person. The Conservative Jews try to steer a course between the Orthodox and Reform traditions, being conservative in religious observance but open to modern secular scholarship and social practices. As well as these three major traditions there is also a mystical tradition which has greatly influenced Christian, Hindu and Buddhist mystics.

Individual Jews have contributed greatly to diverse aspects of Western culture and civilization — to science, politics, scholarship, music and the arts. Their influence continues to be felt in almost every aspect of contemporary life. ❖

