

On Second Thought

Reflecting on the people and the moral,
behind the stories **By Joel Rebibo**

For 16 years, Hamodia's Israel News editor Joel Rebibo has presented readers with balanced coverage of the events of the day. In this column he looks beyond the facts and reflects on the people, and the moral, behind the stories

Worth Losing Sleep Over

Some people lose sleep over financial stress or children going through challenging times. But what keeps Avraham Leibler up nights is Christian missionaries who won't leave Israel in peace.

The problem isn't just what he calls "street corner deception," the missionaries dressed as religious Jews handing out brochures. That's the small stuff. The bigger issue is their attempt to set roots in Israel and to transform the Jewish state into a Judeo-Christian commonwealth.

"Today, we have Christians who want to establish Christian prayers on the Temple Mount," says Leibler, a Yerushalayim resident who made *aliyah* from the United States over 30 years ago. "We have Christians who believe that they have a *chelek v'nachalah* [Biblical portion] in Eretz Yisrael. There are Christians who claim to be descended from the Tribes of Yosef or Ephraim, and accordingly call themselves Josephites and Ephramites.

"They yearn to come here and establish J. in Yehudah and Shomron, but anywhere in Israel will do.

"We have Christians who believe they can whittle away at the Law of Return and are entitled to come on Christian *aliyah* to Israel. We have Israeli messianic congregations, which by Yad L'Achim estimates, and their own, number between 15,000 and 20,000 members."

The problem is that the Israeli messianic Christian community is growing and becoming more entrenched. Its members hold influential positions in the IDF, political spheres and major law firms, where they use their legal expertise to push for democracy — not out of concern for human rights, but out of a

desire to weaken the Law of Return and weaken the hold of the Rabbanut over matters such as conversion and marriage.

He cites, as an example, Calev Myers, whose father established a messianic congregation in Yerushalayim, and who is a partner in a prominent law firm. "Internationally, Myers is considered an important hasbarah spokesman for Israel," Leibler says. "Locally, he brings legal appeals to the Supreme Court, to make it possible to expand Christian influence and enhance Christian ability to reside in Israel."

What prompted Leibler to devote so much time and effort to try and halt this process? In 2008 he founded JewishIsrael.com, which monitors, researches and reports on Christian influence in Israeli society.

He was rudely awakened to the problem through a series of "coincidences." His wife was on the board of a nonprofit organization and quit when it took a big check from a Christian group. At the same time, a family member made a *simchah* at the Bible Times Center, which he discovered was run by evangelical missionaries. His eyes were opened to the growing influence of missionaries in ways that other people just weren't seeing.

Leibler says that when it comes to taking money and assistance from Christian organizations, the danger is not just the subtle and not-so-subtle influence Christians "buy" with their generosity.

"For example, there are some communities which accept Christian volunteers to work in their vineyards," he relates. "We informed the community leaders involved that these volunteers go



Miriam Alster/Flash90

Christians attend a parade in the center of Yerushalayim last Sukkos.

back to their churches in the U.S., Europe and Australia and point to their role in the settlements as 'prophetic' proof that the Christian redemption and restoration is coming and that many evangelicals should move to Israel. They are being whipped into a theological frenzy and fervor.

"These volunteers ultimately strengthen Israel's messianic Christian communities and give many Christians abroad a sense of urgency to come on *aliyah*.

"The farmers they volunteer for are now dependent on their labor. This is leading the Israeli government to invite tens of thousands of these Christians to come and toil in Israel's fields."

Leibler concludes, "The concern is real and only getting worse. We have problems in this country with practically

every major Christian organization, especially evangelicals. However, it is we Jews who have to draw the red lines in our relationship with these Christians coming to Israel, so as not to empower them nor allow them to corrupt Jewish values or introduce their own foreign ones.

"My wife and I spend most of our lives dealing with this now. It's affected my ability to run my business. It steals a tremendous amount of my wife's time, and it makes us lose a lot of sleep. But confronting such an existential threat to Jewish continuity and integrity is worth losing sleep over."

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