

**An Atheist on a Mission From God?
The Fantastic, Untold Story of
"Trees; The Green Testament"**



Preface

It was March 8th, my birthday.

I was on an El Al flight from Israel to America. A stewardess came down the aisle offering newspapers to passengers. We had a choice of either the NY Times or the Wall Street Journal. I chose the Journal.

A Wall Street Journal front page story surprised me.

Its headline announced that an Israeli Cartoonist was being called a prophet.

I was that Israeli cartoonist.

The graphic novel I'd written and drawn was being called a work of prophecy!

Soon Jewish newspapers were running stories about this book of "prophecy." Back in Israel I would meet with an ultra-orthodox Jewish friend. He'd read the book and said "You did not write this book!" I protested and he stated that it had been written by the "*gilgool of some gaon*" (The reincarnation of a Jewish sage). I said that I did not know that, as Jews, we believed in reincarnation. He ignored my challenge and explained that, with work, the identity of the "true" author could be discovered.

Reports started to come in of people who had broken into uncontrollable weeping while reading the book. In the weeks to come, a Filipino Christian pastor would replace Bible readings with readings from my book on his weekly evangelical radio show in Manila.

One of the many newspaper stories would refer to me and my book with the phrase "An atheist on a mission from God."

On the following pages is the secret I've never before revealed; the fantastic, untold story of **Trees; the Green Testament**.

Foreword:

As the cartoonist who drew the daily Dry Bones cartoons in the Jerusalem Post my job was to comment on the news of the day. But I wanted to do more. I wanted to explain why I had moved to Israel. I wanted to explain myself, my people, our history, the Biblical prophecies that spoke to us, and our hopes for the future. But how would or could I do that?

PART ONE:

First Contact:

It was early morning; I was struggling with the question of how to tell the story of the Jewish people, the Jewish State, and Zionism.

I had gone for a stroll along Jerusalem's *Emek Refaim* Street to think things through. I plopped myself down on a bench and took out my sketch pad and pen.

An old olive tree stood across the street from me. I began to draw it. I traced every line of its gnarled trunk. I fell deeper and deeper into the task, copying each branch, following each line of its beautifully twisted and tangled branches, twigs, and leaves. I was totally absorbed by the act of drawing.



My concentration was suddenly broken by the noise of running, pushing, and shouting children. I had not noticed that my bench was at the entrance to a grade school. The school's morning bell unexpectedly rang out. And the kids were gone, swallowed up inside their school building. Quiet returned and I returned to my sketching.

But now the quiet was broken by buses, cars, taxis, and trucks, belching fumes and honking their horns. The traffic pushed and chugged its way along the road that lay between me and the olive tree.

As the morning wore on, chatty moms pushing baby carriers and strollers began to crowd the sidewalk; on their way to shop at neighborhood stores and to meet with friends at local coffee shops. Bell-ringing bicycles and the growl of occasional scooters added to the threat to my communication with the olive tree.

It was at this point that I thought. "They are the rootless ones. They are blown in the wind like dry fallen leaves." I was seeing the scene through the eyes of the olive tree!

And so began a year-long process in which I would dutifully write and draw the story of my people, our history, and the Biblical prophecies that spoke to us and our hopes for the future, as "dictated" to me by "the Trees." I never planned the book, I never edited the book, I simply wrote the words that the trees spoke to me and drew the images that the trees showed me. In the end I called the book "**Trees; the Green Testament.**" It was the title that they had chosen.

PART TWO:

The Story So Far:

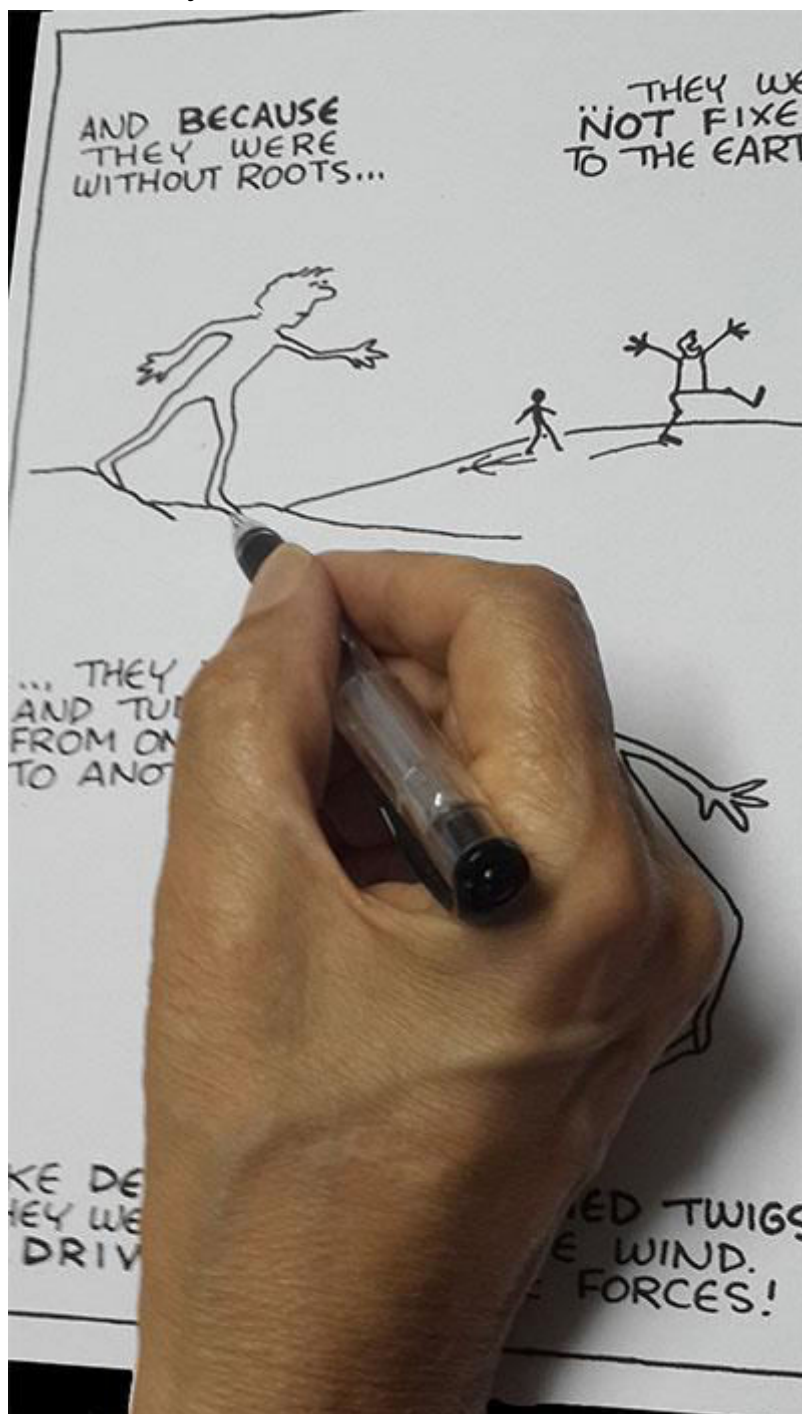
I was the political cartoonist of The Jerusalem Post. I lived in Jerusalem and I was writing a graphic novel. Because I was a completely secular and "rational" Jew I did not tell anyone that what I was writing and drawing was being "dictated to me" by "the Trees" (who referred to humanity as the rootless ones.)

Taking Dictation?:

The Jewish National Fund (JNF) is the American partner of the Israeli organization that plants trees in Israel. The Israeli part of the operation is *Keren Kayemet*

L'Yisrael, locally referred to as KKL. JNF/KKL manages Israeli forests, pushes back the desert, and builds water reservoirs in the Jewish State. Israelis often enjoy holiday picnics and family outings in KKL forests. As a journalist I had been invited to take a JNF bus tour of their operations and facilities. I saw how seeds were sprouted, saplings pampered, and trees planted. And so when “the Trees” spoke to me I understood the world that they lived in and the images that they showed me. Having been on the journalist tour allowed me to maintain the fiction that I was the one writing the book, not “the Trees.”

On the days that “the Trees” were silent I attempted to write an outline of



the book,
but I couldn't.
I tried to estimate the length of the finished book,
but I couldn't.
I attempted to write a chapter "on my own",
but I couldn't.

Telling the story of Israel had always been difficult for me. There were three conflicting stories. One story was the long and painful history of the Jewish nation. A second story was the religious one, complete with Biblical “end of days” prophecies. The third story was that of the modern state, the revival of our dead language, the ingathering of our

brothers and sisters, the building up of our cities. And so I was not surprised when "The Trees" argued between themselves in their dictation to me. Maybe they weren't dictating. Maybe it was all just my subconscious. It was a comforting thought, but I dutifully continued to watch as each page surprised me as it flowed from my pen.

A heavy Jerusalem snowstorm blew down neighborhood trees and damaged the little house we lived in. In reaction, my wife and I moved to a Tel Aviv apartment. Soon I would find myself sitting, every day, at a table in a local Tel Aviv café across the street from our apartment, furiously drawing page after page. The book was now nearing completion, but I had no idea of what lay in store.

PART THREE:

Finished:

I was finished. I had drawn close to 200 cartoon pages of my graphic novel. I no longer thought of it as being dictated to me by "the Trees". Not consciously. But the cartoon pages had just seemed to flow from my pen without my input. Family and friends had watched me working furiously and they marveled at my dedication. I did not tell anyone that I was simply drawing without planning. It had been like automatic writing. I had completely repressed the idea that I was "channeling" the book. That crazy notion was too insane for me to accept. In any case, the Trees book was now completed.

The next step would be to publish/print the book. To do that I would have to create a set of clean, sharp, finished "camera ready" drawings, so I carefully traced each coffee-stained and smudged page on my light table.

After completing that task I had camera-ready artwork, but I was then gripped by two irrational fears that kept me from proceeding.

Fear of Offending:

I was afraid that there might be something "unintentionally offensive" in the book. As a political cartoonist I'm certainly not averse to offending people but only if I intended to do so. Non-Jewish American cartoonist colleagues

had, on occasion, unintentionally done anti Israeli cartoons that were, in my opinion “antisemitic.” I assumed that nothing in my book would offend Jews but what about Christians? Would Christians be offended? I got a list of Christian churches in Jerusalem, chose one at random, telephoned the minister, and asked for his help. He agreed to take a look at the manuscript. I photocopied the entire book and sent it to him.

A few days later the minister called me and said that it was “not a matter to discuss on the phone.” He wanted me to come to his church and meet him in person. This response worried me. Why couldn’t he just tell me if there was, or was not something offensive in the book? I drove to his church and found my way to the rectory. As I entered his office the minister stood, stretched out his arms, and greeted me with an emotional and hearty outburst of “Praise the Lord!”

I responded with a blunt “I am not a Christian, I don’t believe in Jesus! I am a Jew, and I am not a good Jew! I don’t keep kosher. I drive on Shabbat! I just want to know if there is anything offensive in this book! That’s it! That’s all!”

The minister dropped his arms to his side, and broke into tears!

“Look how great the Lord is!” He blurted out, tears streaming down his face, “He chose a non-believer to deliver his message! If you had been a Christian believer or a religious Jew this book would not be what it is!” “Leave me!” he shouted, “Go! There is nothing offensive in this book! Go and continue in your disbelief!”

I left the church, confused, got into my car, and drove back to Tel Aviv. I had wanted an assurance that my book was not offensive to Christians and I had been told by a Christian minister that I was an unwitting instrument of God!

PART FOUR:

Finding a Publisher:

I decided that the way to find a publisher was to approach a number of Jewish organizations and get each to agree to pre-purchase a few

thousand copies. Then, with these agreements in hand I would contact prospective publishers.

Given the nature of the book I had written, I first contacted the JNF. I was shocked by their response. They agreed to buy 40,000 copies! Stuart Paskow, head of JNF Public Relations (a dedicated and really savvy guy) was excited by the idea. He'd been the one who got me onto the JNF/KKL Israeli bus tour for journalists. Having Dry Bones now produce a book about the JNF was a sign of his success. Paskow looked over my shoulder as I had created the book, but I never shared him the fantastic fact that I had become an instrument of the Trees. Stuart arranged a meeting with a sweetheart publisher in New York. With the JNF commitment to buy 40,000 books we didn't need a commercial publisher. Stuart's help and guidance was critical both in negotiating with the JNF and with publishing the book.

The Wall Street Journal:

I was contacted by a writer from the WSJ who wanted to do a story about the book. She showed up at my apartment, asked questions, and I babbled on. I obviously did not mention the fact that the book had been dictated to me by "the Trees." I did not want to appear to be a charlatan, a loony, or a religious nut-case.

Fear of Dying:

Suddenly I was gripped by a dark, irrational fear. The book was done, but I had not drawn a cover. I drew one cover design after another, but rejected each. The reason was an irrational, crippling fear. I confided to my wife that I was convinced that if I drew a cover, the book would be done, and I would die. It was as if doing the cover would "end my mission".

The Bend in the Road:

Although Sali Ariel, my LSW (Long Suffering Wife) and I now lived in Tel Aviv, many of our close friends still lived in Jerusalem. One day we took a drive to visit the Holy City. It was only an hour away.

Tel Aviv (a city on the coast) and Jerusalem (an inland city on a mountain top) were connected by a highway. The road is appropriately named Route

One. On the highway that stretched between TA and Jerusalem there was a major bend in the road. It offered a gorgeous broad panoramic view of a JNF forest. As we whizzed around the bend I had often commented on the beauty of the spot. This time Sali suggested that we stop, pull onto the shoulder of the highway, get out of the car, and enjoy the view. And so we did.



We stood there absorbing the view, treasuring each detail of the natural tapestry that lay before us (normally a blur as we drove by).

Off in the distance, mostly hidden under the forest trees, I saw a small shed. A shed that I'd never noticed before.

It was exactly the shed that "the Trees" had me draw at the start of the book!

In a flash my fear of dying was gone. I felt a tremendous surge of euphoria. That evening, when we were back in Tel Aviv I knocked out a

cover for the book. I sent the finished, "camera-ready" drawings off to the printer. My work was done. The book was being printed.

SECTION TWO: THE BOOK

Demonic Attack?

Here in Israel an *intifada* was raging. Jews were being attacked, stabbed, and slashed by Palestinian Arabs. The book was being printed in America. Sali and I were in Jerusalem, visiting friends. Fear and foreboding were in the air. We sat in silence with our friends, watching the television news as it broadcast details of the discovery of the sliced-up bodies of a couple of Jewish kids. It was a night of horror.

The hour was late and we were depressed. We said our goodbyes and went to our car for the drive back to Tel Aviv on Route One.

The road was empty. Not another car was in sight.

Ding!

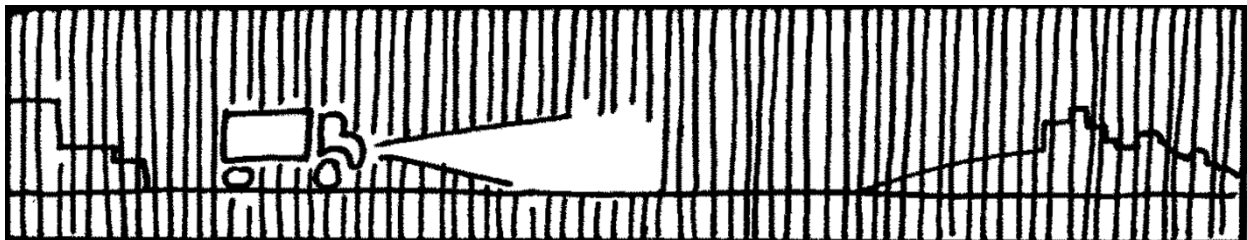
I heard a high pitched sound. It was a bell-like “*ding!*”

“*Did you hear that?*” I asked Sali.

“*Like a bell?*” she responded.

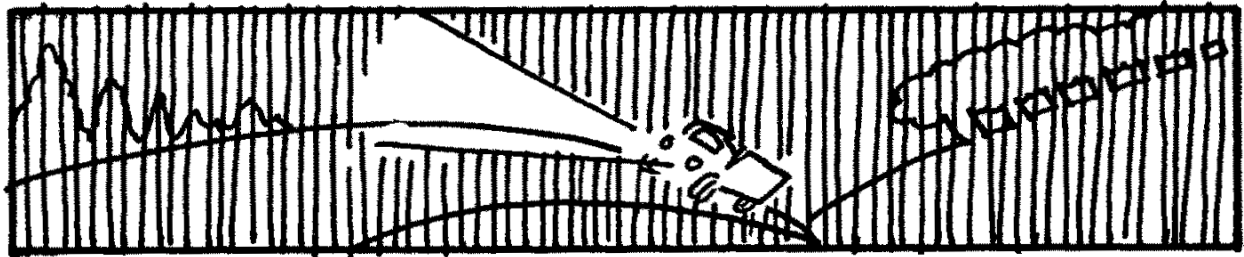
And then the engine of our car died. We rolled to the side of the road. The auto’s electrical system didn’t work. We sat in the darkened car, alone and terrified on the ominously desolate and deserted highway.

For no apparent reason I impulsively I jumped out of the car and ran across the empty highway. When I reached the other side of the road I saw the headlights of an oncoming vehicle. It was plowing through the night, on its way from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.



It was a giant auto tow truck. I waved frantically and the truck stopped. The uneasy driver asked what in the world were we doing out on a night like this. He was a Jerusalemite and had been visiting friends in Tel Aviv. By

chance, he explained, he had stayed longer than he'd intended and that was why he was now hurrying home at this late hour. Nervously looking around, he offered to help us. I climbed into the cab of his truck. He made a U-turn and drove his truck around to the other side of the road where Sali stood next to our disabled vehicle. He hoisted our car up onto the back of his truck, and drove us, and our car, to Tel Aviv.



Once we were in Tel Aviv he gave us his card (with his phone number) turned his tow truck around, and drove his truck, with our car, to Jerusalem where he left it in front of an auto repair garage.

I told Sali that I had the strange feeling that that we had been killed and that time itself had somehow been “rewound” and restarted to play an alternate version of reality in which we had not been murdered. She said that she had exactly the same weird and irrational feeling and added that we should never tell anyone. We then hurried to our apartment and never spoke of the event again.

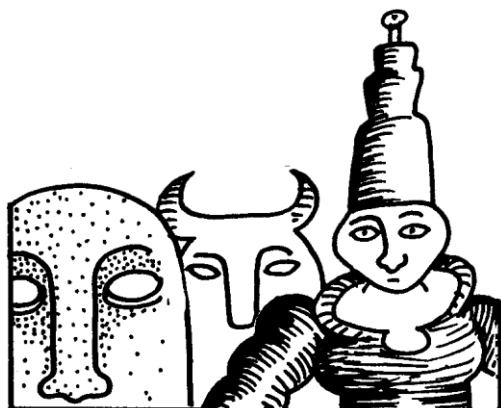
Pentecost:

Time passed. It was now the Jewish holiday of Shavuot (Pentecost to Christians). As a journalist for the Jerusalem Post, I had been invited to attend the annual Pentecostal Christian Zionist gathering in Jerusalem.

On the first day of the conference I met an American Christian minister named David Allen Lewis. He was a well-known author and theologian. I

showed Pastor Lewis “**Trees; the Green Testament**” and told him the story of the middle of the night “ding” and the car breakdown and the tow truck rescue.

Lewis asked me a strange question. He asked me if I would, on the drive back to



Tel Aviv, see where the breakdown was in relationship to the bend in the road where I had seen the beautiful panoramic view and the hidden shack.

On the way back to Tel Aviv we checked. The breakdown had taken place exactly across the road from where Sali and I had stood to see the scene. The next day, back at the conference, I shared with Pastor Lewis the location of the breakdown. He told me that he believed we had been the target of a “demonic attack.”

The Story So Far:

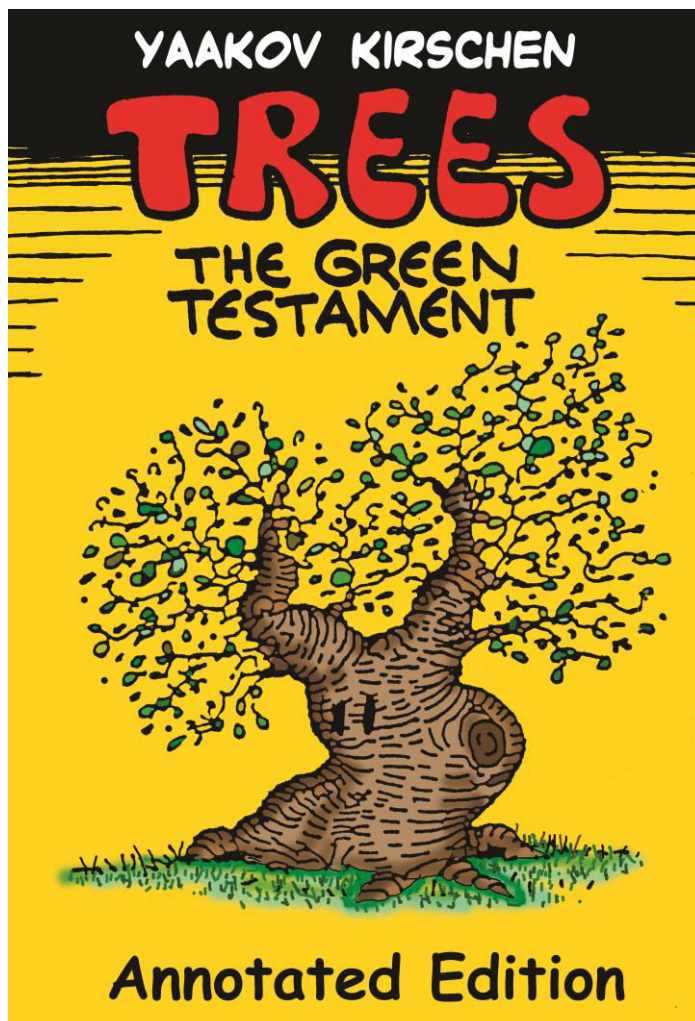
Seemingly without my own input I had drawn an almost 200-page graphic novel called “**Trees; the Green Testament**”. American Christians were now treating me like a prophet, and word was spreading. An ultra Orthodox Jew in Jerusalem had told me that my book had been written by the reincarnation of a long dead sage, a Christian minister in Jerusalem had said that I was an unbelieving instrument chosen by God to deliver His message, and now Pastor Lewis, an American Christian author and theologian was saying that

my wife and I had been attacked by demons!?

An Annotated Edition:

Pastor Lewis later published a book in which he called me as a prophet and identified “**Trees; the Green Testament**” as a book of prophecy.

At no time have I ever revealed to anyone that I’d actually written the book as it had been dictated to me by “the Trees.” “**Trees; the Green Testament**” became an underground classic, out of print and being sold for outrageous prices on Ebay. In the ensuing years I’ve



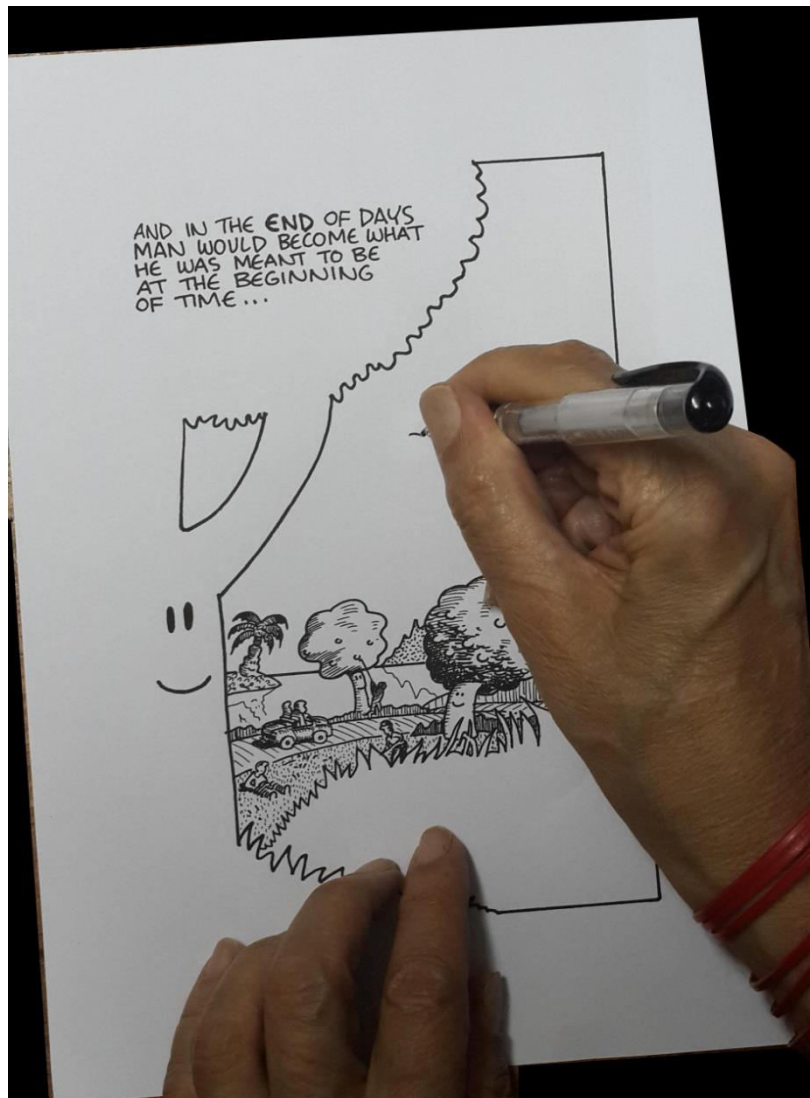
come to realize that because so much of the book had hidden meanings, an annotated version of the book should be published.

And so I sat down and read and reread the book, taking notes on the material that, in theory, I had written.

The annotations and explanations of the text are the only part of the book that I can take truly credit for.

The Annotated Edition of Trees has now been published, and I've decided to share the untold story of how the book came to be written.

I hope that this honest retelling will not result in my being viewed as a charlatan, a loony, or a religious nut-case.



Finally:

Current events, including the assault on Judeo-Christian civilization, the denial of Israelite history in the Land of Israel, the rise of “replacement theology”, Jerusalem, the wild rise of antisemitism, the attacks on Christian communities in Africa and the Middle East, and the almost daily fulfillment of Biblical “End of Days” prophecies are behind my decision to share the strange story of how **Trees; the Green Testament** came to be written.

Link to Trees; the Green Testament (Kindle or paperback) at Amazon:

<http://amzn.to/2vfrJ6x>

Link to Trees; the Green Testament directly from Dry Bones

<http://store.drybones.com>

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