

From Jew to Jewish Mormon

DARRELL BYBEE

Church News Editor

Judah was born thousands of years ago, in a desert tent somewhere in the Middle Eastern region of the world.

He was the first Jew. He fathered children whose offspring would become the most maligned group of people in world history.

After Joseph was sold into Egypt, the Jews became a nation of slaves. Moses led them from Egyptian bondage to their promised land after 40 years of wandering. Since then, they have lost and found and lost their land many times.

The Jews have dispersed into many nations, but through their cultural ties, their religious heritage and faith in a land that would bring them together to worship as they pleased, and a gruesome tale of prejudice, hatred and bloodshed against them through the annals of time, they formed an unbreakable bond as a people.

Elissa Molling is a product of that history. She was born under the Jewish covenant. As a Jew, she felt the common bond with her people, but what brought her from Brooklyn, New York to her home in Provo, Utah, was a faith in LDS teachings that has made her feel even closer to her Jewish brothers and sisters.

"Being Jewish, I always felt that I didn't know enough and needed to learn more about it. As a Mormon I know so much more about my background now that I've got the whole picture. It took coming into the LDS



Jewish Menorah

LANCE EARL

Being Jewish, I always felt that I didn't know enough and needed to learn more about it. As a Mormon I know so much more about my background now that I've got the whole picture

Church to feel more Jewish than I've ever felt before," she explained.

Although she has always been Jewish, and remains Jewish even as a Mormon, Molling has not always had the LDS Church in her life.

"I've always had a love for the Jewish people — for the heritage — but I just couldn't find a religion I was comfortable in. It seemed like something was missing," she said.

She finally began to find the deeper meaning she sought when her baby son was sick. "He was dehydrating," she said. "I was staying with some LDS friends while my husband, a merchant Marine at the time, was out to sea. My son was crying quite a bit, so I told them I had to take him to the hospital. They said, 'Why don't you have the elders come?'"

"I said, 'I'm not even of your faith. How in the world can you minister to this baby? Don't you have to be a Mormon?' But after the blessing the baby went right to sleep and was fine the next day."

The baby's blessing proved nothing to Molling, but it opened her heart and the heart of her Jewish husband enough that they allowed LDS missionaries into their home when they knocked at the Mollings' door in 1963.

"We wanted to know more about our own religion, but we decided we'd just see what it was all about," she said.

Molling was touched by the missionary lessons, but three lessons later, she

see JEW, page 10

JEW

Continued from page 9

still wasn't convinced. "The missionaries pointed their fingers at me and said, 'Sister Molling, do you believe the things we have said are true?' " she said.

"When a 'yes' popped out of my mouth, I was shocked. I put my hand to my mouth and thought, 'My goodness, what in the world am I saying?' I looked over at my husband and he looked sick — he looked white. And then they said, 'Do you want to be baptized?' And a 'yes' popped out of my mouth again. It took me by surprise. It was like my spirit just spoke out for me. My spirit knew it was true."

That night, Molling prayed with all her heart. If she was choosing wrong, she knew she could lose her husband, her family, and the acceptance of her Jewish people.

"I wanted to know if what I said was true. The next day when I woke up, everything was the same, but I felt different, like I was wearing rose-colored glasses," she said. "A strong feeling came to me, and I felt like a bride in the most spiritual sense."

From then on, she vowed to do everything she could to stay true to her newfound belief. But her husband, Al, strongly opposed to her conversion at the time, would not give his consent for her baptism.

Molling waited patiently for nearly five years, all the while attending church meetings and taking her children to the meetings.

One day, after meeting with her bishop, Elissa told Al she would respect his feelings and not become baptized if he didn't feel good about it. Al then took their children to a Jewish synagogue. "When he came home," said Elissa, "he said God wasn't there (in the synagogue). And he asked, 'Do you still want to get baptized?'"

"And I said, 'Yes.' So the following day I was baptized."

Not long after Elissa's baptism, Al gained a testimony and joined the LDS church. Although Elissa's parents disowned her at the time of her baptism, they came back to her after 19 years. Al died of cancer in 1976.

FAITH

Continued from page 9

friendships. These relationships can, in fact, enrich our lives.

They have enriched mine. Living in an area where over 90% of the people hold a world view different from my own has challenged me. It has caused me to more clearly define those assumptions that I have made and lived by as an Evangelical Christian. It has also caused me to discard some things that I used to see as important but now are nonessentials.

Living here has been faith-promoting. It has been faith-promoting to be different, to be in the minority, to not have my faith continually substantiated by the sheer numbers of those around me. Before we were married my wife and I attended a church of 5,000 people in Southern California.

There I discovered how easy it is to