

A Sketch of a Better Tomorrow
A Next Generation Response to *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*
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The Ramchal, Rabbi Moshe Chayim Luzzatto, opens his classic work on *mussar*, *Mesilat Yesharim*, by stating, “I have not written this work to teach men what they do not know, but to remind them of what they already know and is very evident to them all.”¹ The words of the Ramchal echo my sentiments in regards to this paper. Much of what I have to say is not new to many of you. What might be unique or different is that they are coming from the mouth of a young leader and hopefully articulate the feelings of many other young adults and future leaders. Thus, I would like to also thank all the young people who were willing to dialogue with me on this topic and who were willing to share their ideas in this paper.

Shacharit begins with the words, “*Ma tovu ohalecha Ya’aqov, mishcanotecha Yisrael.*” “How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places O Israel.” This opening line of *Birchot Hashachar* is taken from Numbers 24:5 and has been interpreted by our Sages as a reference to the synagogue and the study hall.² Its placement at the opening of the Morning Blessings is meant to evoke and express our sense of love and gratitude for both. But how many Jewish people truly have these sentiments about their local synagogue? The statistics are startling. American Jewry is in a state of crisis. According to Eliot Abrams, we are facing a demographic disaster:

- Jews, who once comprised 3.7 percent of the U.S. population, have fallen to about 2 percent.
- One-third of all Americans of Jewish ancestry no longer report Judaism as their religion.
- Of all Jews who have married since 1985, the majority have married non-Jews, while the rate of conversion of non-Jewish spouses is declining.
- Only 28 percent of intermarried couples are raised as Jews.
- Demographers predict a drop of anywhere from one million to over two million in the American Jewish population in the next two generations.³

¹ Moshe Chayim Luzzatto, *The Path of the Just* (New York: Feldheim, 1966) p. 3

² Talmud Bavli, *Sanhedrin 105b*

³ Elliott Abrams, *Faith or Fear* (New York: Free Press, 1997) p.1

To a great extent the state of Messianic Judaism mirrors what is going in the wider Jewish world. Many of our congregations are declining or at best growing very slowly. Our movement has a hard time maintaining the interest of our teenagers and often do not retain our college students and young professionals. Therefore, we must ask the question, “What can be done to stem the tide of decline and revitalize Messianic Judaism?”

Creating & Communicating a Shared Vision & Mission

One of the primary things that young people are looking for is meaning and purpose in life. This was true of me when I was a teenager. A clear sense of purpose generates energy, excitement, and commitment. Furthermore if you do not have a vision and purpose for your life, someone else will certainly try to give you theirs. What is true of individuals is also true of movements. There is a multiplicity of competing visions that are vying to set the direction of Messianic Judaism. In part, this is due to the natural process of growth and maturation. There, however, does seem to be the loss of core mission as Messianic Judaism has moved away from seeing itself as the evangelistic arm of the Church to the Jewish people.

Thus, the Messianic Jewish movement must clarify and refine its vision if we hope to impart meaning, purpose, and spiritual vitality to young adults. As the Proverbs states, “Without vision the people perish.”⁴

In his book, Kinzer offers a new and compelling postmissionary paradigm which consists of both an inner and outer mission. Postmissionary Messianic Judaism’s inner mission consists of “bearing witness to Yeshua’s presence within the Jewish people.”⁵ Its outer mission is directed to the church, “before whom it testifies to God’s enduring love of the family chosen in the beginning to be God’s covenant partner.”⁶ This is a helpful way construing the mission of Messianic Judaism that I believe will have great appeal to many of our young adults.

Making Talmidim

Building off of Kinzer’s concept of inner-mission, I believe that the first critical aspect of our mission is to make Messianic Jewish *talmidim*. This paradigm of making Jewish followers of Yeshua who demonstrate their fidelity to the God of Israel, Torah and tradition is rooted biblically in the Torah and Brit Hadasha.

In Bereshit 12:5 we read, Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the wealth that they had amassed, and the souls which they had made in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. Traditionally, Christian Scholars hold that “all the souls” mentioned in this verse refers to the slaves and servants that Abraham and Sarah acquired in Haran. This interpretation is implied by most Christian versions of the Bible, when

⁴ Proverbs 29:18

⁵ Mark Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005) p.10

⁶ Ibid, p.10

they translate the Hebrew clause *ve'et hannefesh asher 'asu beCharan* as “all the people they had acquired in Haran”.

However this is not the most literal translation of the words *nefesh* which literally means soul and *'asu* which means to fashion or make. In fact, the verb *'asu* is used in the creation account alongside the word *bara* which means “to create.” Thus, some scholars and theologians hold that the verb *bara* refers to things that God created *ex nihilo* (“out of nothing”), while *'asa* refers to things that God fashioned out of already existing matter. In light of this, our Sages teach the following:

“The Souls that they made in Haran” (Genesis 12:5) – this refers to all those pagan men and women that Abraham and Sarah brought to faith in the God of Israel, which shows that he who brings a stranger near and causes him to become a worshipper of God is deemed as though he created him.⁷

Our father Abraham would bring people into his home, give them food and drink, befriend them, and thus attract them, and then bring them to faith and draw them under the wings of the Divine Presence. Hence you learn that a man who brings a single creature under the wings of the Divine Presence is accounted as if he had created him, shaped him, and articulated his parts.⁸

Commenting upon these texts one Conservative Rabbi writes,

It is my deepest conviction that the American Jewish synagogue’s most important task is to train Jews to live Jewish lives.... The real task is to create Jewish souls. Like Abram, we are called—“lech lecha”—go and take responsibility for building a community. Like Abram, we are called—“lech lecha”—to bring people closer to God.⁹

Thus our primary goal like Abraham is not to save souls, but to make souls i.e. *talmidim*. Often we forget that discipleship is the fundamental and long term aspect of *kiruv*. Is this not what Messiah Yeshua taught us when he said,

Go therefore and make *talmidim* (“disciples”) of all the nations, immersing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.¹⁰

If you look closely at the opening command of Messiah’s Mandate, you notice that there are several verbal parallels between what God said to Abraham in *parashat Lech Lecha*

⁷ Genesis Rabbah 39:14

⁸ Sifre Deuteronomy 32

⁹ George Robinson, *Essential Judaism* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000) p. 521

¹⁰ Matthew 28:19-20

and what God says to us through Messiah. These parallels are not accidental. Rather they allude to the fact the Messiah's mandate to make *talmidim* is rooted in the divine mission God entrusted to Abraham and the Jewish people. Thus Messiah like Abraham regularly ate with all types of people, fed them, built relationships, and showed great kindness in order to draw them near to the God.

Making Committed and Better Followers of Yeshua

What type of *talmidim* are we supposed to make? We must remember the word *kiruv* comes from the verb *karav* which means to draw near. But, what are we supposed to be drawing people near to? As a **Messianic** community, we are responsible for drawing people closer to the God of Israel through Messiah Yeshua. As we help people to follow Yeshua, we are helping them connect with the God of our forebearers.

But, cultivating Yeshua faith in our young people is not as easy as it sounds. Commenting on this issue Seth Klayman has said, "I feel that it is easier to raise a child with a strong Jewish identity than it is to raise a child who will become a follower Yeshua all of her/his days." Seth's comment especially holds true for young people who are raised in strong Jewish homes and Messianic synagogues where they see their primary identity as Jews of the Messianic variety. When these teens encounter other young people in the wider Jewish community, it is often difficult for them to identify as messianic, due to the negative connotations associated with Jews who believe in Jesus. This is clearly illustrated by an e-mail discussion that I had with a teen in the Northeast on the topic of being a Messianic Jew:

Dear Lisa,

In your e-mail you write, "I have talked to some people who are experiencing the same thing and dislike similar things from Messianic Judaism...." It would be very helpful if you could share with me what some of these things are?

Jason

Hey Jason,

The thing that troubles me and several others most is really just the name "messianic" and when others hear it they will either reject us or say we are not really Jewish....so like I said before, we just say we are Jewish...although we wish we could say we are messianic...and because of this where we stand is really confusing to our self; that is the main thing that we discuss ... for me personally, I wish I knew more Messianic Jewish teens and that in my synagogue the number of Jews will increase...there are a few and those are the ones I can relate to but there are a large amount of Gentiles and its kinda weird...like I like them, and respect them and all, but I just wish there could be more Jews...ahh i dono....do you know what I mean though.... thanks for understanding /hearing/listening and helping out ...

Lisa

If we have any hope of instilling a passion for Messiah in our young people like Lisa¹¹, we must ensure that Yeshua does not play a peripheral role in our personal spiritual lives and life of our community. We must find creative ways to incorporate, highlight, and elevate Messiah Yeshua in our teaching, music, prayer, and outreach.

Chabad has a lot to teach us in this regard. Before Chabad's emphasis on *Mashaich*, the mainstream Jewish community did not really place much emphasis on this topic nor did they find it particularly relevant. I have personally been inspired by their commitment to educate Jews about Messiah and their desire to hasten his coming through Torah, prayer, and *mitzvot*. In many Chabad *yeshivot* a short teaching by the Rebbe is shared on the concept of *Mashiach* after *Shacharit*. Their Messiah centeredness helps to inculcate a sense of love and devotion to Hashem and a great desire to reach the world for the sake of bringing Messiah. Our community should be animated by a similar zeal for Messiah Yeshua, as Chabadniks are for their Rebbe, Menachem Schneerson.

Practically speaking, there are several ways to do this. We must cultivate the *mitzvah* of *tzipiti l'yeshua*, daily hope and longing for the Messianic redemption, which should be expressed in our prayers and *drashot*. We must also bring out the Messianic significance of the Torah, like is done in the Midrashic and Chasidic texts. By doing so, we will help our young people to read the Tanak messianically and to encounter Yeshua, like the men on the road to Emmaus whose "hearts burned within them" as Messiah opened the Scriptures for them.¹² We must also clearly demonstrate transformative nature of faith in Yeshua and study of the Brit Hadashah through the Ruach.

Making Better Jews: Our Covenantal Obligation

As a **Jewish** Messianic community, we are also called to bring people closer to the Torah and the Jewish people. By so doing, we honor God, help the individual, and ensure the survival of our people by strengthening their bond to Torah and *klal Yisrael*.

Many Evangelical Christian institutions and churches have a burden to save Jewish peoples' souls and desire to make committed Christians out of them. But they do not as a rule help them to become more committed Jews, faithful to God's covenant with Israel. As a movement, we must be vigilant to guard against the mistake of making generic followers of Messiah. This might be acceptable for certain segments of the Church but as a Jewish movement for Messiah, we are also called to make better Jews. If we fail at doing this, we fail both our people and our Messiah. This mission is clearly in line with the first tenant of postmissionary Messianic Judaism, which is to "summon Messianic Jews to live an observant Jewish life as an act of covenant fidelity rather than missionary expediency."¹³ By promoting a postmissionary Messianic Judaism as Kinzer advocates,

¹¹ Name changed for the purpose of anonymity

¹² Luke 23:32

¹³ Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, p.9

we can help our Christian friends understand that an important part of our covenantal responsibility is to help develop Jewish souls, like our father Abraham.

If we are truly concerned about the future of our people and their well-being, we will not neglect this task. As mentioned earlier, there is a crisis of monumental proportions in the Jewish community. Due to intermarriage and assimilation, there is a demographic disaster occurring in the Jewish community. More and more Jews are simply opting out of Judaism. Instead Jews have replaced Torah and faith in the God of Israel with such things as philanthropy, political activism, Zionism, and fighting anti-Semitism.¹⁴

This flight from normative Judaism, as Elliot Abrahams correctly recognizes, is ultimately disastrous for American Jewry. All of the above are important and are clearly significant aspects of Judaism, but when any of them become the locus of Jewish identity, it becomes virtually impossible to ensure that our children or grandchildren will remain committed Jews. None of them offer a compelling reason to make the necessary sacrifices that being a committed Jew entails. They lack the power and authority of the covenant that God made with our ancestors at Sinai, whereby we are called to fulfill our unique destiny as members of a holy nation and royal priesthood. To the degree **that** commitment to Torah and *mitzvot* diminishes, assimilation, intermarriage, and apostasy increase.

This view is supported by the National Jewish Population survey that was conducted in 1990.¹⁵ This study raised the question, “Will your Grandchildren be Jewish?” The results were shocking!

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|--|--|--|--|---|
| First Generation Secular Jews 200 | First Generation Reform 200 | First Generation Conservative 200 | First Generation Centrist Orthodox 200 | First Generation Hasidic & Yeshiva Orthodox 200 |
| Second Generation Secular Jews 73 | Second Generation Reform 102 | Second Generation Conservative 125 | Second Generation Centrist Orthodox 302 | Second Generation Hasidic & Yeshiva Orthodox 591 |
| Third Generation Secular Jews 27 | Third Generation Reform 52 | Third Generation Conservative 77 | Third Generation Centrist Orthodox 457 | Third Generation Hasidic & Yeshiva Orthodox 1748 |
| Fourth Generation Secular Jews 10 | Fourth Generation Reform 27 | Fourth Generation Conservative 48 | Fourth Generation Centrist Orthodox 692 | Fourth Generation Hasidic & Yeshiva Orthodox 5157 |
| Intermarriage Rate 72% | Intermarriage Rate 53% | Intermarriage Rate 37% | Intermarriage Rate 3% | Intermarriage Rate 3% |
| Average Number of Children Per Family 1.62 | Average Number of Children Per Family 1.72 | Average Number of Children Per Family 1.82 | Average Number of Children Per Family 3.23 | Average Number of Children Per Family 6.4 |

According to this study, Centrist and Ultra-Orthodox Judaism will become the dominant form of Judaism. Why? They will potentially be the largest numeric group of committed Jews left due to their low rate of assimilation, high birthrate, and commitment to Torah and Judaism. Thus, it seems clear that commitment to Torah and halakhah are critical to the physical survival and spiritual vitality of the Jewish people.

¹⁴ Abrams, *Faith or Fear*, p.125-165

¹⁵ Antony Gordon and Richard Horowitz, *National Jewish Population Study* (New York: 1990)

If the Messianic Jewish movement fails to place equal emphasis on both Torah and Yeshua, our young people will either assimilate into the Church or re-integrate into the wider Jewish community apart from Yeshua faith. Both are harmful to the future of our movement and must be prevented. Therefore, let us be diligent and intentional about making *talmidim* who are equally passionate and committed to Messiah Yeshua, Torah, and the Jewish people.

Making Better People

We are not called to just make devoted followers of Messiah and committed Jews; we are also called to make better people. Therefore, postmissionary Messianic Jewish *kiruv* and discipleship must be organic and holistic both in its theology and methodology. Organic in the sense that it is done as Jews, living in Jewish community, calling our people to return to God and Torah, through the Messiah Yeshua, whose hidden presence is already mysteriously part and parcel of Jewish religious life.¹⁶

It must be holistic in the sense that we are not just trying to save people's souls but are trying to transform their entire life. We cannot just teach Bible, theology, and spiritual disciplines. We must act as spiritual mentors and life coaches who help provide them with the life skills necessary to become healthy, stable, and exemplary members of the community. In a broken and fragmented world this is critical. Many of our young adults and newly marrieds come from broken or dysfunctional homes and thus need more than good Bible teaching. They need to be taught basic communication, financial, and parenting skills. If we take a whole life approach to *kiruv* and discipleship, we will be more likely to make life long committed and mature Jews and followers of Messiah.

Ethical Nature of Halakhah

Furthermore, if we want our young people to engage Torah and find it relevant, we must not simply encourage them to keep Torah for the sake of Torah, or even for the sake of Jewish continuity and identity alone. Rather, we must begin to stress the ethical, moral, and transformative aspects of Torah, halakhah, and the Brit Hadasha. According to the findings of the Conservative study of 1,000 Jewish college students, when asked the question, "There are many different ways of being Jewish. For you personally, how much, if at all does being Jewish involve?" 74% answered that the leading a moral and ethical life is what it means to them to be Jewish.¹⁷ In other words, the majority of the twenty-something's surveyed considered the moral and ethical aspects of Judaism highly important.

¹⁶ Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, p. 9

¹⁷ Ariela Keysar and Barry Kosmin, "*Eight Up: The College Years*" (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 2004). p.19-20

Some of our young people might not find the customary reasons for keeping traditional *halakhah* compelling. For some, it might be necessary to find new reasons why Torah is relevant.¹⁸ Take *kashrut* for example. The majority of Jews in the world today find *kashrut* archaic and meaningless. Some young people, however, are finding new meaning in this ancient *mitzvah*. These young people are more conscious about environmental issues and animal welfare. Thus, some Jews see *kashrut* as a way of minimizing the suffering of animals and see the price and availability of kosher meat as a practical way of helping to preserve our environment due to the amount of natural resources wasted in raising cattle. Since Stephanie and I stopped eating non-kosher meat, we primarily eat vegetarian outside of the home. This is not only good for our health but also the health of the environment. Some take this a step further, advocating what they call eco-kosher¹⁹, which redefines *kashrut* in terms of organic and whole foods. This even leads some to opt for vegetarianism. Our young people must be shown that Torah and halakhah are not only an integral aspect of covenantal fidelity and critical to fostering Jewish identity, but also ethically and morally transformative. In other words, keeping Torah must have redemptive value and thereby help to foster *tikkun olam* on a personal and global level.

Tikkun Olam: Making a Better World

Another key aspect of our divine mission is *tikkun olam*, which involves partnering with God in the healing, repairing, and the redeeming of the world from the forces of sin and oppression. As we say in the Amidah, *letaken olam bemalchut Shaddai*, to perfect the world under the sovereignty of the Almighty.

Shimon Shokek, Professor of Jewish Philosophy and Mysticism at Baltimore Hebrew College describes the process and purpose of *tikkun olam* as follows,

Tikkun is achieved by the daily study of Torah and by continual fulfillment of the Mitzvot. When a man or women participates in Tikkun (Olam), their deeds not only mend the world below and the world above, but also heal their souls... However the exalted purpose of Tikkun resides in the mending of the disharmony of the world of God, which was damaged in the cosmological era. Hence, Tikkun is the human's and the world's recovery; it is the world's and the society's resurrection; it is the earthly and the heavenly renewal; and it is the conscious recognition that everything comes from the One and yearns to return to the One.²⁰

¹⁸ Even though their view might significantly break with traditional halakhah we should still applaud them for engaging Jewish Tradition and desiring to keep it. Although I personally hold to a more traditional view of halakhah, I would rather have our young people take a more progressive view than be apathetic towards halakhah and Torah.

¹⁹ The following is an interesting essay on Eco-Judaism. Arthur Waskow and Michael Lerner ed., "The Emergence of Eco-Judaism" *Best Cotemporary Jewish Writing* (San Francisco, CA.: Jossey Bass, 2001) p.134-144

²⁰ Shimon Shokek, *Kabbalah and the Art of Being*, (New York: Routledge, 2001) p. 140

Although the concept of *tikkun olam* is an integral part of kabbalistic thought, most Jews today, do not think of it in terms of mystically mending the universe through prayer and study. Rather in modern and more progressive forms of Judaism, such as the Jewish Renewal Movement, *tikkun olam* has become synonymous with social justice and humanitarian causes.

We must be very careful not to underestimate the importance of *tikkun olam* for the majority of Jews and young adults in particular. When a 1988 LA Times poll asked what is most essential to your Jewish identity only 17% said religious observance, but 59% said a commitment to social justice.²¹ This is further corroborated by the 2002 “Eight Up” study, in which 58% of the one thousand college students surveyed said that making the world a better place was very important to them and their identity as Jews.²² If we want to be attractive, relevant, and engaging to younger Jewish people and develop a better reputation in the Jewish world, we must find ways to more proactively participate in *tikkun olam*.

Simchat Yisrael is a great example of this fact. Under the direction of Rabbi Tony and Meryl Eaton, and Assistant to the Rabbi Tom Esposito, the congregation has developed a social conscious that has translated into action. Simchat Yisrael has become the largest single contributor to the food bank of the Jewish Family Services in the greater New Haven area. As a result, the congregation’s reputation has been elevated in the eyes of many in the wider Jewish community. This desire to be good citizens and make a difference in the world has even effected their teens. As Tom Esposito notes,

Our teen group is called L.A.U.N.C.H which is an acronym for Loving Action Unite “N” Chasdei Hashem. From the inception of our group we made the doing of mitzvahs an essential part of who we are. We believe in the process of Tikkun Olam and do all we can to take part in it. Over the last three years, I’ve listened to the feedback from our teens as they engaged in these types of activities and it has always been a positive experience. We collected nonperishable foods for the Jewish Family Service food bank and the teens were excited to be part of something positive that helped the community. The same effect was had when L.A.U.N.C.H did projects like collecting children’s books for the local literacy program.

Our teens experience G-d through action. Nothing more demonstrates this than the humanitarian efforts they engaged in while they were in Israel this past summer. The L.A.U.N.C.H teens participated in the Esther’s fast program through the UMJC, last March. Through their fasting they raised over \$1,000. While in Israel they were privileged to give the entire amount of the nationwide UMJC offering to an organization called The One family Fund. Upon returning from their trip they decided to adopt a family through the One Family Fund for one year. They have committed to send

²¹ Abrams, *Faith or Fear*, p.128

²² Keysar and Kosmin, “*Eight Up: The College Years*” , p.20

support to this family through financial aid, prayer and correspondence. This is only the tip of the iceberg. Before we left, the teens along with some adult help, gathered over 100 dozen new pairs of shoes and oral hygiene supplies for Ethiopian immigrants in Israel. While in Israel they took off one day of from their trip to help at Joseph's storehouse. There are very few teens that will save up for two years to go to Israel for the first time and then give up some of their trip to work. There were even some teens that were so zealous for the work we were doing, that they decided to make a public proclamation for Yeshua and were immersed in the Galilee. This is truly a sign of Tikkun Olam and it is through Tikkun Olam that our teens became more connected with the land and with our Jewish people.

The work of Rabbi Jamie Cowen and Tikvat Yisrael among Russian Jews in Richmond, Virginia, is another great example of the significance of social action. In fact, it was the work of Tikvat Yisrael that inspired Rabbi Tony to develop their social action programs.

We must take *tikkun olam* seriously not only because of its popularity but primarily because it helps add meaning and purpose to our lives, by providing a tangible way to mend this world. All of us are guilty of following in the foot steps of Adam and Chava by causing further harm to the world. But as Rebbe Nachman says, "If you believe that you can do damage then believe that you can repair it!"²³ As members of the Covenant and agents of Messiah, we have a God given responsibility and mandate to bring about healing and hope in this world through engaging in *tikkun olam*. This includes bringing about a tikkun through spiritual means such as prayer, Torah study, and making *talmidim* of Messiah. It also includes our participation in social action, such as, helping the needy and oppressed, fighting against racism and discrimination, and caring for the environment. As we wait for Messiah, let's not forget that we have a role to play in the healing of the world.

Some simple steps that can be taken to foster *tikkun olam* include starting social action committees and *chavurot* that specifically study biblical and Jewish texts that deal with this subject. It also entails supporting and encouraging our young people to create and participate in social justice programs, as well as humanitarian aid work such as Anshei Rachamim.

Programmatic Elements of Creating Committed Young Messianic Jewish Talmidim

We live in an extremely fast paced, stressful, and consumer orientated society. Increasingly, our young people face a plethora of choices competing for their time and attention. Therefore, we must realize that many of them will not stay involved unless we can create programs that interest them and meet their needs. The following are some key programs that should be created in order to help reach and retain our young people.

²³ Rabbi Nachman, *Tikkun Haklali* (Jerusalem: Bresslover Research Institute, 1984) p.8

Programs the Strengthen the Jewish Home and Bnei Mitzvah Education

In order to create the type of *talmidim* we have spoken of, we must start as young as possible. Spiritual mentoring and discipleship must start in adolescence. Many young people will be lost altogether if they are not reached by the time of their *B'nei Mitzvah*. This is due in part to peer-pressure and competing worldviews encountered at school, in the media, and on the internet. As the Conservative “Eight Up” study states,

To influence the decisions of today’s independent-minded young people, it is crucial to start early and present Jewish religion and culture in a way that is attractive and meaningful to them.²⁴

This has to start in the home, since many young people attribute their commitment to being Jewish, to their parents. As the Keysar and Kosmin found, “When asked to name their Jewish role models, more than half of them chose family members: one-third of the students choose their parents, 15% chose their grandparents, and 5% said other relatives.”²⁵ Therefore, we must equip the parents of our young people, so that they can model Messianic Judaism in the home.

This means finding creative ways to effectively educate and encourage the parents in our synagogues to grow in Messiah and Yiddishkeit. Our children must see and experience the joy and excitement of Torah study, Jewish prayer, Shabbat, and the Jewish holidays in their home, if what we teach them in Hebrew school is really going to really stick long term. Why are they going to take seriously, what their parents do not? Jewish life must be modeled in the home, but how can parents impart what they themselves do not know or feel comfortable practicing. From my personal experience growing up in a large Conservative synagogue, this was one of the primary reasons why my friends did not continue with their Jewish education. Since it was a low priority for their parents, they did not see it as important or relevant for their lives.

Unfortunately, for many families, their child’s Bar or Bat Mitzvah is the end of their synagogue involvement. One possible way to help prevent this might be to do some joint education with parents and children as part of the Bnei mitzvah program. At Sha’arei Shalom, we had the whole family learning beginning Hebrew together and trained many of our adults to read Torah. Several even had adult Bar and Bat Mitzvahs. Another creative way to facilitate this might be to study the Jewish life cycle together, and then break into small groups and do mock weddings, bnei mitzvahs, and brit milah’s. This would be a fun interactive way to educate the whole family.

Youth Camps

Camps are also essential aspects in developing committed Jews. A recent study on Camp Ramah, clearly indicated that camps are one of the most effective initiatives for fostering Jewish identity and commitment to Judaism. Overall, the Conservative Jewish report

²⁴ Keysar and Kosmin, “*Eight Up: The College Years*”, p.45

²⁵ Ibid., p.22

entitled “Research Findings on the Impact of Camp Ramah,” found that “students who attended Ramah as campers were more observant of Jewish ritual life, more positive about Jewish identity, more inclined to date and marry Jews, and more active in Jewish life on campus.” When they refined their study and focused on campers who returned to work as camp counselors the researchers found the impact of camp Ramah was even greater:

Synagogue Attendance: 40% of Ramah-trained counselors attended synagogue at least once a week, compared to only 5% of those with no Jewish camping experience.

Jewish Marriage: Over three-quarters (78%) of Ramah-trained counselors state that it is “very important” to marry a Jew, in contrast to just 52% of respondents overall and 39% of those with no Jewish camping experience.

Kashrut: Only 17% of students with no Jewish camping experience and 29% of students overall state that they observe Kashrut outside the home. The figure jumps to 71% for Ramah-trained counselors.

Jewish Education as a Career: Over one-third (40%) of Ramah trained counselors state that they can see themselves becoming Jewish educators, nearly twice as many as the 22% of the overall Eight Up cohort and four times as many as the 10% of students with no Jewish camping experience.

Jewish Studies Courses: While in college, Ramah-trained counselors are twice as likely as students with no Jewish camping experience to take a Jewish studies course- 63% compared to 31%.

Israel Advocacy on Campus: Ramah-trained counselors are almost three times as likely to be engaged in Israel advocacy on campus (42%) than are college students with no Jewish camping experience (15%).²⁶

The findings speak for themselves. We desperately need to start a Messianic Jewish camping movement for our young people. All the empirical and antidotal evidence confirm that camps are one of the most effective ways to make Jewish *talmidim*. Yachad, which Jonathan and I are in the process of establishing, hopes to make this a reality in the next several years.

²⁶ All of the above statistics are taken from, Ariela Keysar and Barry Kosmin, “*Researching Findings on the Impact of Camp Ramah*” (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 2004). p.2-3

Youth groups

Youth groups are also foundational for fostering Yeshua faith and Jewish identity. Since Messianic youth will always be a minority among their friends, they desperately need to connect with other young people who can understand them and their struggles. They need a place where they can feel free to be themselves and not be judged for wrestling with questions of faith, identity, and sexuality.

Our youth must have safe havens where they can interact and connect with each other and other young people in the Messianic Movement. Therefore, it is also very important for synagogues to try and connect with other messianic youth groups in the area to do some joint events. This is imperative in order to help our young people feel that they are part of something much bigger than their local synagogue.

Sending teens to regional and national events is another great way to help our young people connect with one another. This might even mean that congregations have to be proactive and entrepreneurial in raising funds to help subsidize the expense of their young people and college students' attendance at these events. Seth Klayman, who has grown up in the movement and has worked with the young people for many years, underscores the great importance of youth groups and conferences for the development of our young people:

Every congregation should have a youth group. If there are two youth, there should be a youth group. This begins to create a peer group outside of schools (which usually don't support Jewish identity or faith in Yeshua). If young people's primary friends are other Messianic Jews, we're building community from within. Conferences and camps should also not be underestimated in the impact that they have on a young person's growing up experience. There is something about getting a group of young people together for an extended period of time, away from their normal environment, and giving them an intensive Messianic Jewish experience. It creates memories for a lifetime.

Creating positive memories, experiences, and friendships that last a life time are priceless. Even if our children are forced to depart from our ranks for a while due to college or for vocational reasons, there is greater chance they will return if they have warm memories and have forged strong life long bonds with other Messianic Jews.

Israel Trips

Overall support for Israel is strong among Conservative Jewish high school and college students. In the "Eight Up" report, 66% of the students surveyed said that Israel is very important to them.²⁷ And almost none of them said that it was unimportant. This high

²⁷ Keysar and Kosmin, "*Eight Up: The College Years*", p.12

level of support and increased pro-Zionism is in large part due to Israel trips, like Birth Right Israel. Directly experiencing the land of Israel and meeting Israelis is probably the single greatest way to cultivate a commitment to Israel and strengthen Jewish identity.

A rising number of young Jewish people are defining Jewish identity in terms of their relationship with Israel. Many of our own young adults have also made love Israel, Modern Hebrew, and making *aliyah* the locus of their Jewish identity. Therefore, it is essential that we send as many of our young people as possible to Israel during their formative high school and college years. By so doing, we will increase their solidarity with Israel, encourage *Aliyah*, and strengthen their Jewish identity. Helping to connect them to Messianic Jewish youth in the land and finding ways for them to do *tsedaka/mitzvah* projects in Israel will also strengthen their ties to Messiah and Messianic Judaism.

Holocaust & Israel Education

A great way to help young people and our entire community fulfill its outer mission to the ekklesia is to create programs geared toward Christian churches and youth groups which educate them about Israel and the Holocaust. Holocaust denial, Anti-Semitism, and Anti-Zionism is steadily increasing on college campuses. Remembering the Holocaust, Countering Anti-Semitism, and supporting Israel are among the primary concerns of young Jewish people. They are also at the core of their Jewish identity. As Messianic Jews, we are uniquely situated to help combat these issues in the local church and Christian schools.

By training and equipping our young people to be involved in educating other young people, especially Christian youth, we can strengthen their Jewish identity, do something positive in the eyes of the Jewish community that they can feel proud of, and provide them with an opportunity to participate in *tikkun olam*, by fulfilling their outer mission as Messianic Jews to help heal the Jewish Christian Schism.

Due to the current crisis among young people in the Jewish and Messianic community, now is the time to redouble our efforts by investing more heavily in programs and initiatives aimed at young people. This point is poignantly underscored by Avinoam Bar-Yosef, Director General of the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute in Jerusalem, who in a recent Messianic Times interview, spoke with journalist Rebekah Kobler, about current negative trends in the demography of the Jewish people:

Q: Did you find anything interesting about Jewish identity and life in Diaspora?

A: We found that all over the world, but even in Israel, there is an erosion of Jewish identity. Right now we have a generation being raised without a connection to the community or a sense of what being Jewish is all about. We think that this means there are significant opportunities to work with the younger

generation of Jewish people both in terms of tikkun olam, and more importantly, in terms of the search for spiritual meaning that young people are craving.²⁸

The somewhat encouraging, yet sad news is that we are not the only ones struggling with our young adults. The only question that remains is “What are we going to help do about it?”

Using the Internet to Connect with and Disciple the Younger Generations

Religious educators across the Jewish and Christian traditions are unified in the conviction that one of the primary ways to ensure vibrant young adult participation in a religious movement is to afford them a significant experience of connection with the movement on both a regional and the national level. As we enter the 21st century, these connections are often forged through the internet. Thus, the internet is an important tool that appeals to young adult interests and needs and is therefore a valuable tool in connecting them to the broader Messianic Jewish community.

Many seminaries, such as Fuller, are offering classes devoted to studying and pioneering new ways to build community and do outreach in cyberspace (or via the internet). We must utilize this vital tool if we are going to stay relevant and engage the next generation who spend a significant portion of their time on the internet. According to eMarketer, teenagers and children account for 18.8% of all internet users in the US (over 200 million), up from 18.3% in 2004. This number is expected to increase to 20.8% in 2008. The following statistics from an article on Edupage dated 15 November 1999 further emphasize the importance of this internet and communicating with youth and young adults.

- A joint AOL and Roper Starch study of 500 children between the ages of 9 and 17 found that 63 percent of the youth surveyed would rather surf the Web than watch television, while 55 percent prefer being on the Web to being on the telephone.
- Children between 9 and 11 years old go online an average of three days per week, while those between 15 and 17 years old go online an average of five days per week.
- Two thirds of adults and children surveyed said they would prefer a computer with access to the Internet rather than a television or phone, if stranded on a desert island.

In terms of religious education and experience, 8% of adults and 12% of teenagers use the internet for religious or spiritual experiences according to the Barna Update. This is further evidenced by the success of sites such as Beliefnet and aish.com as well as the over 1,000 subscribers to the UMJC Torah list and 100 or so people who have subscribed to or make use of the Set Table every week.

²⁸ Rebekah Kobler, Messianic Jewish Times Article, (Niagara Falls), Volume 15 Number 5 2005.

In the future, the internet will not only be a key tool for fostering education among youth and young adults but also communication and connection. Email, instant messaging, threaded discussions, pod casts, and blogs are rapidly becoming the way people sustain relationships across the country. We have already begun to see the importance of these media in connecting with the geographically dispersed youth and young adults in the UMJC.

Commenting on the importance of the internet for building community, [REDACTED], a Messianic Jewish twenty-something, [REDACTED] student and a member of [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Messianic Synagogue writes,

The biggest potential site of technologically enhanced community development comes from what might seem an unlikely source: www.myspace.com. Anyone who has spent much time with teenagers or 20-somethings in the last year has at least heard of this website. It is a friend networking site, where individuals set up profiles in order to connect with friends they already have as well as to collect new ones.

Our movement is virtually entirely made of up commuters. Very few people live in close proximity to their synagogues, and even if they do, usually most of their friends do not. This often makes socializing within our communities outside the confines of Shabbat and holiday services difficult to impossible. If we put the needed effort and commitment into it, we can craft myspace extensions of our homes, discussing our tastes, feelings and interests in an informal setting. All of this is also free to the public.

Why is this kind of site important? Because, as unquestionably vital as our time in synagogue is, when we have no extra-synagogal interaction with each other, we have a tendency to create “business relationships.” All we talk about is Torah, Messianic Judaism, and “being Jewish.” These are obviously sizable aspects of our lives, but so is our incomprehensible love of Pink Floyd, or our fascination with Japanese Anime, or our frequent day trips out to Zuma beach in Malibu. We need to have a way of sharing our particularities in order to deepen our relationships with each other, and while I would never suggest that the internet act as a replacement for physically assembled community, I do believe it could enable relationships to continue their development in between meetings.

This sort of activity could encourage nominal attendees to come more often because they find people they connect with on myspace. It could on occasion bring new people into a community as they stumble upon our members’ profiles. But there is another aspect to the service worth noting: the free creation of private groups, monitored by the founder.

The importance of the internet is further corroborated by the research of Keysar and Kosmin, who found in their research on Jewish communication that: “Today’s college students and young people in general search for information, friendships, and even spiritual activities online, using the World Wide Web. This is a high-tech generation that creates its own virtual community.”²⁹

Recognizing these significant trends, we must begin to better utilize the internet. We are currently in the initial stages of conceptualizing www.yachadnetwork.net, a website which will serve as a portal for youth and young adults to the Messianic Jewish community.

Avodah that will Inspire the Next Generation

Music and the Rising Generation

Music is one of the most powerful mediums in existence. Many movements have been birthed and revitalized through the creation of new music. All one has to do to confirm the veracity of this statement is to look at the role music played in birth of modern Messianic Judaism. Music has and always will play a central role in lives of young people. It influences every part of youth culture including styles of dress, speech, friendships, values, and worldviews. Therefore, if want to capture the hearts of the younger generation, we must help create new music and worship experiences that speak to innermost core of their being.

For Jen Cowan, who has grown up in the movement, music and worship have always played a central role in her life and in the life of her family. Jen has been involved in leading worship for the youth both in her congregation, Tikvat Yisrael, and at UMJC conferences. Due her extensive involvement and experience in worship, I asked her so share some thoughts on the subject:

When talking about music and young people, there is obviously much to say. I find music to be one of the most influential factors in a young person’s life. The popularity of the ipod, a portable computer drive that can hold up to five thousands songs at once, is proof enough that music has great value to younger crowds. As young person studying music, I can surely count myself in as a person who is greatly affected by music and a person who hopes to reach others through music.

The rising Messianic generation of today is responsible for carrying on the foundational principles established by our leaders and parents. I also believe however, we have the responsibility to stretch, strengthen, and add to what has already been given to us by our great leaders. Music is a great example of an element that has been relatively established in the

²⁹ Keysar and Kosmin, “Eight Up: The College Years” , p.20

Messianic movement since its birth thirty years ago. This music was composed of Messianic Jewish themes from the Tanach, Hebrew lyrics, minor keys, and a stylistic approach influenced by the times in which these songs were written. Music groups such as Lamb and Israel's Hope are prime examples of the pioneers of what is called Messianic Jewish music.

The question then arises, what next? Do we continue playing the same songs that were written ten to twenty years ago? Do we wait until these same writers write new music? Do we write new music? If so, what are the parameters or NEEDS that should drive Messianic music for THIS generation? As a musician who grew up in the movement, I have developed answers and ideas through my own thoughts and feelings and conversations and experiences in the Messianic Jewish community both in the United States and Israel.

When looking at Music purely from the perspective of its purposes in worship, I believe that first and foremost, the goal should be to connect to God through His son Yeshua. There are so many ways to connect to God... Often times, young people need to be drawn in to worship. They need something that they can see or feel, something they know is real. This is the Spirit of God, Ruach Hakodesh, that brings life to what we do and that draws us closer to Yeshua. If this is our belief, then truly singing the songs written 20 years ago, if filled by the living Spirit of God, should draw us near to Him. Even so, we do not necessarily need to continue to use these songs.

What about writing new songs? We are a new generation with our own talents, gifts, and styles. I believe God wants to use those talents and continue to develop our identity by imparting something new. I firmly believe that our generation has become restless for the need to express ourselves and to add onto what has been given. The problem then becomes, what is acceptable as Messianic music? Is it music in Hebrew? It is based on WHO writes it? Honestly, I have yet to decide what the true definition of Messianic music is... The Messianic music written twenty years ago was stylistically relevant to that of the time period. Thus it is essential that the modern Messianic worship that we develop, be relevant, not simply copies of what was previously innovative.

One thing that I find essential to this generation, not only in the United States, but also in Israel, is the need to be real and to find what is real and true. Authenticity is essential when it comes to faith... The idea of authenticity brings me to the idea of liturgy and traditional worship. Much of the liturgical pieces that are commonly used in synagogues were very much inspired by God many years ago. Being able to connect to the same God throughout the generations, gives us depth in our worship and in our

knowledge of our Messiah. This is a very authentic way of connecting to God and to who we are as one people.

I can honestly say however, that it can be easy to say these prayers and either not realize or forget their meanings. However, two things make this kind of worship authentic and true. The first thing is an understanding of the meaning of the words. In my opinion, knowing the translation is not enough. I think it is extremely important to have a basic knowledge of Hebrew in order to grasp the meaning and fullness of the prayers, otherwise we should just say them in English, which does not do them justice. On a side note, if we are to be considered a part of the nation of Israel, we must have an understanding of the language that is used both in modern Israel and also in the synagogues worldwide. This language is one way we are all held together as a community, and in fact, I have seen among the young people an increased interest in wanting to know the language. Secondly, this worship must be full of the Spirit of Yeshua. This is the one ingredient missing when the prayers are prayed in the Jewish community as a whole. Without this extremely important component, our worship no matter how true to the original prayer, and no matter how beautiful, is incomplete.

It is also important to have a deep knowledge of the traditional prayers of our ancestors and to be able to sing and worship with them with great conviction. I believe that having a modern expression in a worship service that is relevant and full of the Ruach Hakodesh alongside authentic spirit filled liturgical worship is an extremely powerful combination that is absolutely necessary to draw young people closer to God. These ingredients are essential. It is not about compromise, but rather the fullness of two components that were simply written at different times, the modern simply being a continuation of the other. Even more, they are similar in that they are both inspired by God, both draw people to God, and both fulfill the purpose of giving glory to God and blessing our Father in Heaven.

Based on Jen's comments and personal experience, I believe that there are several key steps we need to take to create a dynamic worship experience that will appeal to young people.

First, we need to find ways to be Messiah centric. This can be done through highlighting the inherent Messianic meaning in traditional prayers, inserting Messianic *kavvanot*, and adding new pieces of Messianic liturgy to our services. This is an absolute essential, since liturgy is one of the primary means through which Jewish identity and worldview is formed. We desperately need a new Messianic *siddur* that incorporates all these elements and others if we hope to make Messianic Jewish talmidim.

Secondly, we need to strike a better balance between *keva* (fixity/order) and *kavanah* (improvisation or the “something new” that that our sages incorporated into their prayers). We should utilize the basic fixed structure and core texts of traditional Jewish prayer, while at the same time incorporating new creative elements. It is possible to be faithful to tradition without doing it traditionally. A very successful and popular example of this is the Friday Night Live service, led by Greg Taubman at Sinai Temple in Los Angeles. Another great example is the Shabbat services that Shuva Yisrael has led at the UMJC conference. Our young people also need to create similar services that use the standard fixed (*keva*) Jewish prayers while incorporating newer creative elements such as contemporary songs based thematically on the liturgy, experimenting with different genres and styles of music, *niggunim*, and *nusachs*. By doing so, the divine drama of Jewish *avodah* will not only become relevant and engaging to younger generations, but we will also restore the original jazz of Jewish prayer.³⁰

Thirdly, we need to help cultivate greater *kavannah* (inner directedness or spiritual connection in prayer). The importance of *kavannah* is underscored by the popular dictum, “Prayer without *kavannah* is like a body without a soul.” *Kavanah* is even a halakhic requirement according to the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Hayyim 70:3 and 98:1) and Mishna Berakhot states, “One who makes his prayer a fixed routine, his prayer is not counted at a supplication.” (Berakhot 4:4)

There are numerous ways to cultivate *kavannah*. The most basic, as Jen mentioned, is helping people grasp the general meaning of the Hebrew words that they are praying. A second way is by having people visualize and meditate on the fact that they standing in God’s presence. A third way is through the use of creative use of music and melodies such as *niggunim*. Whatever the means, we must find ways to help our young people to prayer with *kavannah* if we hope to keep them interested in traditional davening and Messianic worship.

The Mystical Element: Experiencing God

Fourthly, our music and services should also contain an experiential and mystical component. More Jews than ever are interested in Jewish mysticism. It has become so popular that even many famous non-Jews such as Madonna, Britney Spears, Demi Moore, Ashton Kutcher, and Paris Hilton are involved with the Kabbalah Center. Madonna gave a reported 21 million dollars to help fund the establishment of a Kabbalah center, children’s school, and a hotel. People’s interest in Jewish mysticism is in part a reaction and rejection of modernism’s unbalanced emphasis on reason, science, and the supernatural. But overall, Kabbalah’s popularity primarily stems from people’s natural desire to directly experience the Divine (although others are seeking personal empowerment or spiritual power). This same desire is part of the reason why many our young people are drawn to the Charismatic movement. We however must provide a Messianic Jewish alternative. Although we cannot manufacture mystical experiences, we

³⁰ Lawrence A. Hoffman, *My People’s Prayer Book, Vol. 2, The Shema and Its Blessings*. (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997) p. 3-4.

must provide a context where this can occur. Thus, Messianic avodah should aim at fostering *deveikut* (union) with God through Yeshua.

Even though I am not exactly sure how we go about doing this, I believe that the following are two central components. First, we must create a space where people expect to encounter God and the supernatural. Rabbi Stuart Dauerman does this at Ahavat Tzion by having a special healing service called Emanuel. Music and *niggunim* must also play a key role. *Niggunim* are wordless melodies, which entered Jewish worship through Hasidism, and made popular in mainstream Judaism by Sholmo Carlebach and the Jewish renewal movement. *Niggunim* clearly have a mystical component that helps increase our *kavannah* and heightens our spiritual awareness, and creates a state of spiritual arousal. Concerning the power of *niggunim* Rebbe Nachman of Breslov taught:

It is good for a human being that he teaches himself how to give life to himself through a melody (Niggun), for a melody is something great and very very high, and it has the power of pulling up man's heart to God, may He be blessed...³¹

We must help young people find that ancient Jewish melody that resides and resonates within them. They must discover and articulate the ancient *niggunim* of our forebears in modern melodies. Music is key to fostering a spiritual connection to God, inspiring younger generations, and creating a new Messianic Jewish youth movement.

Leadership that will Inspire a New Generation

Movements, organizations, and congregations all rise and fall based upon the quality of their leadership. If we are going to see significant growth and renewal in the Messianic Jewish Movement, then our leadership must enfranchise our young adults and reflect their values. In some cases, this will require major paradigm shifts in the area of leadership.

Egalitarianism: Women's Leadership and Participation in the Ritual Life

Women have always played a pivotal leadership role in the history of the Jewish people. Often it has been the Jewish women who have had the temerity and spiritual strength to take bold action to ensure the survival of Israel. Take for example, the Jewish midwives, who risked their lives to save Jewish babies and Devorah the judge and military leader of Israel. In the Brit Hadasha, it was primarily the women who were not afraid to accompany Yeshua to his death. It was also the women who first realized and believed that Yeshua was raised from the dead. There have been many other great Jewish women throughout our history, like Hannah Senesh and Golda Meir, whose spiritual, political, and communal leadership has ensured our success and survival. Unfortunately, many of these women had to remain in the background due to the accepted role of women in Jewish and Christian society.

³¹ Shokek, Kabbalah and the Art of Being, p. 143

Today, however, this is not the case. Women serve in every level of leadership both in the secular and wider Jewish and Christian world. America is clearly an egalitarian society, where women are free to pursue the highest levels of leadership in both the political and business arena. Regrettably the one place where this has often not been true is in the more traditional religious world. More conservative forms of Judaism and Christianity have in general barred women from the highest positions of leadership, spiritual authority, and equal participation in the ritual life of the community. This however has been slowly changing over time.

Although women Rabbis and pastors are not the norm, the majority of Jewish and Christian dominations, allow the ordination of women. Messianic Judaism with its roots in Evangelical fundamentalism still does not ordain women Rabbis. But, there are a growing number of leaders that believe that this should change. In fact, our movement must find ways to become more egalitarian, if we are going to retain our younger Jewish people and attract mainstream Jews. Even the Orthodox world is beginning to shift on this issue as women make their voices and concerns heard.³²

We can no longer accept the status quo. We can no longer tell women that they are barred from leadership in our movement because the Bible says so. We must proactively empower women to serve as leaders and encourage them to enter fully into the ritual life of our community. It seems contradictory and strange to me, and I would venture to guess most Jewish people, that that majority of our synagogues allow Gentile men to wear *tallitot*, lay *tefillin*, and serve as *hazzans* and Rabbis but not Jewish women. If we fail to create a more egalitarian movement, that values women and creates a space for their full participation, then many of our younger women, who are some of the most talented, capable and committed among us, will leave and look for another spiritual home.

The importance of this issue cannot be underestimated, ignored, or swept under the rug due to its potential volatility.³³ Over the last three years at the Young Messianic Jewish Scholars Conference, our female participants have made it clear that they are not sure if there is a place for them and their gifting in this movement. Whether intentional or unintentional, we have treated and communicated to our women, that they are second class citizens. This must stop. A large percentage of our women want this to change and we need to listen. Even though a number of our women might never want to wear a *tallis*, lay *tefillin*, or be a Rabbi, they desire and deserve the right to do so if they so choose. Groups like Nachalat Nashim, which means the Inheritance of women, will help to facilitate this change through educating, empowering, and representing the perspective

³² This clearly evidenced by the writings of women like Blu Greenberg, by the growth of women's minyans, and the ordination of a few Orthodox women Rabbis.

³³ I believe that issue would be a lot less controversial if we had a different understanding of the role of ordination. In the Messianic movement the title Rabbi almost exclusively refers to a pulpit Rabbi. This however is not the case in the Jewish world. Rabbis serve as Hillel directors, chaplains, professors, outreach workers, and educational directors. Many in the Orthodox world pursue ordination for the sole purpose of being a more learned and observant Jew. It is short sighted and detrimental to see Rabbis as primarily congregational leaders. The personal growth and skills obtained by studying for ordination is valuable no matter what vocation one chooses.

of women in our movement. Like the majority of the Jewish world, we need to make the full integration and participation of women in our movement a priority. But, this will not come to fruition until egalitarianism becomes a core value of our movement.

Not only does logic and sociological realities necessitate this, but there is also strong biblical, historical and halakhic support for moving in the direction of becoming more egalitarian. Let's look at the issue of women and *tefillin* as an example. The following is taken from an interaction that occurred on the Set Table blog.

Set Table Question on Parashat Eikev

In this week's Torah portion parashat Eikev, we read about the mitzvah of *tefillin*, "Therefore impress these words upon your very heart: bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead" (Deuteronomy 11:18). What are *tefillin* meant to signify? Did Yeshua wear *tefillin*? Should we? Traditionally only men lay *tefillin* but today it has become common in more progressive branches of Judaism for women to also don them. Do you think there is support in the text and tradition for this practice?

One Male Respondent's Answer to the Question

Regarding women wearing Tefillin - I do not see any traditional support for it. Tefillin is a time-bound mitzva and women are relieved from its observance. Therefore, I think that women should not wear them. In the same time there are a lot of other things that are more important than tefillin - loving your neighbor for example. When this is accomplished, then I think we can worry about who should wear tefillin and who should not.

Jason Sobel's Response

According to the Mishnah Berachot, "Women, slaves, and minors are exempt from Shema (a time bound *mitzvah*) but they are obligated in *Tefillah/Amidah*, *mezuzuah*, and *Birkat HaMazon* (Grace after Meals)."³⁴ However just because the Mishnah says that women are "exempt" it does not necessarily mean that they are prohibited from voluntarily performing these *mitzvot*. What it clearly means is that they are not obligated to perform these *mitzvot*.

The Talmud seems to support this position when it says,

For it was taught: Michal the daughter of the Kushite wore tefillin and the Sages did not attempt to prevent her; and the wife of Jonah attended the festival pilgrimage and the Sages did not prevent her. Now since the Sages did not prevent her it is clearly evident that they hold the view that it is a positive precept the performance of which is not limited to a particular time. But is it not possible that he holds the same view as R. Jose who ruled: It is optional for women to lay

³⁴ Mishnah Berachot 3.3

their hands upon an offering? For were you not to say so, how is it that Jonah's wife attended the festival pilgrimage and the Sages did not prevent her, seeing that there is no one who contends that the observance of a festival is not a positive precept the performance of which is limited to a particular time?³⁵

The Tosafists (prominent medieval commentators on the Talmud) support the position of R. Jose in general and permit women to both perform positive time bound commandments and also allow them to recite the accompanying blessings.

Yosef Karo, the author of the Shulchan 'Arukh (1564), the Rema, the author of 'Orekh Chayyim (1569-1571), and the 'Arukh HaShulchan (1903-1907), some of the most influential and important Orthodox halakhic decisors, all agree that women should not be allowed to fulfill this mitzvah.

However, other prominent rabbis such as Rashi, Rabbenu Tam, Rambam (Maimonides) and Rashba allow women to voluntarily fulfill positive time bound commandments and do not hold that tefillin are an exception, like the other decisors mentioned above. Rashi allowed his daughters to wear tefillin. Today many Conservative, Reconstructionist, Reform and even some Orthodox Jewish women are wearing tefillin with the support of their rabbis and halakhic scholars. In light of these facts, there seems to be substantial halakhic and historical support for women to voluntarily fulfill the mitzvah of tefillin.

Leah's Response

I thank "The Set Table" for the balanced approach to the issue of women wearing tefillin. At a time when the vast majority of Messianic Jews (and most other Jews too) are very far from Torah observance, does it make sense to quibble with Jewish women who want to take upon themselves extra commandments?

When in December of 2003, my then boyfriend of Conservative background asked me if I have ever laid tefillin, I gave him the "traditional" response that there are more important mitzvot for me to do. However, as we all realize, "loving one's neighbor" is not a mitzva one can "fulfill and be done with," but rather it is an ongoing commitment, which applies regardless of one's gender or level of ritual observance. With ritual mitzvot, on the other hand, I strongly believe that a woman should not take upon herself an optional mitzva if she is not already practicing the obligatory ones. But if she is, then, I believe, she has a duty to fulfill as many more mitzvot as she can. Otherwise, she is neglecting the potential for religious growth.

That was my situation back then. I therefore agreed to commit myself to the mitzva of tefillin. My boyfriend and I consulted his Orthodox rabbi who gave me the permission to lay tefillin. He then bought me a pair for 400 dollars. Ever since then, I have cherished this mitzva (and this gift), even after I broke up with my

³⁵ Talmud Bavli Eruvin 96a-b

boyfriend and even after I put my faith in Yeshua.

No matter what our position is on women's ordination, we need more Jewish women serving as leaders in our congregations. We must also grant them the right to enter into the full ritual life of our community. Failure to do so, will inevitably lead to a further exodus of young women from our movement and will continue to marginalize us in the wider Jewish community.

Empowering our Young People

Not only do we need to empower our women but we need to empower all of our young people to serve in significant leadership roles. To accomplish this task, the first thing that needs to be done is to simply take the time to listen and learn from our young people. Based on my experience in writing this paper, I was amazed how much it meant to the young people that I was interested in listening and learning from them. This might sound simplistic but it is very important. By not doing so, our leaders could potentially build a movement that has no relevance for our young adults. Therefore, we must all ask ourselves the question, "Who are we building this movement for?" Is it not for future generations? If so, we must be visionary enough to build with two and three generations in mind and this means dialoguing and involving our young people.

Our movement must also move away from being predominately clergy lead. We desperately need to empower lay people who possess important skills our Rabbis lack. This is essential for the well being of our Rabbi's, who are often overworked, and underpaid. By empowering our lay people, we give them a greater ownership of Messianic Judaism, provide an outlet for them to serve Messiah, free up our Rabbis, and increase our chance of success, as well as the level of professionalism in our movement.

The critical need to make all the aforementioned a reality was driven home by an experience that I witnessed Shira Rubin go through this summer at the UMJC delegates meeting. Reflecting on this experience Shira Rubin writes,

I have a passion. My passion is to carry on the Messianic movement. I am in my early 20s and have every reason to believe that my generation will advance this movement. Unfortunately, I am aware that there is a huge gap, not only in age, but also in agenda and thought process between today's leaders and my generation.

Sadly, I believe this gap could hurt this movement greatly. I am part of the generation whose parents helped build the modern Messianic movement in the 1970s. These people were passionate about starting their revival in this movement. As cliché as it sounds, they made this movement what it is today. Now, they are called the "graybeards." They are still passionate, yet it seems to my generation that they aren't ready to listen to their children speak up. But we're ready to voice our ideas.

This is the frustration I felt at the July 2005 delegates meeting. Having never attended a prior meeting, I had much to say and I was disappointed to find that circumstances were such that I wasn't able to express it all. I felt as though, because of my age, people doubted that I had anything substantial to contribute. It is clear that our current leaders will and should still make the big decisions. I am not asking to make them. I am asking to be heard by these leaders, for them to listen to the fresh voices.

This is what I know: I know that my generation needs to *earn* the right to have our voices be heard. We cannot assume that because we are old enough to speak, others will think we are worth listening to. This is where we need help. We need help from today's leaders in the Messianic community.

To these leaders:

My generation is at or near the age you, our parents, were when you began to participate in the revival of this movement. You believed in yourselves back then, even though many had minimal training and experience. Please believe in your own children now, after all you've taught us. Many of us grew up in this movement. You have been teaching us for a few decades already. We *have* learned so much. But we need more from you.

Help us understand our leadership responsibilities and help us find our place in the future of this movement. We see your wisdom as a gift; however we wish we saw the passion to share it. We want this movement to continue and to succeed. But if we, the next generation of the Messianic movement, are struggling with the current leadership to establish our place in its future, how much success will we have? We'd like to work alongside you while we learn from you. It is a gradual process—to hand down responsibility in small portions, to let us try to take all you've taught us as our biological and spiritual parents and continue the movement you've put your life into. All we need is your guidance.

As leaders, I hope you take Shira's plea to heart for it represents the sentiments of many of our young people.

To make this a reality, we must take the time to get to know our young people and figure out what are their interests, gifts, and abilities. Once this is known, we must mentor, train, and give them significant opportunities to serve. It sometimes might seem a little risky and scary to open up leadership positions for younger, less experienced people, but there is no other option if we hope to internally raise up a new generation of leaders. Our established leaders must begin to listen, learn from, provide leadership opportunities, and begin to slowly relinquish control to the next generation. After all, they were not much older than many of our young people when they began to lead their congregations and founded the UMJC.

One of my greatest concerns is the propensity I see in the UMJC to endlessly talk about theology without taking action. It is not enough to just agree with these things and their importance, we must take action. This means embodying postmissionary Messianic Judaism in our lives and the life of our community. By so doing, we will create a Messianic Jewish movement that our young people are proud to call home. It also entails making a greater investment in the training and discipleship of our young people. I would like to now conclude this paper with a beautiful story that underscores this point.

A few weeks before Passover, a number of religious Jews in Bergen Belsen requested flour to bake *matzah*. Their Rebbe, fearing for his life, reluctantly approached the camp commandant for permission to bake *matzah* in honor of Passover. Their request was forwarded to Berlin for approval. Surprisingly, a few short days before Passover arrived, their request was granted.

In haste, they feverishly built an oven and baked the *matzah* fearing the Germans might change their minds. Since they did not have enough for everyone, it was initially decided that the adult men in their group, would be given the privilege of fulfilling the *mitzvah* of eating *matzah*. One lone voice dissented arguing that the children should be given the *mitzvah* to eat, for when God freed them from their current slavery; it was going to be the children who would ensure the survival of Torah and the Jewish people. In the end, everyone agreed that nothing was important then teaching the children that Torah/Jewish life must even be observed in the Valley of Shadow of Death. At the end of the *seder*, the Rabbi kissed each child on the head and reassured them that Messiah was coming soon and therefore their freedom was close at hand. Today, those children who ate *matzah* made with tears are Torah leaders in America, England, and Israel.³⁶

Our situation is certainly not as dire as that of our brothers and sisters in Bergen Belsen. But, our situation is dire. Let us bake the *matzah* for our children. As we await Messiah's return, let us make the sacrifices necessary to raise a new generation of young Messianic Jewish *talimidim* for Yeshua.

³⁶ Adapted from Nosson Scherman, *Path through the Ashes*. (Brooklyn: Art Scroll, 1986), p.33.

