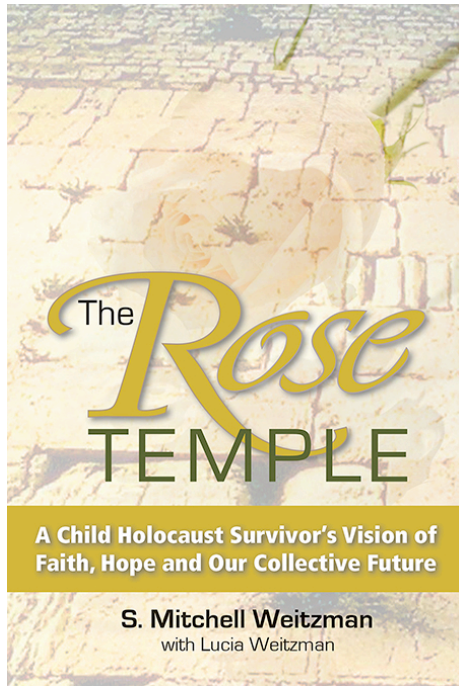


The Rose Temple – Book Excerpts



Excerpt 1

August 2011, New York, NY: Lucia Weitzman opened the book that seemed to purposefully emerge from the bookstore shelf and narrowed her eyes at the preordained page. The image, blurry at first, came into focus. It was an old black and white photograph of children, faces drawn and forlorn, gathered in front of a concrete wall in an unidentified place. The only adult in the photo was a shadowy silhouette of a man in a Nazi uniform, half of his rifle visible in the frame.

For an instant, Lucia imagined herself as one of those children. A moment later, the image seemed anything but familiar. When she glanced at the picture again, it was new and fresh, as if it had never before been published. Yet she knew that photographs just like this one had appeared many times in memoirs and history books.

A question entered her mind—one that, inexplicably, had never occurred to her before, though there was every reason it should have. She captured it and held it close for the remainder of day. And when she lay down to sleep that night—her soul returning to its Divine source—the question traveled with her.

The next morning, she received a response to the question— a direction, really. She understood that she was to ask the question publicly, and in writing. This is the question:

“God, why were You removed and not involved during dark periods on the planet, like the Holocaust, 9/11, and other tragedies?”

Lucia shuddered at the notion of publishing this question— a private thought—to God. She knew it was not unique or original. Yet it is the question she was directed to present. And, she was assured, she’d already been given an answer.

Excerpt 2

September 1994, Jerusalem, Israel: Lucia Weitzman stood in the shadow of the Western Wall and wept. She was not a woman prone to crying in public, but somehow her self-consciousness faded and she felt as if she were alone in this holy place.

Looking down at the earth, she whispered to God, “You made me an orphan again. For the third time in my life, You made me an orphan. Why don’t You take care of me?” She waited for a response. None came. Looking up, she fixed her gaze on the Wall. “I won’t come back here,” she declared, “until I am no longer an orphan.”

Had she uttered her ultimatum aloud, or only thought it? She wasn’t sure. She cast her eyes down, tears streaming down her face. What had she done? She had challenged God, had threatened to abandon Him.

Yet strangely, unexpectedly, she felt purged. She *had* been wronged. Life *had* been unfair to her. The injustice had finally been released, to be absorbed into the ancient crevasses of the holy structure.

She stood erect and lifted her head, looking skyward. In that instant a light touch on her shoulder, like a gentle feather stroke, sent a shiver down her spine. God had touched her—she had not imagined that. And she was sure she knew what it meant.

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Excerpt 3

August 1942, Bochnia Poland: The Nazis relocated more Jewish communities to the Bochnia ghetto, swelling the population. The clustering of Jews in this confined area escalated their sense of collective urgency. Michael and Adele Berl still hoped their plan to escape to Hungary would materialize. They’d made the unimaginable choice to give away their child once already. Now Rose was back with them. What did it mean? Should they take her with them? Or should they try to find another Polish family to care for her?

Days later an unexpected solution appeared, and a plan was hatched. Genowefa’s niece in Stanisławów who had recently lost her husband on the battlefield was planning to visit her aunt in Bochnia with her one-year-old daughter, Alicja. Before leaving Stanisławów, the niece obtained a duplicate of her daughter’s birth certificate, and changed the year and date to match Rose’s age. If they could smuggle Rose out of the ghetto, Genowefa and Franciszek would announce that they had adopted a relative who had lost her father in the war. Rose Berl, the Jewish daughter of Adele and Michael Berl, would become Alicja Swiatek, the Polish Catholic daughter of Genowefa and Franciszek Swiatek.

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Excerpt 4

Spring 1945, Bochnia, Poland: Genowefa expected more questions but was relieved when Alicja decided she first wanted to play. She took her favorite doll and coloring book and walked out to the balcony that extended over the small backyard. Stroking the doll's hair, she began singing the same lullaby that Genowefa always sang to her at bedtime.

She heard the sound of approaching footsteps below. She went and looked down over the balcony and saw their landlord, Janek Chmielewski, a red-faced, stocky man who usually gave Alicja candy whenever he saw her. He was grumbling angrily, his red face looked swollen like a balloon, and he had a brick in his hand. He looked up at her, then cocked his arm back and hurled the brick right at her. It passed by, just missing her head, and shattered the balcony window behind her. She shrieked in terror and crouched on the floor.

“Go to Palestine, Jew!” he shouted. “Go to Palestine!”

Franciszek and Genowefa rushed to the balcony and found Alicja sobbing on the balcony surrounded by shattered glass. Franciszek ran to the police station while Genowefa attended to Alicja, who wondered what she had done wrong.

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Excerpt 5

1948, Bochnia, Poland: Every so often, when Alicja heard some classmate asking why a Jew had to be in their school, she stiffened, averted her eyes, and acted as if she'd heard nothing.

Some continued to follow her after school and sling slurs at her. She began to zigzag her way home to avoid painful contact with her tormenters. Her new path home took her up a hill into the cemetery where the children were reluctant to follow her.

Other than the cemetery, there was no place Alicja felt safer or happier than when she was in church. She and Genowefa would enter the open doors of the church, pass the vestibule, and sit in a pew on the right side of the sanctuary.

Alicja rose when she was supposed to rise, and kneeled when she was supposed to kneel. Occasionally the priest, as part of the Homily, would mention something about Jews. Alicja usually drifted off into her own thoughts during the Homily. Whatever was said was usually intended for the adults.

Sometimes she would just gaze at the figure on the large cross over the altar or survey the pictures and plaques depicting the Stations of the Cross that adorned the walls all around them. How Jesus had suffered. How she had suffered. Who else could really understand her?

The hymns, Eucharist and Communion rites would soon call her attention back to the service. But it was what the priests would often quote from scripture that most resonated with her. “Love one another,” Jesus said, “Just as I have loved you.”

Jesus was all about love—and she was certain that he loved her.

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Excerpt 6

July 1998, New York, NY: Lisa had been seeing an entertainment lawyer from Los Angeles on and off for several months, and she invited Lucia to meet him while he was visiting New York.

He'd learned a bit about Lucia's story from Lisa and was interested in learning more. He was particularly curious about Lucia's returning to Judaism after being raised a Catholic

It was a question she'd been asked from time to time. And she had a prepared answer.

"I've always been a believer in God," she said. "My religion changed, but my belief in God never did."

But David's next question sent blood rushing to her face. "What did you do about Jesus?" Lucia froze. "I ... I don't know."

It was such a simple, obvious question. Many people who knew a little about her background asked about her transition to Judaism from Catholicism, but few had ever asked her about Jesus as starkly as David just had. David sensed Lucia's discomfort and pressed no further.

Lucia left the restaurant with memories of St. Mikolaj and Jesus flooding through her, unexpectedly released from some inner vault.

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Excerpt 7

April 1955, Bochnia Poland: Alicja and Marysia walked side by side with the first year gymnazjum class following the school priest at the head of the student procession. The priest distributed a pamphlet with the word *Recolekcje*, a guide for the Passion service he was about to lead.

"The Jews did not heed Jesus. They mocked him and ridiculed him."

Alicja noticed some of her classmates turning to look at her. She'd heard priests at St. Mikolaj say those words before, but no one had ever turned to look at her that way.

Now Alicja's chest tightened as the priest continued to read from scripture at each Passion "station." As Jesus's suffering intensified, so did the glares some of her classmates directed at her.

She felt dizzy. "Alicja, you don't look very well," Marysia whispered. "Perhaps I should walk you to the nurse." Alicja nodded.

Alicja decided to stop at the old cemetery she'd been visiting since grade school. There she tried to order her thoughts.

She knew her Jewishness made her different from everyone else in town. She thought that the teases and curses she had to endure were because of how people remembered the way Jews must have acted.

But what had happened this day in the school church was unlike anything she'd experienced before. It wasn't just about her being different, or about the ill feelings people in town harbored toward the Jews who once lived among them. It now seemed that the source of their animosity reached all the way back to the Passion. Was that why her landlord hated her so

much? Was that why so many Jews—including her parents—were killed?

Alicja's mind raced as disturbing questions arose. Did the glaring students think she was personally responsible for what happened to Jesus? Was *she* responsible? If so, why had she been spared while her parents died?

Alicja let the questions settle. Then a curious thought entered her mind. Perhaps there was a reason she had survived. Perhaps she had been chosen to survive in order to repent and pray for the Jewish people.

Yet as she considered this possibility, a perplexing new question arose. How would she pray? As a Catholic? As a Jew? "What am I?" she asked herself. She had never asked herself this question before. And standing in the cemetery, silent but for the stirring of the spring breeze, she realized she didn't know the answer. And not knowing this, she wondered if she should pray at all.

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Excerpt 8

May 2002, New York, NY: More than a year had passed since 9/11. Like many, Lucia still grappled with its aftermath. Looking back at what she'd written in her journals, at her recorded dreams and inspired writings, she was clear she'd exercised her personal will by choosing to continue the lonely, often murky spiritual path she was on. But how could she know or understand God's will? How could anyone? She pondered the question one night in early May as she recorded the following dream:

I see a large gold envelope near my bed. There is the most beautiful flame coming from it—a white and gold flame. But the envelope is not consumed by the flame.

The symbolism of the dream wasn't hard to decipher; it evoked the Biblical account of Moses and the burning bush. Its profound implication of a message or communication from God left her feeling overwhelmed. She considered the dream with Mitchell in their next conversation.

"What should I do?" she asked him. "This is more than I can take."

"Perhaps instead of asking *if* God is communicating to you, you need to ask *what* God is communicating to you," Mitchell said.

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Excerpt 9

June 1962, Brooklyn, NY: Alexander and his wife Sophie arrived to take Lusia for what they promised would be a meaningful trip to Brooklyn's Boro Park.

Alexander led Lusia into the room where a man with a long, greying beard in a somewhat ruffled white shirt sat hunched over a desk with a Bible or some other religious text opened out before him. He removed his reading glasses and looked up affectionately at Lusia. She thought it strange, since she'd never seen him before. Outwardly similar to the many Hasidic men she'd seen in Israel and Belgium, she instinctively knew this man was very different.

"This is the Bobover Rav," Alexander whispered, "one of the foremost rabbinical giants in the world. The Rabbi was in the Bochnia ghetto at the same time your parents were there. He remembers meeting them and urging them to try a second time to give you away to a Christian home for safekeeping, even though they had been betrayed once."

Lusia sat stunned, unable to speak. Even though she sensed that the silence was making Alexander uncomfortable, she didn't know what she should say.

"He says he is overjoyed and fortunate to see you here before him. He wishes to bestow a special blessing upon you. He wishes to bless you for a new life."

Lusia felt she'd hardly had time to contemplate her old life. Seeing the Rabbi sitting across from her, she wondered why her parents couldn't have escaped with him.

"*Es zee gezunt?*" the Bobover Rav asked Alexander, the expression of concern on his face needed no translation.

Lusia lifted her head and nodded. She felt comforted in the rabbi's presence. He had looked into her parents' eyes, extracted their prayers for her, and absorbed them into his own essence. Suddenly hearing his prayers meant more than anything else in her life.

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Excerpt 10

August 2009 NEW YORK, NY: Nearly one year after her trip to bring the "fruits of her work to Jerusalem, Lucia's question about the Temple remained unanswered: What did "*your work will help rebuild the Temple*" mean?

Once again, her dreams offered a clue. She was standing at the peak of a mountain, yet was denied the opportunity to "see the other side." Suddenly, she *and* the mountain shifted. In the next part of the dream, she was on the ground of an old structure that resembled a temple or monastery. A man wearing a cloak approached her. She asked whether she could go back up the mountain; she wanted to try again to "see the other side." The man in the cloak said she could not.

Engrossed in trying to understand the dream and decipher the identity of the man in the cloak, Lucia closed her eyes, meditated, and asked for answers.

A man, whom she guessed to be some sort of holy figure, appeared to Lucia in her dream that night. He was helping her serve food to a celebratory gathering of young people in their

twenties or early thirties. The man walked over to a set of double doors and proceeded to open them. A pristine, sun-drenched beach appeared before them—ocean waves crashing majestically over the sand.

Upon awakening from her dream, Lucia placed her journal in her lap and began to write.

The mountain that I have shown you is a temple not of stones, but of love. It is a temple of light that you carry in your heart.

Lucia relaxed her grip on the pen. How could she rebuild a temple made of stones, anyway? Yet the words piqued her curiosity about the dream of the mountain from whose peak she could not see “the other side;” the mountain that shifted along with her. She now wondered: How could her work help to rebuild a temple of *love*?

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Excerpt 11

September 2009, New York, NY: Lucia had experienced the Divine presence at Mt. Kuchumaa near Rancho La Peurta; she’d been to the summit at Machu Picchu where her spirit reached into the heavens; and now she’d dreamt about a mountain with a temple in its base, and encountered a holy man or prophet of some sort. What did it all mean?

As she’d done before, she walked into a bookstore with only a vague notion of what she was looking for. One book on the shelf looked intriguing—*The Isaiah Effect: Decoding the Lost Science of Prayer and Prophecy* by Gregg Braden. As she flipped through the pages of the book, a chapter entitled “The Mystery of the Mountain” captured her attention. It described how the prophet Isaiah had opened a door to a path that may forever change the attitudes of humankind.

Lucia recalled the mountain dream where a holy man or prophet had opened a set of double doors to reveal a panoramic view of the beach and ocean. What did the opening doors really reveal? A new horizon? A new world?

“Like our times,” Braden writes, “Isaiah’s times were ones of both healing and destruction. But choices can be made to avoid future suffering. The Isaiah Effect stands for the proposition that we embody the collective power to choose which future we experience.”

The message was profound. The dreams and writings that had engrossed her for well over a decade were coming into greater focus. She’d made choices throughout her life, from the way she handled the adversity of her schoolgirl days to the decision to continue her pursuit of a spiritual journey that was, at times, overwhelming and frightening.

Yet there was more work to be done, and so many unanswered questions. Also still lurking in her subconscious was the question of where was and is God’s presence during times of destruction.

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