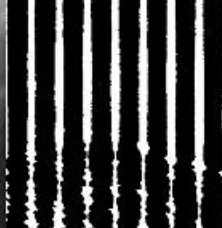


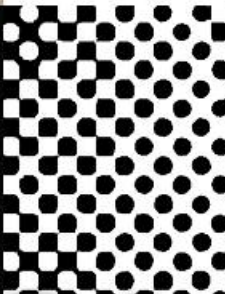
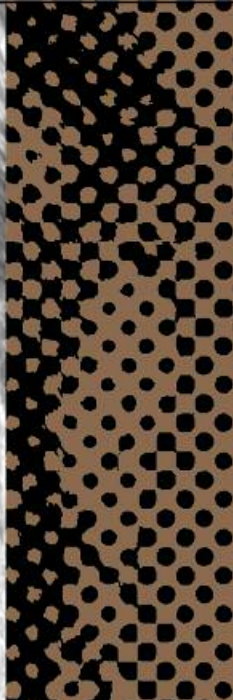
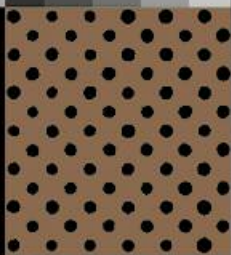
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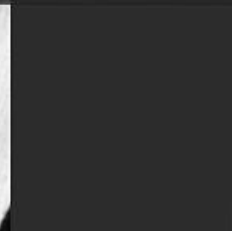
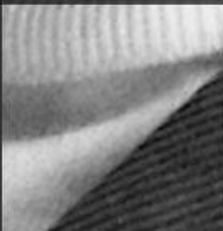
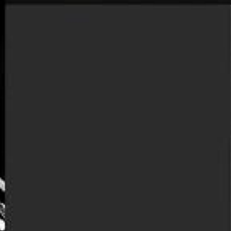


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# MOISHA ROSEN

HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE MESSIANIC MOVEMENT



# MOISHE ROSEN

## HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE MESSIANIC MOVEMENT

A reflection by Richard Harvey

It is difficult to overestimate Moishe Rosen's contribution to Jewish evangelism. In addition to being a bold and fearless evangelist, a charismatic personality and a dynamic speaker and leader, he was also a pioneering strategist and masterly tactician. As founder and leader of the organization Jews for Jesus, he raised the image of the Messiah among our people and challenged the Church to consider the call to take the gospel "to the Jew first" in a way that few in the past century—even in the previous twenty centuries—had attempted and achieved to such powerful effect.



Of course, as he acknowledged, and those of us who knew him would concur, he made plenty of mistakes in thought, feelings and actions. Nevertheless, he made a significant contribution that deserves to be remembered and celebrated.

The concept of "Jews for Jesus"—in the early days just a slogan on the streets of San Francisco and Berkeley—communicated a message bigger than any one organization. For perhaps the first time since the days of the early Jewish believers, it was recognized as a Jewish option to believe in Y'shua as Messiah. Through Moishe's gifts as communicator and leader, the existence of Jews who believed in Jesus was visible on the radar of both Church and Synagogue in ways that could not be avoided or ignored.

Moishe also had a significant but often unacknowledged role in the growth of the modern movement of Messianic congregations and ministries. One of the distinctives of the Messianic movement is the claim that Jewish people who believe in Jesus remain Jewish and are encouraged to live out their Jewish identity. And according to Reform Rabbi Jonathan Romain of the U.K., Moishe could be credited with inventing this notion:

His "crime" was not that he attempted to convert Jews to Christianity—the church had been doing that for centuries—but that he added a new and subversive element to the missionary campaign by asserting that those who did so were not reneging on their Jewishness but fulfilling it.<sup>1</sup>

Benjamin Cohen, the son of an Orthodox rabbi and author of the book *My Jesus Year: A Rabbi's Son Wanders the Bible Belt in Search of His Own Faith*, similarly claimed Moishe as the founder of a group known as "Messianic Judaism":

His group, often referred to as Messianic Judaism, attempts to merge Jewish and Christian beliefs by convincing Jews to believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ while still remaining Jewish.<sup>2</sup>

Moishe himself would never have made such bold claims, and in fact some in the Messianic movement would strongly disassociate themselves from the ministry of Jews for Jesus. Yet Moishe did have a significant influence on the modern movement known as Messianic Judaism, and it is this writer's conviction that his influence should not go unacknowledged, and that honor should be given where it is due. Five aspects of his influence are worth considering.

Moishe's Jewish identity was not artificial or academic, but real, earthy and authentic.

## The priority of Jewish evangelism was always on Moishe's heart.

### 1. Role Model as a Jewish Believer in Jesus

Even apart from Moishe's commitment to evangelism and his gifts as a leader, strategist and controversialist, his character as a Jew who became a believer in Jesus was an example to many. Moishe's Jewish identity was not artificial or academic, but real, earthy and authentic. He was a food-loving, humorous, wise and unpretentious son of a scrap metal merchant who made his own way in life, brought up his family and provided for them, went through the knocks and boosts of life in a difficult and demanding ministry, and was an example of character and humanity that spoke as loudly as his writing and teaching. No one would claim that he was perfect, but he offered a personal example of being Jewish, believing in Jesus and living out his faith in ways that demonstrated that one could be fully Jewish and fully Christian.

In the words used to describe Sir Leon Levison, first President of the International Messianic Jewish (formerly Hebrew Christian) Alliance, he was a "Jew by race and a Christian by grace," and managed to integrate the two. As one of his first broadsides said, "I was born a Jew and I'll die a Jew." This matter-of-factness about his Jewishness was more authentic and genuine than many of those in the Messianic movement who have little or no connection with being Jewish.

### 2. Missiologist

It goes without saying that the priority of Jewish evangelism was always on Moishe's heart, and his leadership in and advocacy of Jewish missions is well known. What may be less known is that Moishe advocated appropriate contextualization in the Messianic movement. He encouraged the production of resources such as the *Avodat Y'shua* congregational hymnbook, liturgies for the High Holidays and Jewish life-cycle events, Messianic Passover haggadahs, and more. He trained his own staff in compiling and leading services. Those liturgies were made available, and became the basis for much congregational worship today. The contextualized Messianic music of the Liberated Wailing Wall continues to be used some thirty years later.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to his work in contextualization, Moishe spoke out in the area of ethics. In a 1985 paper delivered to the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE), Moishe spoke to the issues of the use of Jewish symbols, the use of ethical persuasion, the relationship of contextualization to deception, and the integrity of our witness in such areas as invitations to public events and child evangelism. He concluded, "We must see for ourselves that much of the

condemnation of our ethical behavior from the Jewish community is defensive.

Nevertheless, there are those areas where we need to take heed that we are conducting ourselves honestly and that our behavior is not a reproach to the name of our Lord."<sup>4</sup>

Moishe stood for integrity and truth in reporting statistics and facts. At one time he threatened another well-known evangelist with the possibility of legal action if he did not substantiate the statistics he was publicizing about his work in Israel. When the post-Soviet era saw a great openness to the gospel in the former Iron Curtain countries, he encouraged those leading campaigns and festivals to ensure the statistics for those responding were accurate. On the other hand, when some rabbis complained that the Messianic movement was just "picking off" people who were poor and uneducated, Jews for Jesus conducted a survey. Beverly Jamison, a statistician, compiled the results indicating that the situation among Jewish believers paralleled that of the larger Jewish community in terms of socioeconomic status, education, and correlation with the branches of Judaism.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Friend, Trainer and Mentor to Individuals

Moishe saw the ministry of Jews for Jesus as just one part of the greater movement of Jews coming to faith in Jesus. Many of the individuals now in leadership in Messianic congregations and organizations were advised, mentored and trained by Moishe. These include some who at one time served with Jews for Jesus, including Steve Cohen (The Apple of His Eye, St. Louis, MO), Stuart Dauermann (rabbi at Ahavat Zion Messianic Synagogue in Beverly Hills, CA), Mitch Glaser (President of Chosen People Ministries), Loren Jacobs (Congregation Shema Yisrael, Southfield, MI), Barry Rubin (rabbi at Emmanuel Messianic Jewish Congregation, Clarksville, MD and director of Messianic Jewish Publications), Murray Tilles (Light of Messiah Ministries, Atlanta, GA), and David and Martha Stern (David wrote the *Messianic Jewish Manifesto* and other books and translated the widely-used *Complete Jewish Bible*).

There were others too who though not serving with Jews for Jesus benefited from Moishe's friendship and advice. Among these were Jonathan Bernis (Jewish Voice Ministries International), Arnold Fruchtenbaum (Ariel Ministries), Neil and Jamie Lash (Jewish Jewels), Abraham Sandler (Christian & Missionary Alliance), and Robert Specter (Rock of Israel Ministries, Fairfield, OH).



Continued on page 5

# Moishe, Buddha and the LCJE

An excerpt from the forthcoming biography by Ruth Rosen

“This way, Moishe!” Jhan pointed to some small boats on the river. He then darted to the other side of the road before his boss could reply.

It was a small town in Thailand, but even so, Moishe looked both ways to be sure it was safe to cross. He paused as a Vespa whizzed by. The occupants, catching sight of Moishe, pulled off to the side of the road as they screeched the motor scooter to a halt. Two diminutive men quickly dismounted and came running back to Moishe. Smiling shyly, first one, then the other, reached out to rub the large, American tummy. They laughed—not derisively, but with delight—ran back to their scooter, and quickly rode away. Jhan, watching from across the street, stood shaking his head in disbelief. Moishe, hands aloft and both eyebrows raised, shrugged his shoulders as if to say, “Who knows?”

“Have you noticed,” he asked Jhan, “that the Thais are such a very attractive people? Their smiles are so open and friendly.”

Two diminutive men . . . came running back to Moishe. Smiling shyly, first one, then the other, reached out to rub the large, American tummy.

“Well those guys who rubbed your belly certainly were friendly.”

“I wonder what that was about?” Moishe’s expression was somewhere between thoughtful and bemused.

“Well, look at how many of the tourist attractions around here are Buddhist Temples, statues, you know, Buddha this and Buddha that. Buddha is built into the fabric of life here. And you know how they keep saying it’s good luck to rub the Buddha’s belly?”

“You mean the laughing Buddha? Well, I know I’m fat, but do I look like the laughing Buddha to you?” He pulled his face into a caricature of a glower.

Moskowitz laughed. “No, Moishe, I don’t think

anyone could ever mistake that face for a laughing Buddha. But still, how often do people in Thailand lay their eyes on someone your size? You’re probably the closest thing they’ve seen to those statues, you know?”

The above events took place in 1980, when Moishe went to Pattaya to participate in a conference called COWE, the Consultation on World Evangelization. The 1980 conference in Pattaya was the second meeting of that group. The conference included seventeen mini consultation groups to focus on specific areas of world evangelization. Jews for Jesus was part of the group for reaching Jews with the gospel.

David Harley, then the principal of All Nations Christian College in England, was the COWE coordinator of the Mini-Consultation Group on Reaching Jews. He had met Moishe in the late 70s; Moishe had come to talk with people from CMJ,\* one of the Jewish missions in the UK. At the end of the conference, a group of participants decided to form a task force, so they could continue meeting for mutual encouragement and the added stimulus of cross pollinating ideas and experiences. They called themselves the Lausanne Task Force on Jewish Evangelism, which later became the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE).

When asked to comment on Moishe’s level of support for the conference and subsequent development of LCJE, David Harley, the group’s first international coordinator recalled,

Incalculable! LCJE would never have come into existence but for the enthusiasm and support of Moishe. If I remember correctly, a small group (Moishe, Murdo MacLeod, Ole Kvarme, Susan [Perlman] and myself) met over a meal during the conference in Pattaya and discussed the possibility of forming an international task force on Jewish evangelism. Moishe was very enthusiastic about the idea from the start and his subsequent support in terms of advice, encouragement





and financial commitment was invaluable. LCJE would never have come into existence or continued as one of the most significant products of the Lausanne Movement without Moishe's wholehearted involvement.

The history of the LCJE is worth explaining in this biography because it helps demonstrate that, whereas Moishe's identity was inextricably linked to his founding and leading the ministry of Jews for Jesus, his influence stretched far beyond that mission. He was an international force for the cause to which he devoted his life: making Jesus known to Jewish people.

Postscript: Even prior to the LCJE, Ruth Wardell, who was in charge of the ABMJ's Long Island work, had encouraged Moishe to become involved with the Fellowship of Christian Testimonies to the Jews (FCTJ), a 1970s network of Jewish evangelism professionals. In Moishe's view, the FCTJ was a precursor to the later LCJE.

The LCJE continues to meet internationally and in continent-specific meetings. Their website can be found at [www.lcje.net](http://www.lcje.net)

And watch for announcements of the biography's publication in the coming months.

\* Abbreviation for the organization *The Church's Ministry Among Jewish People*.



Continued from page 3

A few comments are worth hearing. Specter noted that "in 1995 Moishe Rosen invited me to join their Summer Evangelism Campaign in New York City. He allowed me to receive the training and experience that would shape much of my efforts in Jewish Evangelism."<sup>6</sup> Sandler, a longtime missionary to the Jewish people in the C&MA denomination, wrote that "for more than twenty years I have known of and related to the Jews for Jesus organization. I have had their staff speak in my congregation that I pastored. . . I personally participated in one of their two-week training programs . . . I have sent some of our staff people to train with Jews for Jesus and to participate in their witnessing campaigns. Their experience was one of the highlights of their ministry."<sup>7</sup>



There were many who benefited from Moishe's friendship and advice.

Many senior leaders in the Messianic movement such as Yosef Koelner, Paul Liberman and David Sedaca have paid tribute to the influence Moishe had in their lives. Daniel Juster, a founding figure in the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) and currently director of Tikkun International, remarked about the inspiration Moishe gave him in his zeal and passion for evangelism. Paul Liberman, publisher of the *Messianic Times*, said that "Moishe would speak the truth even though I did not want to hear it—but I needed to hear it, and he usually turned out to be right." David Sedaca of Chosen People Ministries affectionately reported how "Moishe taught me to drive, and I got my first ticket with him!"<sup>8</sup> Stan Telchin, the late Zola Levitt, and other Messianic leaders valued Moishe's friendship and support.

#### 4. Supporter and Encourager to the Movement

In addition to the many individuals that Moishe took an interest in, he also encouraged the larger movement in its congregational and ministry aspects.

As to Messianic congregations, Moishe spoke positively of earlier congregational works such as that of David Bronstein in Chicago. Yes, there were aspects to the more recent congregations that he didn't like, such as the use of the title *rabbi* which he felt only belonged to those who had earned *semicha* (ordination). Nevertheless, Moishe himself actually led what amounted to two Messianic congregations (though they were not referred to by that

Continued on page 6

name), both called Beth Sar Shalom, when he served with the American Board of Missions to the Jews (ABMJ)<sup>9</sup> in Los Angeles and in Manhattan.

It was not Moishe's intention to make Jews for Jesus into a congregation-planting ministry; direct evangelism was always to remain the focus. But it happened that congregations came into existence as a result of the evangelism that was being carried out, with the Jews for Jesus staff providing leadership and resources until the new congregation was able to stand independently with its own pastor. Such congregations included Kehilat Y'shua (New York City); Adat Y'shua Ha Adon (Woodland Hills near Los Angeles); Beit Y'shua (Johannesburg, South Africa); and Tiferet Israel (San Francisco). One congregation (Shema Yisrael in Southfield, MI, outside Detroit) originally began as an outreach by a former staff member with the encouragement of Jews for Jesus. All but the San Francisco congregation remain in existence.

Moishe encouraged the staff of Jews for Jesus to be involved in congregational life in a number of ways. For example, for their tenure in Chicago, Jhan and Melissa Moskowitz were members at Adat Hatikvah, a UMJC congregation. Jhan was an elder; Melissa was a deacon, head of education, and head of women's ministries. Both were *chavurah* group leaders. Jhan afterwards led Kehilat Y'shua in New York for a time, as did Efraim Goldstein at Tiferet Israel in San Francisco. Michael Sischy of Jews for Jesus' Johannesburg branch helps to lead Beit Y'shua. Many Jews for Jesus staff continue to participate in the life of Messianic congregations in their own cities, and advocate

that new Jewish believers be encouraged to attend either churches or Messianic congregations, depending on what is available, the needs of the person, and the quality of the church/congregation.

Moishe frequently spoke at Messianic congregations and aided in such areas as fundraisers for their building programs. Among those congregations were Ruach Israel (Needham, MA, at the invitation of Rabbi Rich Nichol); Roeh Israel (Denver, led by Burt Yellin); and the Messianic Jewish Center (Philadelphia, headed by Herb Links).

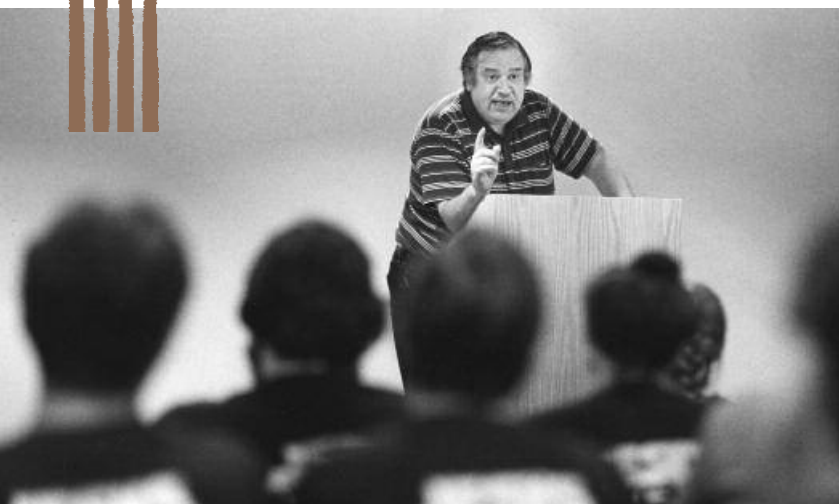
In evangelism, Moishe's own strategy was sometimes adopted by others in the Messianic movement, whether as part of their regular ministry or on a short-term basis. Messianic congregations and ministries sometimes sent their younger members to participate on Jews for Jesus evangelism campaigns. When Steve Cohen led the work in Canada, he was encouraged to partner with Messianic groups in Toronto for evangelism, and members of Melech Yisrael would sometimes join campaigns as volunteers.

And Moishe lent his support to some who had at one time served with Jews for Jesus but now felt called to Jewish evangelism in a different role. Already mentioned are Murray Tilles, who founded Light of Messiah Ministries in Atlanta, and Steve Cohen, who went on to establish The Apple of His Eye mission society within the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Loren Jacobs engages in direct evangelism in addition to his congregational ministry. All have continued to partner with Jews for Jesus in evangelistic outreach and Cohen in particular organizes his own evangelism campaigns modeled on those of Jews for Jesus, including producing a steady stream of broadsides for various occasions.

Whether among congregations or missions, Moishe was an advocate of networking and cooperation. In Chicago, the Harvest Committee was a group of leaders of the Messianic congregations and Jewish ministries in the greater Chicagoland area. Jhan Moskowitz acted as the facilitator for some twenty years, with the group meeting at the Jews for Jesus office every six weeks or so. Moishe hoped that this would be a model for other cities, whereby different ministries would meet together for prayer, outreach, picnics and mutual encouragement. The Harvest Committee continues to meet to this day.

The issue of cooperation between congregations and missions came together in a unique way in 1982. That was the year that the "Messiah Has Come" evangelism campaign took place in London. At the time this author was one of the leaders of the fledgling London Messianic Fellowship (it was not yet a congregation). It was Moishe who was largely responsible for getting LMF accepted by the Jewish missions in the United Kingdom, and he successfully advocated for us to be involved in the campaign and to receive contacts alongside the various Jewish missions that were participating.

Many of the individuals now in leadership in Messianic congregations and organizations were advised, mentored and trained by Moishe.





Not least, Moishe's active involvement with the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism was, in addition to encouraging the networking among missions, often to advocate the place of Messianic congregations before leaders of Jewish missions who had reservations. (See accompanying article on the LCJE.)

### 5. Messianic Theologian

In my recent book, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology*,<sup>10</sup> I identified eight or nine types of Messianic Jewish theology, but there is one type that is missing. That is "Jews for Jesus/Moishe Rosen" Messianic Jewish theology. From one perspective, Moishe's theology could be described as evangelical, Calvinistic and Baptist with a dispensationalist edge. But there is actually more depth and subtlety to his position. He did not formulate it systematically, but Moishe's "Messianic theology" saw Y'shua as the Messiah and the fulfillment of all that Judaism aspired to. Once a person came to know the Messiah, he or she would find true fulfillment in him—in terms of Jewish identity, in terms of Torah observance and in solidarity with Israel.

His priority was making the Messiah known, and he challenged those with other emphases and concerns to respond to this priority and articulate clearly their own



### Moishe was always a provocative and controversial figure.

reaction or in response to Moishe's unsystematic and implicit theological system. At the end of the day, many Messianic Jews were sufficiently challenged to study more diligently and come to greater personal integrity and authenticity of belief and practice through his example.

### Conclusion

Moishe was always a provocative and controversial figure. As one of the most significant Jewish mission leaders of the twentieth century, he could not but be given some of the credit for shaping the movement known as Messianic Judaism and also sometimes taking the blame for its mistakes. Some might say that there has often been a love-hate relationship between Jews for Jesus and the wider Messianic movement. If so, this has only added stimulus to the discussion of the questions, "What does it really mean to share the Messiah with our people?" and "What does it really mean to be a Messianic Jew?" By his advocacy of evangelism, by his mentoring roles, by his encouragement of congregations and ministries, Moishe has left us with critical questions that the Messianic movement dare not ignore as it looks to the future. ■



Moishe has left us with critical questions that the Messianic movement dare not ignore.

position. Often he had a pivotal influence in causing other Messianic Jews to formulate their own positions, whether in

*Dr. Richard Harvey is Academic Dean and Tutor in Hebrew Bible and Jewish Studies at All Nations Christian College in Ware, Hertfordshire in the UK, and author of Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach (Paternoster: UK, 2009).*

### Notes

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- Benjamin Cohen, "Death of a Salesman: Moishe Rosen, Jews for Jesus Founder, Is Dead," *Huffington Post*, June 3, 2010. Online at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/benjamin-cohen/death-of-a-salesman-moish\\_b\\_598150.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/benjamin-cohen/death-of-a-salesman-moish_b_598150.html)
- As of summer 2010, the Liberated Wailing Wall has been deliberately disbanded as Jews for Jesus moves towards a new approach to our music ministry, which will involve more direct evangelism than in the past. The new music group is called Blue Mosaic, and you will hear more about them in the months ahead.
- Moishe Rosen, "An Ethical Basis of Witness to the Jewish Community: A Compendium of Thought," April 1985. Online at: <http://www.lcje.net/papers/1985/Rosen.pdf>

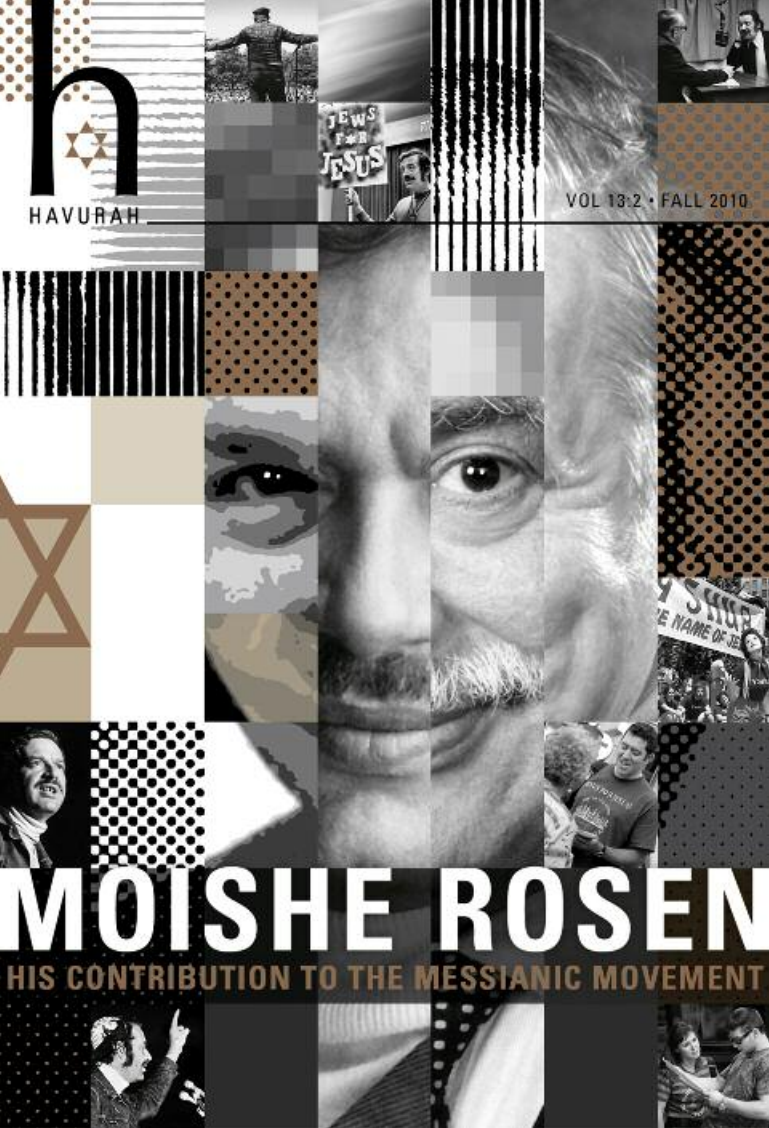
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- "Letter from Robert Specter," <http://www.jewsforjesus.org/about/forjewsforjesus/messianic/specter>
- "Letter from Abraham Sandler," <http://www.jewsforjesus.org/about/forjewsforjesus/messianic/sandler>
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## INSIDE

**MOISHE ROSEN**  
His contribution to  
the Messianic Movement

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An excerpt from the forthcoming  
biography by Ruth Rosen

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