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Why should a Jew become a Mormon? Ask Marlena

Posted by [Mark Paredes](#)

The proverbial "third rail" issue for a Christian blogger on a Jewish website is Jewish conversion to Christianity. It is one of the few issues that unites practically all Jews, and well-funded organizations (e.g., Jews for Judaism) have been set up to keep Jews from converting. Although many Jews who know me well have asked why a Jew would become a Mormon, I have declined to blog on the subject because I considered it too sensitive.

Until now. After more than two years blogging for the Jewish Journal, I'm pretty confident that readers know that my purpose in writing this column is not to convert Jews. A few weeks ago a prominent Jewish leader asked me why Jews decide to become Mormons. I decided to pose a series of questions to my friend Marlena Tanya Muchnick, a well-known Jew-turned-Mormon speaker, author, and researcher. Marlena travels around the country making presentations on Jews and Mormons, and also maintains a website (<http://comeuntochrist.blogspot.com>). I am grateful to her for taking time out from her Baltic cruise to compose her answers. If you would like to contact her directly, her e-mail address is comeuntochrist@att.net. She and her wonderful husband Daniel live in the Seattle area.



Q: How old were you when you converted to the LDS Church?

A: I often contemplated the gifts promised the human family in the Tree of Life mentioned in Genesis 2. The Hebrew life giving tree motif I found in a copy of Kabbalah (esoteric Judaic writings). It stirred in me a deep curiosity about the mysterious connections of all things in earth and heaven. I read of covenants, oaths, the patterns and behaviors of men –blessings received, curses endured. Always the connection of God to His children was tested and tried. The Hebrew people have always been engaged in a love story (often also a tryst!) with their Father/Lord. So, in a fashion, I was being spiritually prepared for my transformation at age 47 – from Orthodox/Conservative Jewess to a temple-attending Latter-day Saint.

Q: Jews believe the Abrahamic covenant still applies to them. Mormons also believe that the Abrahamic covenant is applicable today. Why is there a need for a Jew to become a Mormon if the Abrahamic covenant is still alive and well?

A: Being raised an observant Jewess, I trusted that the everlasting Avrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:15, 17, and 28) was the blueprint for every life. An agreement between mankind and God, it is unconditional in its nature to bless the tribes of Israel (see Genesis 12:2-3). Nations and kings were to descend from that patriarch who would become father of a "great nation", receiving special blessings for their faithfulness, including the Mashiach's (Messiah's) return into their midst. Many Jews believe in these future events but have little idea of the profound meanings implicit in them. Spiritual truth often lies in mystery, but to ignore that tantalizing search is to remain dead to the potential for life that waits hopefully within each soul.

Fortunately for me, through the teachings of the missionaries, I discovered that Mormons understand covenants better than anyone, because they realize the importance and urgency of gathering members of the house of Israel through the restored, latter-day Gospel teachings as reintroduced through the Prophet Joseph Smith; his translation of the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the restoration of the temples of God to the earth.

Jews are the "chosen" people according to God's covenant with Abraham, but they became scattered and drifted into anonymity through intermarriage and abandonment of their traditions and religion. Abraham wanted to regain the true priesthood and gospel principles that had been lost through apostasy. But neither the Jews nor anyone else can be automatically saved. The Latter-day Saints have been charged with finding those who are lost and teaching them the essential news of the restoration of ancient priesthood powers which God has covenanted to them unconditionally on His part. But individual faithfulness and action are required to bring fulfillment. Judaism is the foundation of Christianity, not the final product.

Q: What was it that attracted you to Mormonism?

A: How does a proper Jewess cross the seemingly uncrossable line to Christianity, then venture further to the hallowed country of the Gentile, gentle Saints? For me, it was the hardest work my rebellious soul has EVER done! I was 14 and just confirmed from Hebrew school when I realized something was missing from my synagogue experiences. My parents thought me mad. I was told to get over it. It was 1954.

Arriving at age 40 I found myself alone and poor, a victim of many abuses as a child and teen.

During my growing years as a female in a traditionally male cultural setting, I sought in the synagogues for a deeper and especially a personal solace. Jews do not focus on personal prayer. Synagogue prayers are praises to God and petitions for Israel - our traditional way of approaching Deity. But I needed a personal witness. Finally, pleading with God before the opened Torah scrolls, I challenged Him to bring me what He knew I needed; then I determined to find it myself, if it took this lifetime to do so. It took several years longer.

My only sibling, a younger brother, eventually accepted the Gospel more or less against his will. Mark had married a Tongan whose father translated the Book of Mormon into Tongan for the country's royalty. Mark's wife and family were, of course, devoted Mormons. In 1975, he brought me a Book of Mormon, to share the joy in the Gospel that he had found. I immediately rejected it. "I have Torah. Why would I need another book? No, thanks. I prefer to remain a Jew. Is this what our people have fought to become? I think not." I put the book in my bookcase and left it there for years. Many years later, in 1985, I moved to Oregon from L.A. to assist with care for my now widowed brother's children. Senior Mormon missionaries lived next door!

I was quite disturbed by this new and sudden interest of these Christian people in my background and my beliefs as a Jew. Having been taught by my parents that non-Jews (Gentiles) were off limits to me, I'd never learned Christian ways or beliefs. They couldn't pronounce the guttural ch. They didn't like Jewish food, they didn't know Hebrew history or celebrate any Jewish holidays. But I was attracted to them in ways that stirred my soul.

1. I found those Mormons I met and who befriended me to be genuinely caring about each and every person and were gentle and forgiving folk. They were genuinely kind to me and they related all their life experiences to faith and love of God and Christ. What impressed me so much was their close relationship with God. That gave them satisfaction I had only dreamt of finding. They listened to my denials of Christ, asked me about Judaism, and were genuinely interested in comparing religions through scripture and through their own understanding. And then there was the "look" in their eyes. Was it joy? True happiness? Their constant relationship with the mysterious Holy Spirit? I wanted it!

2. They patiently spoke of New Testament gospel writers, pointing out that most were Jewish men, including the apostles of Christ. I had never thought that important. I confess that at first I only allowed them to entertain me with these things because my brother had earlier brought me that book which claimed our ancient Jewish ancestors truly came from Israel to these American continents and – would you believe – accepted Jesus as the Christ? They told me that Jesus came to fulfill the Law of Moses (Matt 5:17) and create a new covenant between God and his people, that he visited the American continents (Book of Mormon, 3Nephi 11-28). The Book of Mormon is a sign that the gathering of Israel and the fulfillment of his covenants with them was beginning.

3. These apostles learned there was a higher law than the Aaronic/ Levitical priesthood: the higher or Melchizedek priesthood. This man, Melchizedek (Heb 7:2) was a notable prophet and leader who lived about 2000 BC. He was the first individual to be given the title of Kohen (priest) in Torah. Father Abraham paid tithes to him. Melchizedek is mentioned in many places in Torah and in latter-day scripture. Mormons claim that these two priesthoods have been restored in our day, along with prophets, temples, baptism and other ordinances by priesthood authority, the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost and other blessings, and proxy work for the dead. I was finding a unity between our two faiths; that we are connected by many things. Mormons have more in common with Judaism than any other religion because Judaism laid the foundation for Christianity and through the LDS church the fullness of many covenants God made with the nation of Israel will be realized. These include the Abrahamic (Gen 12:1-3, 15), Edenic (Gen 3:16-19), Palestinian (Deut 30:1-10), Davidic (2Sam 7:8-16, Luke 1:32-34), and the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34).

4. I was attracted to the notion that prophets and seers were once again on the earth. In Torah many prophets are mentioned, some true, some false. The greater ones were usually disbelieved and hated for their unpopular messages. Some met with an untimely death. The last Hebrew prophet, Malachi, lived at the end of the 70-year Babylonian exile. Judaism today does not recognize anyone as having the voice to speak for them. But the Mormons claim Joseph Smith was a prophet and seer and that these chosen men of God will never again be taken from the earth. Thomas S. Monson is regarded as the current seer and prophetic voice among the Saints and he has two counselors. Together they form the First Presidency of the church. Their writings, in my mind, equal and often surpass those of many scholarly Talmudic sages.

5. The Mormon view of the afterlife attracted me greatly. Jews believe there is an Olam Haba – the world to come after death. Torah emphasizes immediate, concrete, physical rewards and punishments rather than abstract future ones. See, for example, Lev. 26:3-9 and Deut. 11:13-15. However, there is clear evidence in Torah of belief in existence after death. Indicated in several places the righteous with their loved ones will be reunited after death, while the wicked will be excluded. Ideas about resurrection and reincarnation are accepted, but there is much room for personal opinion, because Torah does not mention this subject directly, though the early temples practiced cleansing and vivifying rites. I was very concerned with what hope there was for mine and my family's death. Mormons have revealed knowledge through prophets that explains and clarifies much about the spirit world before and after mortal life, and I found it reassuring.

6. The missionaries read with me the Book of Mormon, enlightening my understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant.

Q: According to one of your websites, you engaged in five months of "secluded studying" of Hebrew and LDS scriptures before converting. What did you learn from this experience?

A: I learned, in essence, through totally independent study and prayer that the Gospel as taught in the LDS church is completely correct. I found my personal answers to the questions: Why am I here? Where did I come from? Where am I going?

There is room here for several specific examples.

1. I learned about the priesthood of God, its purposes, duties and ministrations. See Exodus 40, a detailed account of Aaron and his sons receiving the Aaronic priesthood. After the fall of Herod's Temple in 70 AD, that and the greater priesthood were lost, the Jewish nation scattered. In these latter days that most precious gift has been restored to the earth and all of us are blessed through the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthood of God in these latter days.

2. Exodus 34 gives the story of Moses (Moshe) receiving God's commandments. Moses asks the Lord to pardon the iniquity of his people, to which the Lord replies in part (v.14) that the Jews shall have no other god but the Lord, "...whose name is Jealous..." All others are said to be false, and to Jews, that includes Jesus. But the New Testament history of Jesus and his times is compelling. He converted thousands of Jewish followers. This is not mentioned in Torah or Talmud. Why not?

3. When the missionaries told me that Joseph Smith received his visitation from our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ in April of 1820 and that the LDS church was established in April of 1830, I discovered these dates coincided with the Jewish Passover. Joseph's visit by the angel, Moroni, and additionally when he visited the place the golden plates were buried and retrieved them four years later - these occurrences came during the annual Feast of Sukkot in September, 1823 and the Jewish New Year of 1827. Coincidences? These and numerous other occasions in LDS history helped to convince me that the history of Jews and Mormons was intertwined in the mind and heart of God and an important clue to my understanding of how God works with mankind.

4. I learned through the Book of Mormon that God spoke directly to the descendants of the Jewish people in America, introducing them to Jesus Christ, His only Begotten Son. Since I do believe that God is in charge and can do as He wishes, I understood and accepted that the history of the Jews in the lands of America included the visitation and teachings of Christ in the Americas. In the Doctrine and Covenants, Section 29:31-33, I read that Heavenly Father's works are without end. This made sense to me.

5. I learned that both religions honor their ancestors and place them in high esteem. Both believe in the principle of fasting and both have a set of dietary laws that are sensible and spiritually conceived by Deity. Both religions honor God and His commandments. Both revere and celebrate the Sabbath and believe in keeping it holy. There are many similarities between Jewish and LDS beliefs and religious observances, but much has been lost of ancient truths through time.

6. Ezekiel 37 in part refers to the prophecy of combining the "two sticks", that of Joseph, by which is meant the Book of Mormon, with the stick (record) of Judah - meaning the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible -. The LDS "quad" contains those scriptures in one volume that also includes more scripture, much of it dictated by Jesus Christ to the Prophet Joseph Smith. I learned that this is a further evidence of the message for unity between Mormons and Jews.

7. The Book of Mormon opened my eyes to profound teachings, truths about the history of my Hebrew ancestors in the Americas, the true nature of the spirit of mankind, Jesus in America. It is testimony to how the Holy Ghost works in our lives, the divinity of Jesus Christ and presents undeniable evidence that the book was translated by the gift and power of God. It is truly a second witness of Jesus Christ and contains the fullness of the Gospel that Jesus tried to teach the Jews in Israel millennia ago. I could not deny its truthfulness. The Holy Ghost testified of these things to me in an undeniable way, even to the extent of giving me a vision, words from an angelic source, and a transformation of spirit.

8. Importantly, I discovered the Doctrine and Covenants, a book of scriptures containing revelations from the Lord Jesus Christ to the Prophet Joseph Smith. This book amazed me. It is not a translation but claims to be a witness of Jesus Christ. Indeed, as I read the first section, dictated to Joseph by the Lord Himself, I was amazed that I had not known of this book. I now had the problem of believing or denying that Jesus was indeed the Messiah of the world! The book proclaims that the heavens are open again. It contains revelations for LDS church governance and the essential beliefs of the organization of the Saints. While reading it I realized the voice of Jesus was the same voice I read and felt in Torah. Now it became impossible to deny that Jesus was the one who made the Exodus from Egypt possible.

9. The Pearl of Great Price is another enlightening collection of scripture that is invaluable in understanding the way Heavenly Father works with humanity. The Joseph Smith history is also undeniably true, and from it I learned of the First Vision. The book of Moses and book of Abraham teach the doctrine of plurality of gods. I read about the doctrine of exaltation and learned of its significance to us. Jewish canon does not include any of the information found in the Pearl... This is a vast treasure trove of information that really opened my eyes to the mysteries of God.

10. The most important thing I discovered in my reading, pondering and praying was that God is in charge. Consistently, in all scripture, He tells us that. He does what He wants in His time. He is not subject to human rules or traditions, whims, requests, threats, pleadings, etc.

Q: You've said that personal revelation has inspired you to facilitate mutual understanding between Jews and Mormons. In what ways do you do this?

A: My mission, bestowed upon me in 1989 under a priesthood calling, was to "be as an Esther to my people" by bringing the Jews to God's true church, mainly through the tribe of Ephraim – the preponderance of members of the LDS church are of that tribal affiliation. I am to teach them about the genesis of their religion and how to fellowship and understand their Jewish neighbors, thereby to "help them come to the salvation of their souls through their Mashiach, Jeshua, even Jesus their Christ."

To this end I have embarked upon a mission: writing books for the Mormon reading public: about my conversion to the church, about the Jewish people - their history, beliefs, culture and language. I also have published fiction that highlights their plight in America and in Eastern Europe. I give firesides, lectures and classes to LDS congregations on these subjects, as well as maintaining several blog and websites featuring many useful articles on Jewish life. I point out the many similarities and connections (see listing) between the two religions and cultures. I tell my audiences to reach out to their Jewish neighbors, embracing their culture and making as many connections as possible with them in various settings.

Q: Has the Jewish community been receptive to your work? How do Mormons react to your presentations?

A: The work that I do is strictly for the LDS population. Jews do not want me to speak to their congregations because I have embraced Christianity, though many Jews are fond of Mormons. Having a Jew convert to "the other side" of the Jewish world and, in effect, become a "Gentile" (a non-Jew) is anathema to a Jew. My conversion makes them very uncomfortable.

Happily, those to whom I have spoken and written are very pleased with my books, blogs and presentations. Many Mormons are genuinely interested in their Jewish neighbors and have lots of questions I help them to answer. I tell them I am only a messenger. They must do the real work of investigating and understanding to make the connections.

Q: Where can people learn more about your projects?

A: They can visit my websites and blogsites, purchase my books directly from me or on Amazon. Several are also on Kindle.
www.jewishconvert-lds.com, www.peopleofthebook-judaica.com, <http://mormonsandjews.net>,
<http://comeuntochrist.blogspot.com>, <http://judaicaworld.blogspot.com>,
<http://judaicaworld.wordpress.com>

Q: You've written "A Mormon's Guide to Judaism." What is one thing that every Mormon should know about Judaism? What should every Jew know about Mormonism?

A: Through the years I have asked many fellow Jews why they do not wish to believe in Christ. Their responses span their range of involvement in religious worship. By far, their responses included an avowed devotion to Judaism alone - showing little or no interest in any other religion. I have also noticed that relatively few Mormons have any more than a surface understanding of other religions and do not investigate the similarities and differences between their religion. This puts them in the same category with most Jews.

So, in my view, it is essential that Latter-day Saints become aware of the underpinnings of their belief system; Jesus was a Jew. The original Gospel evolved through Mosaic Law. Judaism is the language and belief system that propelled Christianity into being, though it was soon and continually corrupted by many factors. A knowledge of Jewish prayers, group and individual worship, holidays, culture, language, dietary laws and other elements of their sub-civilization should be sought after by the LDS population. This will increase Mormon understanding and appreciation of their own religious life.

As for my first people, I would advise them of the many similarities of the Hebrew religion and current Jewish congregations to LDS ways of life and urge them to investigate these. The Jews are increasingly positive about the LDS church and generally believe Mormons to be helpful, accepting, loyal, supporting and who accept their Israelite progenitors as brethren without prejudice or anti-Semitism. That is especially helpful in the present dangerous political situation in Israel and elsewhere in the world. I would ask them to consider learning of Christ with an inquiring and searching spirit, rather than to be forever satisfied with their centuries-long traditions. I think that the Jewish people in the main resist Christianity because of centuries of persecution, forced conversions and ostracism.

It is important for the Jewish people to understand that the ancient tribal identities and relationships have been restored; that those who are descendants of the Hebrews enslaved in Egypt, Babylon, etc., and now scattered throughout the earth - are in the process of being gathered again, according to ancient prophecy (Isa 54:7, Ezek 11:17, Jer 50:4 and others). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints pursues the literal gathering of Israel throughout the world and the restoration of all the tribes (families) of Jacob prior to the coming of the Mashiach. The fullness of the early Gospel taught by our first prophets is here upon the earth today and available to each of us. Without the birthright tribe (holding the priesthood keys through Christ and his church) of Ephraim, the lineage of Judah (protector of the temples and the people) is as a sword of undirected energy.

Q: You speak often on the symbolic connections between Mormon and Jewish worship. What is the most important connection?

A: That is an easy answer. It would be our holy temples, those that once stood in Jerusalem and those built by the Latter-day Saints. It was and is now Beit YHVH or YHWH, the house of the Lord. The history of the temple in Jerusalem begins in 957 BC with King Solomon's construction. It was destroyed and rebuilt twice more. It was the center of Jewish civilization and all things in life revolved around that holy shrine built to God. In the temple, offerings were made, blessings and benedictions pronounced, ritual cleansings performed. Isaiah spoke of the importance of prayer in the Temple, calling it God's "holy mountain". Those temples were destroyed because of licentiousness, idol worship and murder. The loss of the temple in a.d. 70 brought on the Diaspora of the Jews which has lasted to this day. Jews believe they no longer have a temple in which to worship, but that is no longer the case.

The first temple structure built by the Mormon people was in Kirtland, Ohio. It was dedicated in March 1836 and the Lord accepted it. As of May 2012 there are 137 operating, 15 under construction, 14 announced temples. See <http://www.ldschurchtemples.com/temples/>.

These houses of the Lord are clear and direct links between Judaism and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They provide a place set apart for eternal covenants, a place that is sacred and suitable for the performing of holy ordinances that bind on earth and heaven. They provide ordinances for living and dead that assures the possession and association of families, worlds without end and exaltation for ourselves and our families in the kingdom of God. They contain emblems of ancient Judaic worship. When I first saw these, my heart jumped and I knew I had finally "come home". LDS temples are based on the fact of the atonement of Jesus Christ, without whom all mankind would be irretrievably lost. In ancient and modern times, the "work" done in Mormon temples is binding, the "glory and honour" referred to in Psalm 8:3:

"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? ...For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour" .

Q: Can a person be both Jew and Mormon?

A: To be a technical Jew, it is necessary to be born of the nation and ethnoreligious group that originated in the ancient Near East and which were once Hebrews and before that, Israelites. Judaism is the traditional faith of the Jewish nation. Having said that, anyone can choose to embrace the LDS faith (or any other) through investigation, prayer, personal feeling of "rightness" and a spiritual certainty. As we read in Romans 10:12, the same Lord is over all, both Jew and Greek, and they must call upon him. Specifically, I have found it logically and spiritually sound to progress from monotheism to an understanding of the Godhead, to realize the atonement of Christ stands as eternal, replacing the constant sacrificing of innocent animals. I see the progression from ancient to modern prophets, a restored priesthood authority, temples, revealed prophecies, and so on. I cannot deny it.

A Jew is always a Jew. As a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, that Jew will more fully understand his Jewishness and all it has meant throughout time. He will offer his heart to be circumcised. The "blindness" mentioned in Romans 11:7-10, will fall away, and the true branches of the olive tree can be again grafted in.

The church teaches that the Mosaic Law (Ex 21-24; 31-35) was a preparatory gospel, a series of progressive steps to a fuller understanding of our purpose on earth. It was not a substitute for the higher law of the Gospel. (See D&C 84:23-27). In Galatians 3:23-24 we read the Law of Moses was given as a schoolmaster to bring Israel to Christ. Of course, much of Mosaic Law was important case law; a series of broad premises, such as the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:15, Deut. 5:19).

I believe that with diligent inquiry, study, prayer and revelation, each person who has ever lived will come unto Christ with full purpose of heart and become a member of his church, finding joy and completeness of spirit for himself and his deceased family through the restored temples of God that now dot the earth. A Jew who does that becomes a completed Jew, for the mysteries of God are more certainly revealed to us. We can add the lily to the Passover table and know that Elijah has returned and drunken from his waiting cup. We can finally understand who we are, why we are here and where we are going. I am grateful for that miracle in my life and this is my testimony of the truth of these things. I would restore the Jewish creedal prayer to read:

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is Jehovah!

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