

## THE VALUE OF TRADITION

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### A Baseball Analogy

One of the meanest and greatest ball players ever to play the game of baseball stands on first base. He is Ty Cobb, who is famous for sliding into second base with his shoe spikes high with an intent to cause as much injury as possible. He warns Honus Wagner, also one of Baseball's historic greats, who stands on second base. Cobb yells over to Wagner, "I'm gonna get ya." Wagner yells back, "Come on, I'm ready for ya." The ball is hit and comes to Wagner. Cobb slides toward second base with all his might, spikes up to cause maximum damage. In an amazing movement, Wagner steps aside and plants the tag with the ball right on Cobbs mouth. He is called out and leaves the field with his mouth bleeding. This great baseball story is told again and again. When baseball is broadcast, these old stories are forever repeated.

Those of us who love baseball love its traditions. These traditions consist of a repeated liturgy and stories that are periodically retold. The announcer is to be a baseball historian and to bring the stories to each new generation of fans. Babe Ruth pointing to the place of where he will hit a home run in Wrigley Field in Chicago is one story. Grover Cleveland Alexander as an old man pitching far beyond his years and winning the World Series for St. Louis is another (1926). Jackie Robinson, who broke the color barrier, steals home plate in the World series against none other than most valuable player Yogi Berra in 1955. Willie Mays catches a towering drive by Vic Wertz in center field in the Polo Grounds, where center field reaches to over 500 feet, 100 feet more than today's fields. He is almost in the monument area at the wall and catches the ball over his head while running. He turns and throws the ball beyond human ability into the infield. (This play was one of my earliest live experiences in watching baseball. Don Larson pitches his great no hitter in the '56 World series. The New York Mets, the most hapless team ever, turns it all around and wins four in a row from the mighty Baltimore Orioles after losing the first game. Cal Ripkin breaks the streak of Lou Gerig, playing well over 2000 games in a row. In characteristic humility, in the interview after the game, he states that Gerig was a much better ball player. As he approaches the record his play is sparkling, with amazing fielding plays and home runs. We love baseball because of the stories we never forget.

Baseball has many traditions. It is played within a set of ancient rules that have remained essentially the same for 130 years. The seventh inning stretch, were we are to sing the "Take me out to the ballgame," is a tradition of over 90 years. It came to its height of meaningful joy when led by Harry Carry (St. Louis and Chicago), one of the most enjoyable announcers ever to speak into a microphone. Managers argue with umps. It is both spontaneous and traditional. There are stereotypes to be fulfilled. Why is the movie The Natural perhaps the greatest baseball movie ever made? It is because it so well captures the stereotypes and traditions of the game. There is the tobacco chewing good manager, perfectly cast. There is the evil money hungry owner. There is the stupid but talented athlete. There is the bumbling player who simply can not measure up. There is

the hero who at the last comes through and saves the day. Though biting their nails in close games, baseball fans live for the game that is pulled out in an almost miraculous finish. There are subtle traditions. These include even the vendors calling out “Beer here.” Why is it that the umpire calls strike without pronouncing strike. With great gestures I have heard umpers say, “sterrer,” “errrike,” “ererer,” and “steereek,” but rarely strike. There is the pre-game ceremony with the teams announced and the singing of the “Star Spangled Banner.” The ump shouts, “Play ball.” Baseball provides us with an amazing repetition of sights, sounds, and rhythms with a constancy of rules and repeated stories that are enjoyed without limit. It also provides for the unexpected wonder as well. Baseball, more than any other sport in my view, is a reflection of life. The battle of good and evil is on display because the good guys are the home team. An analysis of the game by cultural anthropology would certainly disclose much in the nature of primal myth.<sup>1</sup>

Such is the nature of religious tradition. Good tradition supplies wonderful repeated stories, a framework of rules, tasks, and celebrations that give constancy and rootedness to life. Without traditions, we have no common experience from generation to generation. We become hollow. There is no corporate personality of a people. Yes, traditions can become boring and meaningless to people. However, this may often say more about the people than the traditions.

### **American Traditions**

As a youngster, being an American was connected to traditions that were deeply meaningful before secularism and hedonism destroyed our widespread participation. As a school boy in the 1950s we all knew of the meaning of the American holy year. It began with a New Year. Yes, it was revelry and parties, but also vows to make the next year better. Soon after, the towering figures of Lincoln and Washington came into view. Their greatness was studied in every school every year. We celebrated their actual birthday, not only a presidents’ day with a three day vacation weekend. Then we came to days off for Passover and Easter. The seven words of Messiah from the cross were portrayed in multitudes of programs on radio and television, including soap operas, plays and movies. We also could anticipate the advertising for *Matzoh* and kosher wines, *Magan David* and *Manachevitz* especially. Then we had Memorial Day with its parades. The whole town gathered to hear patriotic marching bands, soldiers in marching formation and speeches by the mayor and the American Legion leaders. We children could live through the speeches because free hot dogs and ice cream were not far behind. We mourned and respected those who died, but celebrated our freedom and knew it was a celebration because of the treats given. July 4<sup>th</sup> was the time of a bigger parade, greater celebration, fire works and more. We all heard the words of the Declaration of Independence read. We pledged allegiance to the flag. We sang the national anthem and many more patriotic songs. Then came Veterans Day, which was most solemn, for the death of soldiers was remembered in every town and city.

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<sup>1</sup> A profoundly wonderful set of essays by A. Bartlett Giamatti, in a book edited by Kenneth S. Robson and David Halberstan, Chapel Hill, N. C., 1998. Giamatti was a man of letters and formerly President of Yale University. His essay “Baseball and the American Character” presented to the Massachusetts Historical Society is a profound and wonderful piece of writing. This essay was given in 1985.

Thanksgiving was very emphasized in every classroom. We all cut out figures of pilgrims seeking religious freedom. We read of the Mayflower and the compact that was embraced. We read of William Bradford, of Squanto's help to the pilgrims and the courage of many. We also read of John Winthrop and the City on a Hill. Our roots were deep and worthy of repeated ritual. Ritual made these events holy and made our history holy. Inter-religious services were held and large family gatherings were common. It was a true extended family time.

Christmas season was a national joy for youth. School was out. Even our Jewish community emphasized Hanukah to have parallel participation in the season. School plays and celebrations were full of Carols now interspersed with Hanukah songs to show ecumenicity. **So it was for all my growing up years and so it was for much of the 20th century; that is until recently where tradition was rejected and all meaning was leveled. Today most people are at the beach for three day holidays, not remembering, not singing, not engaging in common traditions and rituals. America has been greatly weakened.**

Tradition is part of what makes us human, created in God's image. An anti-tradition orientation is certainly destructive to human meaning. While we can apply the dictum of Socrates, "The unexamined life is not worth living," and say "Unexamined traditions are not worth keeping," yet traditions are central to giving depth, rootedness and common community to our lives. This is especially the case with regard to Jewish tradition, the expression of a modern people who yet rejoice when Tuvya, in Fiddler on the Roof, sings "Tradition" as the explanation for what we do! Without common tradition, we are not a people with a common identity and experience.

### **A Testimony to Tradition**

Let us move into more recent years. In a home in Chicago a two year old runs around the house excitedly repeating, "Its *boray* night." He has observed the best dishes on the table and his mother busily cooking the best meal of the week. It begins with Hebrew prayers which are not yet understood, but he remembers the word *boray*. This little child knows that the family will be together; he will have Daddy's attention. There will be love from Daddy and Mommy in a concentrated way. There will be games and stories. These were the early years of thirty years of Sabbath dinners at the Juster's home and the child is Benjamin Juster, father of two who is now 27 years old and also has his weekly *boray* night with his two infants. It is not as if all traditions in the Juster home were always practiced with joy and acceptance. There was the struggle of the teen years. It seemed so much better to be with friends on Friday night than to be with the family saying prayers, eating together, telling stories and playing games. There was the big battle, and this Dad refused to change our traditions and allow his teens to be away. Friday evening was family time. Friends could join us, but we would not leave one another on this precious night. It was no easy battle, but the teens submitted. The struggle passed. Then a few years later, a younger son Samuel struggled to appreciate our Sabbath. Now his older brother from college gave him a good and stern lecture about

appreciating the meaning of being together on the Sabbath and how privileged he was. He had by this time compared notes with his classmates in college and realized that he grew up with special and rich meaning.

Our last Sabbath with our dear son Samuel was a joyous one. Again, as for the last twenty five years, the best meal of the week was prepared, and Samuel made his demand known concerning the steak. "Give me a tender piece Daddy." He loved his Sabbath steak, but only the best quality. The Bible reading, worship and family time were especially joyful on that last Sabbath with Samuel.

There are many more traditions that have been practiced in our family for the last thirty years. The annual Passover has been a time of tremendous fellowship and joy. Building a *sukkah* has been a great annual family project. How thankful I am for the memory of my dear son Samuel when he built his last *sukkah* with me. He loved to use the rechargeable screw driver as we assembled the *sukkah* based on the plans of the Jewish Catalogue. We celebrated Chanukah and lit our candles whether we were at home or at my in laws home, where Chanukah was unknown. Passover was especially joyful in 1998 when Samuel sang the four questions and shared the readings from the *Hagaddah*. Our Passover was always full of humor as well as seriousness. Horseradish was a test separating the men from the boys, and Samuel wanted us all to know that he could take a full measure of it.

Some years ago, I asked my aunt where my father had been Bar Mitzvah. She knew immediately, B'nai Jeshurun on 88<sup>th</sup> street. When Ben was twelve, we started a new tradition which I hope will be followed into the next generation. We toured Manhattan, my home city. We visited the places where my ancestors lived, Brooklyn, the Lower East Side of Manhattan and then the upper West Side of Manhattan. It was the family heritage tour. We visited the wonderful moorish design Synagogue that was almost 100 years old where my father, when he was 13, said the blessings and read his Scripture portions. The same pulpit and reading table was there just as when he did his reading. Who was this new Rabbi Marshall who had brought this synagogue back from death to be a thriving Conservative synagogue? He had been a successful Rabbi in South America and infused the old liturgy with new verve. He sang duets with the Cantor, he led the people in participation and motivated them to really join with him. New styles were tried with old material. I was given an *aliya*. It was an unforgettable weekend. I was so very glad that the synagogue of my father had this verve, so glad that it was a positive experience for Ben. On his day of *Bar Mitzvah* Ben did his reading with such excellence, chanting the passage with the trope. . Rebecca two years later had a similar experience with Dad in New York. Then some years later it was Simcha's turn. She, however, did not experience the service in the old moorish synagogue, but in the Methodist Church down the street. B'nai Jeshurun had grown out of their old building and was packing out the much larger Methodist Church.

I am so very glad that we have revered tradition and have made tradition such a significant part of our lives. Are there some principles I have learned that can help the

Messianic Jewish Movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? I hope so. Are there some writers that identify the same in their writings? Yes. It is to these principles we now turn.

### **Keys to an Enriching Tradition**

If we are going to attract people to traditions that enrich life, and especially our children, there are, I believe, important principles or keys for success. Most of the problem is not with the traditions *per se*, but with those who seek to convey these traditions. This is crucial point if we are to see the next generation maintain our Messianic Jewish theology and our most treasured traditions. Without tradition, we do not have continuity. It is very parallel to the effects of mediocre teaching and great teaching. Great teaching attracts students to the subject matter. College students sometimes choose majors not based on what would be their greatest interest were the quality of teaching equal, but choose on the basis of great teaching. Several of the keys are intertwined.

### **The Meaning Needs to be Known**

We all laugh at Tuvia's response to the why of various practices in the *shetel*. "Tradition." Tradition is not the reason for doing, but itself needs to be given a reason. Leon Yagod notes that tradition in Hebrew is *masoret* which means to transmit or give over. He defines it as referring to "beliefs, doctrines, customs, ethical and moral standards, and cultural values and attitudes which are transmitted orally or by personal example. Under this definition the process of transmission itself is also included."<sup>2</sup> While people do many things out of habit without reason, the New Covenant orientation is that we are to be adults with regard to our response to tradition, to ask questions, and to know why. Of course, some Biblical commands are done without fully knowing why, but it is well that we seek to know why if we can. When we know why, there is a much deeper response. At a funeral, it is well to know why we say *kaddish*, or why we tear a piece of cloth. Why do we throw dirt on a coffin; why is the coffin a simple one; why is the burial in a simple white shroud; why do we sit *shiva* for seven days, have intensive mourning for thirty days and lesser but significant mourning for a year? Every one of these traditions developed to convey important truths concerning God, mourning, death, and a right response to psychological need. We need not go into the details of explaining these meanings in the present forum, for all present are more than knowledgeable concerning these matters. However, the issue is not our knowing as leaders, but a winsome explanation to our members. In our congregations, it should be generally characteristic that all members will follow Jewish mourning practices, for they are far superior to most

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<sup>2</sup> The writer goes on to state, "In the talmudic literature, the term *masoret* is used to include all forms of tradition, both those which related to the Bible and those which concern custom, law, historical events, folkways and other subjects." Furthermore he later writes, "Tradition has given Judaism a continuity with its past and preserved its character as a unique faith with a distinct way of life. As a successor of Rabbinic Judaism, Orthodoxy representing tradition, harks back to the Sinaitic divine revelation and can only be changed within the framework of Rabbinic law. In Conservative Judaism, tradition is a vital force capable of modification according to the historical evolution of Jewish law. Reform Judaism has recently displayed a greater appreciation of traditional practices, but tradition remains voluntary in character." Rabbi Leon J. Yagod, "Tradition" in Jewish Values edited by Geoffrey Wigader, Keter, Jerusalem, 1974, p. 38, 43.

Christian and other traditions. The simplicity of burial, the affirmation of faith in God's goodness in the *kaddish*, the support the *shiva* period and regular prayer in the synagogue project meanings that are more coherent with Biblical emphases and also with the requirements of psychological healing.

We can show in Jewish tradition after Jewish tradition an amazing attunement to spiritual meaning and to human need. There is a wisdom and creativity in tradition development. Seasonal rhythms, the participation of children, extended family gatherings, the security of knowing that patterns will be repeated, and that truths will be reaffirmed are all strengths of Jewish traditions. However, if we in a rote way simply go through prayers, get through the *Hagaddah*, say the Sabbath meal prayers, and do not keep alive the sense of the meaning, we will lose the next generation.

### **Education is Crucial**

If meaning is important, then education is crucial. Why do we do what we do? Those who educate need to be winsome teachers! We can not afford dry teachers when it comes to conveying the importance of Messianic Jewish tradition. For Messianic Jewish congregations, this education begins in the main Shabbat service. I do believe that there are times to educate the flock in the morning service itself. Does every service need to follow the normal pattern, or could we take a day to have an educational service? It is especially important to periodically reaffirm the traditions in our services and to bring all into capable and meaningful participation. However, there is not enough time in the Shabbat service to educate in Jewish traditions. I believe that the Shabbat pulpit is generally for teaching the Word of God. Therefore, the times of education in traditions during the main Shabbat service is also for motivating people to other venues. It is for creating a culture where people are expected to give themselves to serious educational pursuits toward knowing Jewish tradition. We need to provide the very best opportunities for this. What are the possibilities?

First is the Shabbat School. This can be a first place for learning tradition in its meaning and fruitful practice. Secondly, is special adult education offerings during the week. Yes, ordinary members can take actual courses! It is also possible to have special weekend retreats that teach and involve others in learning to practice valuable traditions. In addition, there are classes in Jewish community centers, colleges, and synagogues that can be of great value.

In all education venues, the quality of the teacher is so important. Does he or she have the ability to bring forth information with passion, humor and personal example? Is the person an example of practice that has proven itself as engaging and fruitful? Is the person espousing tradition really a passionate spiritual or godly person? When we teach, we not only convey information, we impart and reproduce what we are. Education is key to gaining not just a basic definitional meaning but a depth of understanding with regard to what we do.

## Faith is Crucial

Why are so many synagogues mostly empty? Why are many liberal churches in decline? **To seek to carry on traditions without believing in the meaning content of those traditions is a difficult matter.** It is difficult to have a powerful Passover Seder when we do not believe that there really was a Passover in Egypt or that God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt. I am not here speaking of the faith that comes from the Holy Spirit whereby our faith is under an anointing of Holy Spirit presence and power. Of course, I believe this is crucial. Rather, I am speaking of the passion that is the manifestation of the human or psychological dimension of strong faith. We see strong but misdirected faith in radical Islam. We see the strong faith of those committed to radical social movements. In addition, we see the strong faith of many Orthodox Jews whose synagogues are filled. **Furthermore, in those exceptional Reform and Conservative synagogues that develop strong faith, a growing and vibrant congregation is the result.** Why was the Reform Synagogue of Rabbi Joshua Haberman of Washington so successful? This Reform Rabbi was not a typical Reform Rabbi. He believed in a personal God, life after death, and in real inspiration from God contained in the Scriptures. Yes, his approach to *halakah* was Reform, but toward the rejuvenation of tradition in Reform. He is a charismatic personality that drew people into his own sphere of faith and practice. Isn't it similar at B'nai Jeshurun in Manhattan where I have visited several times? Their beliefs are not the same as mine. They defend gay rights at levels that I could not ever endorse. However, they have given a view of God, kindness, and hope with a real belief in the traditions they teach. They bring a new creativity into the way they engage in liturgy. It is clear that they have brought people into a faith in the brand of Judaism they espouse.<sup>3</sup>

For New Covenant Messianic Jews, faith goes beyond the merely psychological. We believe that faith is a gift of the Spirit. It can be embraced or refused, but if received can infuse our practice of tradition. We need to believe first of all that at least some significant body of traditions is good. We need to get past the anti-tradition influences from some evangelical and charismatic streams. We need to believe in the value of tradition first of all in conveying important truth from generation to generation. In addition, we need to believe that the practice of tradition mixed with faith is life changing and helps conform human beings individually and communally to the truth taught by the traditions. In addition, I believe that we release intercessory power in our practice. The Chasidim believe that their practice is part of the process that moves history toward Tikkun Ha Olam. In Passover, the Reform *Hagaddah* teaches us to believe that the

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<sup>3</sup> Milton Steinburg's writing still bears relevance. "The modernist, far from judging all things by the standards of Torah, he test Torah against the standards by which he judges everything else. And only in so far as Torah passes muster does he accept it as authoritative. To him the first criterion of the truth of a proposition or the validity of a principle is not its conformity with the Tradition, but its consonance with reason and experience." He goes on to note that in this regard, that reverence for tradition is due to its being a proven source of values and truth. This is still a high hope for the rational discovery of religious truth which post modernist writers have brought into disrepute. Heberman certainly does not represent post modernist views. For Steinburg, see Basic Judaism, New York, Hercourt, Brace, and World, 1947, pp. 27-29.

message of Passover liberation is for all people. God desires all people to enter into a promised land of blessing. Messianic Jews in parallel to Chasidim, are called to believe that their celebration of Passover is an intercessory act for the redemption of the World. We are moving history to that climax of world liberation where every nation comes into their inheritance.

### **It is Important to Understand What is Being Said and Done**

This may be thought to be the same as the above point with regard to understanding meaning. However, I am here more speaking of the fact that Jewish services from *Shabbat* to Holy Days, from Home Seders to *Havdalah* services are conducted in Hebrew. The Torah is read in Hebrew. We have two choices. One is to train the people in the Hebrew of the *Siddur* and the other liturgical services or to do these things in English. I accept that we may do much in Hebrew and English. However, if we are going to use Hebrew, then it is best if we make Hebrew education part of the ethos of our communities. For those who do not know Hebrew, so there is no barrier, we have several alternatives. One is to do English as well from time to time so the English is in mind when the Hebrew is done. Another is to make quality English translations available and capable of being easily followed when we do the Hebrew. The two synagogues mentioned above do both. However, if a Hebrew prayer or hymn is to be done, there is really nothing that is as good as leaning the Hebrew of the hymn or prayer. People first learn the alphabet and to read words without understanding. After this, they can learn the Hebrew prayer by prayer. Why not have classes teaching the people the Hebrew of the material used? I also wonder why so many Messianic Jewish Synagogues read the Scriptures in Hebrew without providing a *Chomesh* like the synagogues do or a Hebrew English Bible. It is very difficult to worship in Spirit and truth if one is not involved with the meaning in what is happening. To effect this understanding, it is crucial to overcome the objection from members who say that such worship is not anointed. They do not *feel* anointing because they are struggling with understanding and the foreignness of what is being done. I am not only talking of gentiles here. One of the prominent Messianic Jewish leaders, whom most of you would know if named, once criticized the Hebrew parts of our service as a wet blanket that quenched the Spirit that he felt in modern praise and worship. Of course music by guitar and drum with English lyrics is much easier for our people in America. To experience anointing in such settings is easier for people. Is “easy” the only criterion? Is user friendly the only criteria, though we give it some credit? The accomplishment of the hard work of learning the Hebrew of our service will overcome the barrier of felt anointing. However, beyond the merely subjective, I believe that this is part of our calling. If this is true, then the objective anointing will be greater.

Having said this, we must learn from Vatican II which understood that we must be friendly to those who need initiation, or we will not grow. Too large a barrier to the inquirer is self defeating. Again, this is the lesson learned by those renewal synagogues that are being touted as models today.

### **Traditions Can be Fun**



It is amazing that people often think that the very word tradition means something stogy. There are many traditions that are fun. Opening day at the ball game is a fun tradition. Super Bowl Sunday is a fun tradition as is the fourth of July with parades, fairs, and fireworks. As a family our tradition of vacations included several repeated patterns that were in high demand by the children because they wanted to relive the joy of them. One was the countdown time during in the last miles before getting to their grandparents' house. There are many traditions in Judaism that are simply fun, but many parents and Rabbis do not know how to live the fun of the traditions. This includes building and dwelling in a *Sukkah*, dressing up at *Purim*, and doing Passover in a joyful way. The right kind of costume party and story telling at *Purim* and the right recounting of the story of Passover can bring a sense of amazing fun and joy. Marvin "Moishe" Morrison is a master at bringing forth the joy and delight of *Purim*. His plays became a great tradition for the region. He used movie titles and themes to uniquely bring forth the *Purim* story. Such titles as "Esther on the Roof," "Esthar Wars," "The Karate *Kiddish*," and many more brought that **real hilarity that is enjoined for this feast**.

### **The Prophetic Meaning of the Traditions**

We have already mentioned this in the section on meaning, but it is well to expand upon it here. God's appointed Jewish seasons are fraught with prophetic meaning concerning the coming of the Messiah, the last days, and the Age to Come. R. Kendall Soulen has well stated that God's purpose in creation is an order of mutual blessing for all peoples. I believe that the New Covenant revelation brings this out in a wonderful way. However, I do not think that our traditional worship and celebration material adequately brings forth these meanings. I believe that we need to create new materials that are fitting to our traditional forms and content as well as new creative Messianic Jewish forms to fully bring out these meanings as part of our traditional observance and worship. **As stated above, I do also believe that our celebration and practice has an intercessory element that is calling into being what is portrayed.**

Let us begin with the Sabbath. There is the meaning that Yeshua brought forth as Lord of the Sabbath. I do believe our worship is enhanced when we make his life and ministry central to the Sabbath part of our family and congregational prayers. However, the Sabbath is also prophetic of the Age to Come. The traditional liturgy that emphasizes this should be very meaningful to Messianic Jews. The teaching of the book of Hebrews on entering into our rest in Yeshua and the Age of Rest to come is as well an important addition to our tradition. We also draw people into our practice when they believe that in some sense their celebration is making a difference that will add up with millions of other celebrants leading to the very Age of Sabbath rest.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Abraham J. Heschel points out, "Sacred deeds are designed to make living compatible with our sense of the ineffable. The *mitzvot* are forms of expressing and eeds the appreciation of the ineffable. They are terms of the Spirit in which we allude to that which is beyond reason." Also, "Works of piety are like works of art, they are functional, they serve a purpose, but their essence is intrinsic. A *mitzvah* is the perpetuation of an insight or an act of bringing together the apssing with the everlasting, the momentary with the eternal." Hence, we should not forget that there is an immediate joining and not only a future prophetic. We participate already in the past and the future. *Between God and Man*, Ed. Franz S. Rothchild, New York: Simon and Shuster, 1959. Pp. 182, 183.

Passover as well has so much added meaning in the New Covenant. We see Yeshua as the Passover Lamb, the meaning of his resurrection as parallel to the Exodus victory, and the promised place of peace that is offered in Him. His resurrection brings the meaning of the Feast of First Fruits to fullness. However, Passover is also prophetic and releases the meaning of the ultimate redemption of Israel and the nations. The Book of Revelation is really an Apocalyptic World Passover-Exodus. Bringing out these prophetic meanings is an important part of our worship, for the fullness of truth is to be expressed by Messianic Jews. We join with the Chasidic attitude that in some significant way, even if in a small way, we are moving history to the climax of the redemption of Israel and the nations.<sup>5</sup>

*Shavuot* teaches us concerning the meaning of God's provision. God's provision is more in giving us the Word of God than in the early harvest. The anniversary of the giving of the Torah is so very special. How appropriate that we also celebrate the giving of the Spirit by which we are able to live out the Torah (Jeremiah 31:31 ff. and Romans 8:1-4). The giving of the Spirit leads to the first harvest into the Kingdom of God which looks forward to the full harvest at the end of this age. Shall we not celebrate with the fullness of the meaning given us in Yeshua and the prophetic meaning of Joel 2:28, the promise of the pouring out of His Spirit on all flesh and the reception of prophetic gifts. *Shavuot* is a celebration of the charismatic dimension and the demonstration of charismatic reality is fitting to the meaning we now embrace.

*Sukkot* is also full of amazing levels of meaning; the time in the desert, the loss of a generation, the building of faith in the next generation and the supernatural provision of God. All of this is represented and recounted by dwelling in a *Sukkah*. Yet in tradition, the Feast, became the reflection of the fullness of the Kingdom to come. All nations would be part of the Kingdom, all would celebrate the Feast, all would know God. Hence the tradition that the seventy bulls during the days of the feast were sacrificed for the 70 original nations which are inclusive of all nations. In that day the Lord shall be King over all the earth. We do all remember that Yeshua proclaimed himself to be one who gives the water which quenches our thirst. In the Temple, the great lamps were lit to bring an amazing reflection of Glory to the ancient City. During the Feast, He as well proclaimed himself as the Light of the World. This Feast is of all the celebrations the one intended to be the greatest in joy and the one in which we proclaim the joy of the Age to Come. Nothing must be spared in our energy to bring out all of its meaning, using that which is old and creating that which is new to bring out its fullness.

*Rosh Hoshana* is as well prophetic of the judgement to come, the *Shofar* proclaims the coming Day of the LORD. It is a day of both judgement and deliverance. Certainly the

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<sup>5</sup> In this regard see Milton Steinburg,, "Whereas the Exodus is to Jesus, as indeed to much of mankind, the classic instance of liberation, a proof that, since God is, every bondage, political, economic, or spiritual, can be and someday will be broken. *Basic Judaism*, New York, Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1947, p. 49. See also Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchick, *Halakhic Man*, New York, Jewish Publication Society, 1983, p.118. "The redemption of Egypt is linked to the future redemption." Also, reciting the great *Hallel* speaks of the Scriptural vision of the eschaton. Max Kadushin points out that the dogma is not merely abstract, but that we are to be drawn into the experience itself. See *The Rabbinic Mind*, New York, Bloch, 1972, p. 366.

New Covenant passages lead us to understand the *Shofar* as heralding the coming of our Lord and Messiah in glory. This is the seventh month of perfecting. The day of judgement leads to repentance, to *Yom Kippur*. However, this is also prophetic of the repentance of all nations receiving that atonement for sin that will lead them to the celebration of *Sukkot*.<sup>6</sup>

If it is true that these meanings are now clear from Scripture, than our traditions of celebration will reaffirm all that is good and true from traditional Judaism, but will add the fullness of New Covenant meaning. We will instruct the people that even our joyful celebration and humor effect a release of power that moves the world toward its fulfillment. In a sense, we will be Messianic Jewish Chasidim. .

### **Messianic Jewish Tradition Should be Recognizable by the Larger Jewish Community**

Though we add new meanings to old traditions, especially from the New Covenant Scriptures, we do need to see that our traditions are meaningful to the mainstream of the Jewish community. Very few of us espouse “orthopraxy.” However, it does not help us if we develop a way of doing things that will not be familiar to the Jewish mainstream. If we go overboard in doing everything in completely new ways, our practice will not be even recognized as Jewish. One Messianic synagogue developed their own way of chanting the Torah. To any Jewish person familiar with the traditional chanting, this would have a ring of in-authenticity. Messianic Jews sometimes defend radical departures in the way they practice tradition as a natural implication of the freedom of the Spirit. However, it may as well be an outgrowth of a disrespect of our people. Most know that I am for creative new practices and creative new ways of practicing traditions. However, there must a wisdom so that the newness does not destroy the sense of continuity and respect for that which is familiar. This is no easy task. We can learn from those Jewish communities like B’nai Jeshurun that have done this in a most successful way. There is a balance to be attained. The familiar tune is done in duet, it is done in a more lively way, but it is a familiar tune. Indeed, modern tunes for old material still partake of ancient and familiar musical roots. Edward Grieg used familiar Norwegian folk themes in his creative new music. Norwegians recognize his music as authentically Norwegian. Shlomo Carebach gave us another example of the new and old together in a recognizably Jewish way. I have often asked the question, as a criteria, would the average Jewish person recognize what we are doing as Jewish? I understand that bringing out the fullness of New Covenant meaning is a challenge. Why? Because the Jewish community at large did not accept New Covenant meaning. Therefore some strangeness is unavoidable if we will fully express New Covenant reality. However, we need not intensify the strangeness of Messianic Judaism by destroying that which is familiar and within the boundaries of that which is accepted as authentic Jewish expression.

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<sup>6</sup> Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik states, “The metaphysical act is still embedded in the nation’s consciousness, as they pray on that very day for the renewal of the cosmos. The infinite past enters into the present moment. See, Halakhic Man, Jewish Publication Society, New York, 1983.

I find myself pressed by the polar tension between two truths. First is my generally conservative approach to tradition. The principle of honoring father and mother leads me to seek to affirm all that is good in our traditions and is in accord with Scripture. It is a matter of respect and reverence. Messiah is the transformer of culture, not the enemy of culture, in the words of H. Richard Niebuhr. The other side of that tension is that I must express the fullness of New Covenant meanings as well. This will be an aid to bring the traditions across in a way that can capture a generation that has a small attention span and is used to sensory saturation, rock beats, multi media presentations, and an amazing array of entertainment. Can I speak to them? Can I capture their heart for our traditions? Can I educate them? I must if Messianic Judaism is to survive. We share this challenge with majority of Jewish communities today. We can see that creativity is thus crucial in winning people to traditions. Creative people do things in creative ways. One can not learn to be creative only through lectures. Some people will never be capable of creativity in practicing traditions. Creativity comes by the Spirit, but is also a gift that some have more than others. To an extent mentoring can impart creativity. That Rabbi Marshall of B'ani Jeshurun is no longer with us on Earth, but he was able to train his successors to carry on the same creative approach to tradition, worship, and synagogue life that has made my father's old synagogue one of the most famous in the country. It is therefore crucial that we find some means of joining new leaders with those leaders who exhibit sufficient creativity and life in the Spirit that they might impart this ability to new leaders and expand the numbers of those in our midst who can do this. How will we know who such leaders are? We will be able to tell by the quality of life in their synagogues, from the level of enthusiastic participation in the liturgy, to the quality of the Seders in the community and to the joy of dwelling in a *sukkah*. I fear that our numbers in this regard are way too few. The ability to motivate others is a great and needed gift of which creativity is a key element. We see these elements of creativity with tradition so well recorded in stories of the Ball Shem Tov, and this indeed was a key factor in the early Chasidic movement.

### **The Power of the Spirit Gives Life**

The last point leads to this point. The power of the Spirit is great source of creativity and life. The attraction of people to life is very important. The Spirit filled life conveys love, power, and passion. One of the more important experiences of my life was connecting to the Lutheran Church when I was 22 years old. I was courting my wife Patty at the time. We had had a bad experience in a charismatic congregation that became heretical. These were pre-Messianic Judaism days. We were looking for a congregation that would provide a deep worship experience and some historical rooting. We visited many congregations and found that they simply did not allow for adequate worship. Finally we visited St. John's Lutheran Church in Wheaton, Illinois. We were delighted. The connected liturgy and the great old hymns enabled us to really enter into an experience of quality worship. We did not fully realize how much our experience was aided by the pastor, Theodore Laesch. He expressed love, joy and passion in leading the liturgy. The whole congregation expressed fervor in the worship. Some years later after my entrance into Presbyterian ordination, we desired to visit a Lutheran church to recapture the experience. We attended a few different churches. They seemed relatively dead. It was

then that I realized that the quality of worship was tied to the worship leader. Of course, the people can be trained to carry worship even if the leader is not always the best. However, somewhere, the people will need to receive impartation from someone who conveys the Spirit through the worship material. The time at St. John's was important preparation for us, for it was only two years before connecting to the Messianic Jewish movement. Our ability to appreciate liturgy gave us faith that the ancient Jewish liturgy could be made alive and powerful. We have now experienced it to be so for many years.

### **The Starting Point for Tradition Choices**

Once we are convinced that we are called to maintain Jewish tradition, there needs to be a starting point, a beginning where all are called to common practice.<sup>7</sup> As we have noted, our commonality as a people is rooted in common practice. Without it we are hardly a people. At a recent joint convention of the Conservative Movement, executive vice-president Rabbi Jerome Epstein called for a "Compact of Conservative Jewish Commitment." He presented six parts to the compact. The first was to "act as Jews" in improving the world by giving *tzedakah* to one person or doing one act of *gamilut chesed* (act of loving kindness) at least once each day. Secondly he urged that Conservative Jews pledge to light candles and have a special meal for *Shabbat* and for each of the major festivals. Third, he urged a pledge to eat as Jew by avoiding "those foods the Torah forbids us to eat," shellfish and pork products. This is amazingly similar to the idea of Biblical *kashrut* as a standard. This was considered easier than Rabbinic *kashrut*. The fourth commitment is to daily learning either by reading a chapter of the *Tenach* or studying *Mishnah* every day. The fifth is a commitment to raising Jewish families. Last was to build a bridge to Israel, making a visit to Israel, and setting aside some money each week to help someone else visit or live there.<sup>8</sup>

The response to this call was positive, but some were concerned that the commitment level was so minimal. However, most acknowledged that most Conservative affiliated Jews do not do these things. I think we would be surprised at how many Messianic Jews do not do these things either. I would endorse such a program in the UMJC as a beginning point for us all UMJC congregation members, but only as a beginning. Too many Messianic Jews simply expect their Jewishness to be preserved and to be adequate if they attend a Messianic Jewish congregation. The emphases on the family and the individual in these practices noted by Rabbi Epstein are important.

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<sup>7</sup> Rabbi Isaac Klein provides a very comprehensive guide to practices in *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*, New York, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, KTAV, 1992. Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin notes that "As the Jewish judicial system, *halakha* covers every aspect and relationship of life. . . . As the *halakha* is all encompassing, so it might be said that the Jewish religion is all encompassing." P. 29 Of course, Donin as an Orthodox Jew seeks to accomplish a maximal level of practice. It is a far different orientation than the one put forth here.

<sup>8</sup> See *Washington Jewish Week*, February 14, 2002, "A New Compact for Jewish Life," p. 1.

Epstein helps us recognize a standard that Jews consider most basic and universal.<sup>9</sup> I believe that it is a partially valid standard, and that we should foster those practices and traditions considered the most universal among Jewish people who are serious about Jewish life. I have argued the same for worship services. The very most basic elements of the *Sh'ma*, something from the *Amidah* (which is shortened for the Sabbath, and especially the *Kadusha*, the *Kaddish*, the Torah Service, the *Alenoo*, the *Odon Olam* and the Aaronic Benediction are to my mind the most universally recognized. They are ancient as well. I have argued this for the most part of 28 years now. These are touch points of commonality. I would also urge that we train our congregations to participate in these parts of the service with real quality.

Again I repeat the point from above. Messianic Jews are challenged because they add much in the way of New Covenant Scriptural material in our expression and practice. It is foreign to our people because as a whole people we did not embrace the New Covenant Scriptures. This is why the Jewish traditions and expressions in our congregation need to be so recognized by the Jewish mainstream.

In summary, I believe we need to seek to maintain those practices that are the most universal so long as they are good and cohere with our understanding of Scripture and the New Covenant under which we live. This naturally leads to the next point.

### **Bar Mitzvah As a Key To Passing Down Tradition**

In much of the Jewish community, Bar Mitzvah is a graduation from the Jewish practice. The great party with all the gift giving takes place. Bar Mitzvah should be the entrance into adult Jewish responsibility. We have come to this sad place almost because as the New Covenant teaches, we have a from of godliness but deny the power of it. There is a possible power in the form or tradition. However, it must be conveyed to the young so that it captures their imagination and commitment. In general, the most important factor in passing on the tradition is that the teacher of the tradition is looked up to by the one in training. This is ideally, at least in part, the parents. A really positive and loving relationship with the parents is a key to the children wanting to follow in their footsteps. If the parents can share the importance of Jewish life, convey this with conviction, seriousness, humor, and life, the young person is attracted to the traditions. As I reported above the heritage trip we took with each of our young persons was a key. The special

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<sup>9</sup> Milton Steinburg records that which he perceives as normative Judaism broadly. His summary is still valid in my view. However, the progress of more radical post modernist ideas now make this list more controversial. "With regard to Jewish religion, seven strands weave together to make it up.

1. A doctrine concerning God, the universe, and man.
2. A morality for the individual and society.
3. A regimen of rite, custom and ceremony.
4. A body of law.
5. A sacred literature.
6. Institutions through which the forgoing find expression.
7. The people, Israel-central stand out of which and about which the others are spun cords locked together.

See Milton Steinburg, Basic Judaism, New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1947, p. 4.

times in New York together, the travel to and from our destination, all wrapped the Bar Mitzvah package is something very special. None of us will ever forget it. Our day school trained our children in Hebrew language, but our leaning to say their readings together became a most special time of learning. Indeed, Bar Mitzvah was also a time where each was schooled in our book Growing to Maturity at a level that fit their ability. Sometimes a great *bar mitzvah* teacher can be a key. Why is it that so few remember their training as a wonderful time. In Messianic Judaism we can do better. This is the time to turn our young people on, not off! A bad experience here is very hard to overcome.

### **The Bible and Especially the New Covenant Scriptures Provide a Plumb line for our Use of Tradition**

The first major factor that is crucial in testing our approach to tradition is the centrality of Yeshua. He must be central in lives, expressions, practice and worship. He said, "If I be lifted up I will draw all men to myself." John delighted in double *entandres*. Not only is he in all probability speaking of Yeshua's being lifted up in crucifixion. He was also speaking of our lifting Him up as the center of our religious life. In this we also recall the words of Yeshua, that the Father seeks those who will worship Him in Spirit and in truth." I believe that in (S)pirit connotes another double meaning. John is inviting us to unpack the meaning. First is fervor and sincerity. In addition is the anointing of the Spirit. If sincerity is in mind then it leads us to speak of truth as well. Truth connotes conveying the fullness of Biblical meaning. Great tradition and great worship both convey the central themes of Biblical truth. This is exemplified by the Psalms which center on the great events from the call of Abraham to the Passover Exodus events. So our worship, in my view, should be full of the meaning of the events of the New Covenant and its significance to us all. This means adding much to the traditions and worship material which, as we have received them, reflect a pre-fulfillment orientation. If Yeshua is not central, I believe we will lose the some of that great potential for His powerful presence in our midst. This sometimes provides us with hard choices. For example in a worship service, do we rewrite old material? Do we simply write and add new material? Do we add new traditions to the old, or recite new meaning? I am for both being done. Most of our Messianic Jewish Passover *Hagaddot* explicitly bring out the meaning of Yeshua. We can do more to bring out the Passover eschatological meanings. I am glad for the explicit New Covenant content in our Seders. Chanukah can also have much in New Covenant material, especially if this is the time of the angel announcing the coming of the Messiah and Mirium's conception.

The tradition of a fixed liturgy in the Church and Synagogue was to ensure that the most important bases were covered. I think that if we simply leave New Covenant material to the spontaneous *ad lib*, we will be unsuccessful. Indeed, many will not have that skill of immediate comment and leadership such that there will be adequate New Covenant content and meaning. We are always challenged by time. How do we cover all we desire in both traditional material in a variety of liturgical occasions, at home and in the synagogue, while yet having the fullness of content needed to honor the most important events and meanings of God's involvement with our people? Choices have to be made

and they are not always easy. The centrality of New Covenant meanings is a most clear deduction from the teaching of Rav. Shaul in II Corinthians 3 where he asserts that the glory of the Mosaic ministry (probably centered on the sacrificial *cultus*) is by comparison with the great glory of the ministry of the Jewish New Covenant as if it had no glory. We are putting forth the meanings of the New Covenant that is Jewish and in continuity with the Mosaic. This must not be understood as properly identified with Christian orientations of discontinuity that lose the place of Israel and the Torah.

Having said this, I do believe that we should look at the classical historical liturgy of the historic churches. They do a powerful job of covering the basics of New Covenant meaning centering in the life, death and resurrection of Yeshua. Our incorporation of such meanings in Messianic Jewish liturgy is weak. The liturgy of the churches centers around the Eucharist or the communion of the Messiah's Supper or Seder. Some Messianic Jews have argued that we should only celebrate and partake of the bread and wine as the meaning of his broken body and shed blood once a year as part of the Passover Seder. However, I question such an interpretation. When Yeshua said, "Do this in remembrance of Me," there is no evidence in the text that this was limited to the institution of the Supper. Redaction studies of the Gospels would lead us to believe that both here and in John the intent of these passages was in a context of a frequent celebration. Just as the Exodus is celebrated every Shabbat and not only on Passover in the Jewish liturgy, so also the weekly Sabbath is appropriate as a time for celebrating his new Exodus in Yeshua. I have not incorporated this as of yet, but I am beginning to wonder if the celebration of the Messiah's Seder on a weekly basis is a key to the centrality of New Covenant meanings. I have written a Messianic Jewish liturgy for this. Great liturgy is full of content taken seriously. I have been somewhat scandalized by the flippant way that the Messiah's Supper is celebrated in some of our congregation. The elements are simply passed out and people partake. There is little in the way of dignified liturgy. There is no word of institution, warning, or dedication of the elements. Again, I think that a Messianic Jewish celebration of Messiah's Supper when it is done well is just one part of how Yeshua can be central in Messianic Jewish liturgy.

In addition, I believe that our liturgy should include that element of the universal Body of Believers of which we are a part. To make this New Covenant universal reality is an important part of truth and balance. It has been said that the hymn book of classical Methodism fully taught the theology of the Methodists. Charles Wesley's hymns were the most prominent. In the same way, I believe that Messianic Jewish liturgy and other worship material should express the fullness of our theology. This is a key to depth of worship. We indeed have some great Biblical material in this regard. One example is Philippians 2, a great ancient hymn of the incarnation which with the right musical background could form a great part of our liturgy. It seems it was part of the liturgy of the early communities of believers, perhaps even from the Messianic Jewish community.

I am not a post modernist. I do believe that we can approach the objective meaning of Scripture. The Holy Spirit with good scholarship opens our eyes to greater clarity. At times He breaks through revealing the meaning and importance of a text. Because of this, we can saturate our minds in the Scripture and become more and more able to



“Prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” (Rom. 12:2) So besides the centrality of Yeshua, the teaching of the Scriptures provide other tests that are helpful.

First, we need to note that God is the author of traditions. If He did not appreciate traditions, He never would have given traditions. Content, content, content. It is easier to jettison the New Covenant content or to jettison the old traditions. I believe God has not given us this easy choice. Again and again I assert that tradition provides the continuity and the joint identity of a people. Those who most oppose tradition are not aware that **they maintain a tradition of opposition**. Ways of speaking, styles of worship, the language of prayer, the use of the Bible, the style of preaching and more are all very traditional in their circles. However, self-criticism in tradition is in these circles almost impossible because there is no awareness of how much one is traditional, but perhaps shallow. We approach tradition with respect and humble examination. We should note in this regard what I have come to call **the idolatry of spontaneous immediacy**. That which is truly spiritual is identified with that which is unexpected and unplanned. One Messianic pastor asserted that to even plan praise and worship material ahead of time was against being led by the Spirit. All had to be according to moment by moment intuitive orientation. This man is very talented and creative. He can pull off a service that is usually in some ways Jewish (usually the Sh'ma is sung along with much Messianic Jewish praise material), but most would fall into rote patterns after a few weeks or months of this direction while yet proclaiming spontaneity. The air is too thin for most of those who desire a mountain top experience. Furthermore, he is unaware that a basic set of possible patterns are in his mind and will be repeated from time to time. How much better to recognize the real and spontaneous in breaking of the Spirit in a context of repeated patterns and content! The two, spontaneous immediacy and planned repetition, best play off one another. In Chasidism this in breaking was recognized when something extraordinary happened during the Sh'ma or when the Torah was taken out of the ark or when a particular prayer was recited. .

This leads to the other pole of our concern. It is that we should not be so rigid in our appropriation of tradition that this in breaking is impossible. In the New Covenant Era, the mark of God is the Spirit in our midst who brings prophecy, changes of direction and newness in unexpected insight and happenings. Maintaining one eye on the pattern of tradition and one eye on the intuitive-Spirit gives us that wonderful balance. The pattern in form and content provides those essential elements of our worship and tradition. The intuitive provides that important sense of heightened immediacy. Obviously this will not be possible for a person who fears change and treats tradition as requiring rigid conformity. Max Kadushin notes in the context of the dangers of form becoming rote that with regard to the *Amidah*, “It was the practice therefore, to attach personal petitions to the Tefilah, or else to insert them, and that the practice surely testifies that the saying of the Tefilah was not a matter of rote.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The whole section is worth quoting. “R. Aha in the name of R. Jose declares that one should say something new in the *Teffilah* every day; R. Eleazer said a new *Teffilah* every day –that is he changed the text of the middle part, wick is supplication, every day, and R. ‘Abbahu said a new berakah every day –that is, he changed a text in the berakot “of praise” daily, as well. . . (R. Eliazer) points to the difficulty, one that

The Messianic Jewish Movement has made a significant place for modern praise and worship material which includes drums, guitars and more in the way of Jewish folk style music and even folk rock music. (Some generic folks style material is also incorporated.) My view is that this is a very good thing and is a key to reaching the next generation with styles that fit their generation. However, I do believe that it needs to be balanced with training in appreciation with classical expressions which is the thrust of this essay.

There has been some discussion as to whether or not choreographed praise and worship dancing has a place in our congregations. This is a tradition in the Messianic Jewish movement that is unique to our congregations though there are some anticipations in the Chasidic movement. It is difficult for me to believe that this is not a good tradition. Where it is done well, such as at Beth Yeshua in Philadelphia under David Chernoff, or under the Silberman's congregations in California, or Burt Yellins at Roeh Yisrael in Denver, such dance is a great expression of the joy of the New Covenant and the reality of the Spirit. However, I do believe that we need to do more thinking on this. For example, I am bothered by the distraction of dance in the more serious and intimate times of worship. Should we really be looking at dancers during this time or should dances not come to a place of focus where dancing is not appropriate?

The Scriptures lead us to believe that there are good and bad traditions. Yeshua spoke to the bad traditions of his day, from the rejection of healing on the Sabbath to oaths which were permitted to circumvent the honor due to parents, Yeshua was a fierce opponent of traditions that violated the Scriptures. However, it is most prejudicial to think that this implied a wholesale rejection of tradition. He also spoke to the wrong proportionality of valuation. I do not believe that He rejected ceremonial hand washing, but He did reject it as a standard for judging spirituality. While some traditions in Orthodox Judaism would come under the same criticisms today, is the issue for American Messianic Jews today primarily a response to Orthodoxy? Sometimes Messianic Jews act as if Orthodoxy was the issue. The Orthodox are the third largest branch of the affiliated. I am hard pressed to find much in the traditions that are practiced by modern affiliated Jews in Reform and Conservative Judaism that contradicts Yeshua. (They may lack the power of what is put forth!) They have already adjusted their approach to tradition much in line with Yeshua's criticism.<sup>11</sup> For example there are Jewish Conservative and Reform Synagogues that pray for the sick in a special time (even with the laying on of hands) during the Sabbath. Now this is not common, but it would not be seen as contrary to Reform or Conservative

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is inherent in the nature of prescribed liturgy. To overcome the difficulty by eliminating all forms, however, is to do away with the possibility of profound spiritual experiences, the nurture and expression of a rich variety of value concepts, the cultivation of the larger self."

See Max Kadushin, *Worship and Ethics*, New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1963, p. 119.

<sup>11</sup> I refer the reader to footnote number 3 where I quote Steinburg on the criteria for the choices for what is to be included and fostered. Today both Conservative and Reform make their decision on the basis of reason and experience. We however, are informed by authoritative Scriptures for these choices. Nevertheless many of the choices concerning practices are in my view good choices and conclusions. Other choices are a disaster and show the terrible limits of unaided reason without the help of revelation and the authority of the Scriptures. By this I include the ordination of practicing homosexuals by Reform Judaism and the trajectory in Conservative Judaism toward this conclusion for homosexuals who are not promiscuous.

*halachah*. Indeed, our critique of Conservative and Reform Judaism will probably be more toward the direction of their not being true to Biblical orientations which are still maintained by the Orthodox, or missing the power of the New Covenant. Most Messianic Jews identify more with Conservative Rabbis Denis Praeger and orthodox Rabbi Daniel Lapin than with Rabbi David Saperstein in the Reform movement. When I think of traditions that are not in accord with the Bible, the only practice that comes to mind is prayer for the dead. My Catholic friends would disagree. Messianic Jews will be both more like the Orthodox in some teaching and tradition and more like the other Judaisms in other regards. I would hope, for example, that we would be more like the Orthodox in our traditions of death, burial, funeral practices, and mourning periods.

In this regard, I would urge that traditions be reformed, but reformed conservatively. When Yeshua spoke concerning New Wine and Old Wine skins many have thought that He spoke against Old Wine skins in general. Several comments are in order. For all you wine experts who are hearing this presentation, I am sure that you are not excited about your next drink of grape juice. New wine is put into new wine skins so that it might be aged and become old wine. It is amazing how this is missed because Evangelicals in America did not drink wine. Hence the name of a recent charismatic publication, New Wine Magazine. In addition, old wine can be put into new wineskins with no problem, though this would be a waste of the value of the new wineskin unless there was no other adequate container. The redaction of the teaching of Yeshua by Luke makes this clear. No one who drinks old wine wants the new, for he says the old is better. (Luke 5:39) Obviously! Why is this qualification placed in the text? I would imagine that it had something to do with a misuse of the teaching of Yeshua. In the context of questions about fasting, Yeshua was teaching to make our practice appropriate to the circumstances in which we find ourselves, and to not be tied to rigid ways of practicing tradition. Some have even mistakenly identified the new wine and new wineskins with the New Covenant. The New Covenant is said to need new skins and the Mosaic wine with the old wineskin is to be discarded. This can not be the case for as Matthew's redaction brings out, the goal is that both are preserved. One does not want to lose the old wineskin or the new wine. (Matthew 9:17). This motive of preservation yields an essential conservatism in approach. In this regard I have great sympathy with the goals of the Conservative movement's original orientation and philosophy. Why has it been such a struggle? I would say that without the authority of Scripture as more classically understood, it has been difficult for the Conservative movement to find the proper balance between adjustment to a changing society and maintaining that which is most important in tradition.

### **Some Comments on the Israel Messianic Jewish Movement**

I would hope that we would enter into a quality dialogue with the Israel movement. We have much to learn from one another. The Israeli Messianic Jews have paid a price for their witness and life in the land. They face realities that we only know by testimony and not raw experience. There is an authenticity to life in the land, the feasts, the Sabbath, the language, the military struggle, the terrorist challenge and more that must be fully credited. However, I also believe there is a disdain among many for the Jewish traditions

that were practiced in and developed in the Diaspora for centuries. The reasons for this stem partly from the rigid type of Orthodox Judaism practiced in the Land as well as the political power and injustice in the Orthodox control in the government. In addition, it stems from the influences of an anti-nomian theology from Christian sources that became an early root in the Israel movement. Because of this the very word Torah does not produce the warm fuzzies that we experience when we hear the word. I do not believe this dishonoring of our parents (ancestors) is healthy. Of course, I do not give any credit to the anti-nomian trends in the movement in the Land. In addition, we should note that some of the early traditions of Diaspora Judaism go back to the time of Yeshua and were part of His practice or the practice of the Disciples. However, I do believe that a dialogue between Messianic Jews in the Diaspora and in Israel is greatly needed that we might both gain in wisdom thereby.

So these are my comments on Messianic Jewish tradition for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**THE VALUE OF TRADITION**

**Daniel C. Juster**  
**February 2003**