

**Hashivenu Forum #10 – January 2008**  
**Postcongregational Messianic Judaism:**  
**A call for an "insider" expression of Messianic Judaism**  
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***Introduction***

As stated in the invitation to this year's forum, the topic is based on comments made during our panel discussions last year. The title of the forum is: "Yeshua and Jewish Life: Residing at the Center, Standing at the Margins."

I was invited to present a paper focused on serving and empowering those on the margins. I began writing by listing some thoughts on what the margins are. In paring down those initial notes, the paper has taken a slightly different direction, but still within the topic of the forum.

The 2005 release of Mark Kinzer's book *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* caused quite a stir—inspiring some and upsetting others. Some of the strongest criticisms came from those who have not even read it. They take his title to mean a Messianic Judaism devoid of witness. Kinzer proposes rather a Messianic Judaism that is naturally an internal witness among the Jewish people of an already present reality as opposed to an external witness as agents of a foreign community. He is not calling for a Messianic Judaism without a witness, but one with a different kind of witness.

While beginning to write this paper, I was trying to express something related to congregational life. Suddenly it came to me, postcongregational Messianic Judaism. This is not a Messianic Judaism without congregational affiliation, but rather a new kind of congregational affiliation. This is an *insider* Messianic Judaism of havurot

(small fellowship groups) consisting of Jewish followers of Yeshua whose only congregational affiliation is each in a traditional synagogue.

### ***Outside the Camp***

In recent months, I have heard the term "outside the camp" used in numerous settings in reference to our calling as Messianic Jews. Allow me to begin here by sharing a few thoughts on usage of the term.

In Torah, there are eighteen passages relating to going outside the camp. There is only one in the Nevi'im (Prophets) in Yehoshua, and only one in the New Covenant writings.<sup>1</sup> Most references to going outside the camp are in connection with burning the remnants of sacrificed animals. Another common reason is quarantine, including both those with contagious infections and contaminated warriors returning from battle. Other reasons include execution, and relieving yourself.

Hebrews (13:11-17) calls us to go outside the camp to Yeshua. This is in reference to the place of his execution being outside the city. It also speaks of his blood cleansing us as did the blood of those animals burned outside the camp. This is not calling us to social disengagement from our people in the "camp" or community, but rather it calls us to find our cleansing in Yeshua. We may bear the disgrace he bore by identifying him as the one who cleanses us. But there is no instruction here to disengage from the community. In fact, the same passage in Hebrews immediately instructs us to, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority". (v.17) Rather than running from any disgrace of association with Yeshua, we are to remain in the community and bear it, continuing to submit to our leaders. Torat HaShlichim (the Teaching of the Emissaries) is here setting a boundary for us that we must indeed obey our leaders but to the limit of

not forsaking Yeshua. If we turn away from the Jewish community and our leaders, we avoid bearing disgrace. If we face the community and obey our leaders anyway, we may bear disgrace. To disregard our leaders would be a disgraceful thing, but this is not the disgrace we are called to. Again, we are not called to social disengagement from the Jewish community. Rather, we should follow the leaders of our community to the limit of not forsaking Yeshua.

Going outside the camp is not for the purpose of forsaking the camp, much less creating a new camp. It is rather for the purpose of being cleansed, healed, and restored that one might return to the camp in *teshuva* (repentance). The "camp" is not a bad place. It is a good place where we belong, and Yeshua enables us to return cleansed and whole. The purpose of going outside the camp is *teshuva*, not permanent separation. As Yeshua is not hanging in a permanent state of execution, our journey to meet him there is not permanent. We return with him!

Throughout Church history groupings of Christians have broken away in succession each from their own Christian community using this euphemism borrowed from Hebrews of going "outside the camp". It has effectively come to mean forsaking one's community and its leaders, and creating a new and separate community. This is an application of the expression we do not see used in Scripture.

### ***Returning to the Camp***

I see the history of New Covenant faith as following the trajectory of a circle that will return where it began. It could be said that the so-called New Testament church of the first century was the synagogue, or an extension of it. Yeshua's *talmidim* (trainees) and followers did not leave their synagogues to start new communities. They rather

began meeting in homes in addition to remaining in the synagogue. They did not pull individuals out of their families and synagogue communities in order to establish separate extractionist communal structures of evacuated individuals. They rather came together in home-based sub-groupings while remaining within the synagogue community. These home groupings were not under the auspices of the larger group, and yet remained relationally and culturally loyal to the wider community. New expressions of prayer and music developed, and they were practiced in addition to, not in place of, the established Jewish traditions.

Before long, these home-based groupings began separating from the traditional synagogue community and developing into new socio-religious structures detached from the Jewish community and even in opposition to it. There were a number of apparent motivating factors causing these groupings both to withdraw and also to be forced out of synagogue communities. One of these was the acceleration of exile from the Land and its accompanying minority complex. Another was the increasing prominence that non-Jews acquired within the community of new covenant faith making it less Jewish and more threatening to the survival of our people. I see the present progressive reversal of these two factors now paving the way for a return to the original dynamic of home-based sub-groupings within the traditional synagogue community.

In the process of Israel's present return from exile, we are close approaching the fifty percent level of return. Only a few years ago, the number of Jews in Israel surpassed the numbers of Jews in the United States. In the first century C.E., the number of Jews in the Roman Empire living *outside* of the Land were greater than those *in* the Land.

Therefore, this is possibly the first time since the first Temple that no other country or empire in the world has more Jews than the Land of Israel. It is now nearly sixty years since the establishment of the modern state of Israel, and over forty years since we regained sovereignty over Jerusalem. A vast generation of Jews born back in the Land has shifted us in Israel away from the former siege mentality of exile.

Throughout the 1970s and into the early 80s, the Messianic Jewish movement multiplied mostly through the establishment of sub-groupings of Jewish church members. Participation in weekly Messianic Jewish meetings was mostly in addition to church membership. Through the establishment of the UMJC in the 1980s, Messianic Judaism developed into a self-standing congregational movement of Jews whose only congregational affiliations were each in a Messianic congregation/synagogue. Other groupings of Messianic Jewish fellowships soon followed suite. With this, the two thousand year tide of assimilation of Messianic Jews into Christianity began turning back.

In recent years, a growing number of Messianic Jews have begun to venture beyond their Messianic congregational affiliation and reconnect with the traditional synagogue community. My own family is included in this number.

Twenty-three years ago, having already left home, I rejoined my parents and siblings for six months in the Arava. This is an area of the Negev desert below sea-level directly south of the Dead Sea. We lived on what was then a small kibbutz of observant Messianic Jews. We were isolated there from the rest of the world, and even more so from any other observant Jews. We were a highly contextualized community of Messianic Jews, but separate from relationship with other observant Jews. Our

contextualization was cultural, but not relational with the rest of our people. Though we did many traditional Jewish things, we were not relationally connected to the traditional Jewish community. As our Messianic friends throughout the Land heard where we were living and how observant we had become, their reactions were mixed. Most were not happy about our observance and made various comments against it. Some were supportive, but seemingly only because all of those in our community were Messianic and because we were isolated from any non-Yeshua-believing observant Jews. After six months, we left the kibbutz and moved back up north to the Galil (Galilee).

One year later, I moved to Jerusalem to study at the Hebrew University. As a single student, I began living an observant lifestyle again and entered the Orthodox community. This was a very different experience of observance than in the Negev, because this was relational within the wider traditional Jewish community. I was sharing my life with other traditional Jews who were not Yeshua-believers. There was something about this that was far more living and relevant than observing tradition in a small isolated group. On a personal level, I found it more meaningful and fulfilling than the previous experience. It felt more holistic and authentic. On the other hand, it strained my relations with most Messianic Jewish friends. I still attended a Messianic congregation at least weekly, but began to be treated with suspicion as one who could not be trusted by default. Being traditional made one suspect of being a weak Believer, but sharing one's life with the wider traditional community made one suspect of being a "non-Believer". During that time I was regularly rebuked and counseled against Jewish tradition, and often told in a condescending manner that they were praying for me. It was very alienating. After six months of this, I laid down the tradition, retreated from

the traditional community, and began living again like a non-Jewish evangelical, as loyal members of the Israeli Messianic community were then expected to. In spite of doing so, I was convinced that I would someday return to the traditional synagogue community and bring many Messianic Jews with me.

In 1989, Tzofia and I were married. Since then, we have walked out a journey together of re-entering the traditional Jewish community. What began as occasional visits to various neighborhood synagogues developed into weekly attendance. Seven years ago, we finally joined an Orthodox synagogue. For three years, we maintained dual affiliation with the Orthodox synagogue and also the Messianic congregation we had already been part of for some years prior. Four years ago, we left the Messianic congregation, and began a home-based meeting for Messianic Jews active in Orthodox synagogues.

It was originally our intention to develop this home group into a full fledged Messianic synagogue. As the group became established, we began talking about purchasing a Torah scroll for our own Torah services. I was intent on it, but couldn't bring myself to do it. The traditional synagogue had become home, and I was no longer willing to withdraw from it, even if only partially. Others in our home group felt the same way. What we had begun to call a congregation, we modified to calling a *havurah* (fellowship) for Messianic Jews in traditional synagogues.

The meetings of our *havurah* are only mid-week, as each family already prays in their respective synagogue on Shabbat. When we come together, we seek to avoid duplicating or replacing what is already in the traditional synagogue. With each of us

engaged congregationally in synagogues, most dimensions of congregational life are already fulfilled there.

Most of our mid-week home meetings are separate for men and women, as we find these to be more intimate and helpful in each of our lives. Our meetings operate similar to a talking circle and are more of a support group than a congregation. We have an intimate time of discussion and prayer explicitly centered on Yeshua. Everyone in the circle participates, and we talk about whatever each person in the circle wants to talk about, or sing, or pray.

Our *havurah* (fellowship) gets involved in more dimensions of each family's communal life than what a havurah usually would. As an insider entity and support group, we fill in gaps that are missing for each family. And, each family ends up having different issues they need help with.

Occasionally, participants in the group come to us for counsel. Sometimes upon hearing the issue at hand I advise them to approach their rabbi. So far, those who have done so have each returned to say they received wise counsel and are glad they went.

Tzofia and I are occasionally approached by members of the havurah seeking help either with intimate personal matters or with issues related to being publicly known Yeshua-believers by their fellow congregants. This is where leading an *insider* Messianic havurah requires greater experience and maturity than leading the kind of fellowship group most people think of when they hear the term havurah.

There are other observant Messianic Jews in Orthodox communities who I meet with regularly. These are friends who do not come to the meetings of our havurah, but

for whom I serve as a source of counsel, as an accountability person, or whom I assist in bringing together for face-time with other Yeshua-believers.

There is a growing number of *insider* Messianic Jews both in Israel and around the world. With the advancements of communications technologies they are able to maintain regular communication with other Messianic Jews while remaining in the heart of their respective Orthodox communities. One of the increasing applications of computer technology and the internet is making use of video-conferencing in facilitating the new virtual Messianic *midrasha* (study group). Yet, there is no replacement for the need of personal fellowship, prayer, and worship with other Yeshua-believers.

#### ***East Asian "insider" encounter***

I recently had a remarkable *chance* meeting in East Asia with a Messianic Jewish insider. Two years ago, an insider friend in Southeast Asia put me in touch with another insider in another country. I exchanged a few e-mail messages with this new contact and sent him some of my writings as an encouragement of what he is doing. But we never met.

On a recent visit to an East Asian country of hundreds of millions of people, an airline flight of mine was changed, and I got stuck for two nights in a major city I was only transiting. The first night, I went to a department store looking for something Tzofia had asked me to bring home. This is in a city of millions of people. While walking through the store, someone grabbed me from behind and exclaimed, "Are you a Jew?!" I turned and said, "Yes, I am." He handed me his card, and said he is too. He had notice my kippa, and my exposed tsitsis. He was also wearing a kippa. As I glanced

at his card I recognized his name. He was the insider I'd only ever had contact with by e-mail. I looked up and said, "I'm Gavriel Gefen." He stood in complete astonishment and became quite emotional. He had just recently had a dream in which he met an observant Jew in a department store. It was so vivid, he was convinced it was about to happen, and would be a significant encounter.

I've heard the term *divine appointment* numerous times, but usually in ways that cheapened its meaning. But, this was indeed a divine appointment. We connected beautifully and enjoyed getting to know each other over those two days. For multiple reasons, we both needed this encounter. He is a sharp well-educated true insider who is doing some wonderful things. I am sure that those of you in this room will be hearing from him someday.

### ***Postcongregational Messianic Judaism***

In the 1970's, pre-congregational Messianic fellowships were a supplement to church membership for Jewish Christians. Today we see the development of a new kind of Messianic fellowship, a postcongregational havurah in which participation is in addition to traditional synagogue membership and not a substitute for it. It is a circle of support and fellowship for Messianic Jews whose only congregational affiliation is in a traditional synagogue. Could this mean that some Messianic congregations will be relegated to having been halfway houses?

I am not suggesting that the Messianic Jewish movement should be shut down. (Will the last person out please turn off the lights?) Rather I am proposing that we more seriously consider this new expression of Messianic Judaism and its possibilities for the future of our people.

Understand that I am only speaking here of Jewish Messianic Judaism. Much of the so-called Messianic Jewish movement is not Jewish, including even entire congregations without a single Jew. Some of these congregations are also located in areas without any Jews even in the vicinity for them to interact with. They have neither Jewish family nor any Jewish relational networks to remain part of or to reconnect with.

The status quo mode of operation of Jewish Messianic Judaism is to import Messianic congregations into Jewish populated areas, as alternative communities. Yet, establishing a new religious structure (no matter how contextualized in forms) pushes a movement outside instead of allowing it to remain inside. This new trend of establishing insider groupings of Messianic Jews who are congregationally in traditional synagogues seeks to be salt and light in ways that bring radiance and new life to pre-existing communities.

As Jews, we should recognize the divine leadership of traditional rabbis among our people. As Messianic Jews, we should also come to recognize traditional rabbis as having authority in our own lives. As part of our people, we need to see the wider community's leaders and elders as being our own.

Put people before tradition. Keeping the tradition should come as a natural outworking of sharing our lives with traditional people. Better to be in a synagogue without being so observant than to be more observant but in isolation from a synagogue. Where we live and who we share our lives with are more important than how observant we are. This is not to excuse the later, but to set priorities of relationship. Observance should be the natural outworking of sharing our lives with traditional Jewish people.

This is part of the relational dimension of covenant. Without relationship, covenant loses its breath of life.

Shaul HaShaliach said in his letter to the Romans (9:3,4), "I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Messiah for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel..." Hear the cry of Shaul's heart. He had such concern for the condition of our people and desired so much for them to be closer to HaShem that he was willing to be cut off from Messiah for their sake, if it would help. Do we share such love and desire for our people? Could we say the same as he did? What about our own names and reputations within the Messianic movement? What if we were to modify Shaul's statement? Could we say, "I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from the Messianic movement for my brothers...?" Would we be willing to consider this possibility as part of the cost of serving our people?

### ***Bold or obnoxious?***

We are probably all familiar with obnoxious forms of witness that draw more attention to the messenger than the message. Most of us also know the kind of evangelical confrontations that make the messiahship of Yeshua an unacceptable... I mean unavoidable issue.

In the course of confronting Jewish targets with the Gospel, how many can one expect to accept Yeshua? Could it be one in a thousand? Actually, I think the numbers are lower. I know fulltime Jewish evangelists who have been at it for decades and never led a single Jewish person to accept Yeshua. But, for the sake of getting to the point, let's just say that one in a thousand accepts Yeshua. So, what about the other 999? How many of them were likely brought closer to accepting Yeshua? How many were

offended by the confrontation? How many of them had their negative perceptions of Messianic Jews reinforced? Much worse, how many of them became more hardened against Yeshua? My estimation is that almost consistently the vast majority of those Jews *confronted* with the Gospel become more hardened against it and move one step further away from recognizing much less accepting Yeshua. Shouldn't this form of witness be considered not only ineffective but even counterproductive? In fact, couldn't we say that in the very course of talking about the Gospel we have at times made ourselves enemies of the Gospel?

What I am getting at here is not to question even for a moment whether or not we should be witnesses for Yeshua, but rather for us to reconsider what kind of witnesses we should seek to be. Here in this room, I believe we all desire and seek the same, that our people Israel will all come to know and embrace Yeshua. Where some of us may differ is in our perceptions of what each of our roles is in the process, or of what impact accepting Yeshua should have on our place in the wider community.

Living Jewish lives should not be a missiological tactic. Our full participation in the traditional Jewish community should not be for the sake of missionary expediency but rather for faithfulness in relationship with our people and with our people's corporate relationship with God. Upholding the heritage and tradition of our people has inherent covenantal relational value with our people and with our God whether or not it also causes anyone else to recognize and accept Yeshua.

Two years ago, I met a Christian woman from Toronto with an unusual form of outreach to the Jewish community. With a sizeable Jewish population in her part of town, she interacts daily with both Jewish colleagues and Jewish neighbors. To each of

those she becomes friends with, she gifts a high quality Hebrew/English Tanach. On either a birthday or holiday, she gives it to them with a gentle appeal that they turn to the God of their fathers and be faithful to their Jewish heritage. Especially knowing that she is a Christian, this makes a lasting impression that draws the recipients to reflect on her appeal. It serves to draw Jews one step closer to HaShem and therefore to His son Yeshua.

### ***The Second Coming of the Good News***

A Native American friend of mine serves in ministry under the motto, "Preparing the way for the Second Coming of the Good News." This is to say that the arrival of the "good news" of Yeshua on the shores of North America was not good news for those who were already there. Native Americans were massacred by those carrying the message. They were herded like animals off the lands they had inhabited for thousands of years, and the wealth of resources on those lands they had stewarded began to be stripped away and stolen. In fact, what little land and resources the survivors still steward today continue to be stolen from them, often by devout "Bible-believing" Christians.

Untold numbers of Native American children were taken from their families and communities and hauled off to Christian boarding schools which soon attained infamy for their various abuses of the children, including coerced conversions. The children's names were taken from them, and they were given Christian (European) names. They were forbidden to speak their own languages, and taught to despise their native heritage. This educational policy was described by some as serving the purpose of killing the

Indian and saving the man. Understandably, Native Americans see many parallels between their history and Jewish history.

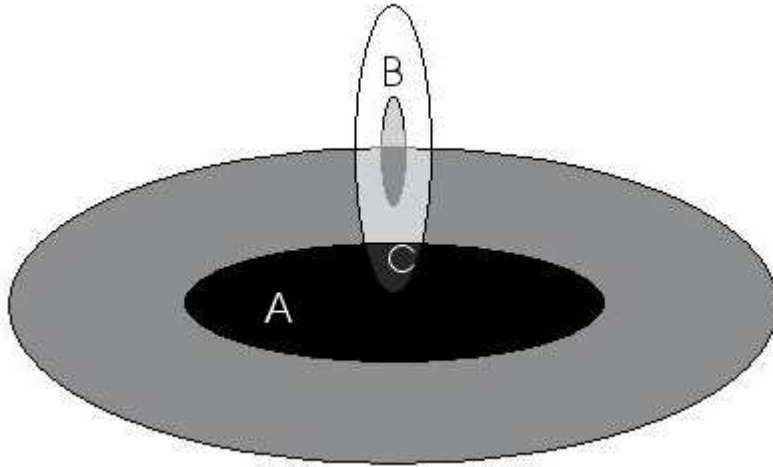
I am inspired by this motto, "Preparing the way for the Second Coming of the Good News". It strikes me as a powerful motto for Jewish outreach. Evangelicals often speak of the Second Coming in reference to Yeshua returning in the clouds. The above motto speaks of a second coming in a different way, referring not to the return of a person but of his message.

Our people Israel need to hear this message again. How will the message return to Israel? Will it be told in a new way? Will we hear it in a new way? Or, will we finally honestly hear it for the first time? Will the nations hear it from Israel again? If so, what is our role in preparing the way for a new telling and a new hearing?

I suggest that in preparing the way for this "second coming" we embrace the margins of the Messianic Jewish community. Let us call Jews to join us at the center of Jewish life, rather than calling them to join us at the margins of or, G-d forbid, even beyond the pale of Jewish life.

What if we were to embrace the margins of the Messianic Jewish movement where they intersect the heart of the wider Jewish community? Consider with me the following graph of two ellipses where the Messianic Jewish community is a smaller ellipse overlapping a larger ellipse representing the wider Jewish community. Think of A as the heart of the wider Jewish community, B as the margins of the Messianic Jewish community, and C as the place where the margins of the Messianic Jewish community intersect the heart of the wider Jewish community. By residing at the center

of Jewish life as Messianic Jews, we would stand at the margins of the Messianic Jewish movement.



Tsvi Sadan stated in a recent paper, "Messianic Jews must go out of their way to draw others to a Jewish way of life by personal example but also by making past traditions and beliefs more understandable and friendly to the disconnected and the disillusioned. The Good News here is not that Yeshua came to destroy Judaism but that he is the greatest Sage, the ultimate Tana, and it is in his power to rejuvenate our religion so that it can become what it ought to be."<sup>2</sup>

### ***Standing at the Margins***

Our place in the margins of Jewish society is in the service of those in the margins. We stand with those who are in need, with the outcast and with the downtrodden as we come to their defense. We lift up the Jewish orphan and the Jewish widow. We not only give *tzeddakah* (benevolence) to feed the hungry and house the homeless, but serve them personally through radical *gemilut hasadim* (acts of grace). We "stand at the margins" as we defend the disabled and the less fortunate. We clothe the naked and

visit the sick. We reach out to those who are estranged from their families. We extend ourselves through *kiruv* by "bringing near" those who are disconnected from the tradition, and who linger on the outer fringes of the community. This is where we join Yeshua in the service of those in the margins.

When we are persecuted, may it be for defending the defenseless and for innovative acts of servant hood rather than for self-righteous attitudes and condescending theologies. May we seek the good of others rather than personal gain, vindication, or validation. If we should gain a reputation of standing at the margins, may it be for engaging in revolutionary acts of *hesed* (grace) rather than for holding to alienating foreign doctrinal dogma. Any inherent marginality coming from following a cross-bearing Messiah should be as a result of embracing the margins of *hesed*.

Moses stood at the margins of Egyptian society, leaving the epicenter of it in order to set his people free, which put him at the center of Hebrew society. But, he had this ability because he started from a position of power as an adopted son of the ruling family. Being positioned in the center empowers us to serve those on the margins.

The Messianic Jewish community is a new and separate camp on the margins as a dissenting community with its own social, relational, and institutional structures. Who will be the prophets of this system, and stand at its margins? Yeshua stood up to the system of his day not as a prophet of counter-culture but of revitalization and renewal. Has Messianic Judaism possibly become a system of counter-culture against the community it is actually called to bring internal revitalization and renewal to?

*Shlichut (emissary work) to non-Jews as a witness to our own people*

Our responsibilities toward those in the margins of Jewish society include how we defend and care for the non-Jewish stranger in our midst. Our responsibilities to the world include helping to care for the neediest of humanity.

In December 1994, I was on the last day of a visit among the Maori people of New Zealand when the southern coast of Asia was hit by a massive tsunami. The following morning I flew to Singapore on my way home. As I arrived in Singapore, the news media were full of reports of the devastation, and the world was only beginning to understand the extent of the damage and loss of life. Being so close to the affected areas, I wanted to go immediately to see for myself how we could help. After a few calls home, it was clear that a response from Israel could be better organized from there. I made a few more calls and arranged for a young Israeli emissary to fly to Sri Lanka ahead of me, where we have many contacts among both the Tamil and Sinhalese peoples. A Tamil friend oversees numerous orphanages, schools, and local churches all along the northeastern coast. Many of the towns and villages they are located in had been devastated.

I flew home and called upon Messianic congregations throughout Israel to give to the tsunami victims. I suggested that if any of them had contacts in the affected areas, they should give through those they already had relationship with. I also offered to hand carry any gifts they were willing to give to our friends in Sri Lanka. Forty-one Israeli congregations and ministries gave us more than \$25,000 to pass on. For many of the congregations who participated in this effort, it was the first time they had ever

collected money for Gentiles in another country. I flew to Sri Lanka with the money and distributed it through local community leaders.

Upon returning home to Jerusalem, word of our ongoing work in Sri Lanka spread throughout the neighborhood. Orthodox friends came to me with money wanting to give to the victims. These are Orthodox friends who know us to be Messianic and who recognized, in our *shlichut* (emissary work), *mitzvot* (good deeds) often absent from their own lives such as *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) and blessing the nations. Some of them offered to go throughout the neighborhood collecting money for our work. As we were in the midst of leading a relief effort of Messianic Jews, this put us in an awkward position. What about third party donors, friends of friends, who might give to the work not knowing us personally later learning who we are and feeling misled and cheated? Our solution was to turn down the offers of help to raise money and to only accept donations from those who knew us.

This work was carried out under the auspices of *Keren HaShlichut*<sup>3</sup> (Foundation for Emissary Work). Because of situations like the one above, *Keren HaShlichut* has remained in a continual state of transition since its establishment eight years ago. Who we send as emissaries, what we send emissaries to do, and how we send them continues to change. We increasingly send *insider* Messianic Jews as emissaries both to unreached indigenous tribal groups and to non-Jewish insider groupings of Believers among the nations.

### ***Messianic Community in Israel***

The Messianic community in Israel is growing and getting stronger. Yet, most of it is still driven by an Evangelical Christian agenda.

Five years ago, before we started our havurah, we were in what was then the largest Messianic congregation in Jerusalem. In the children's classes, they used Evangelical Christian materials translated into Hebrew from English. It was alarming for us to discover that our own children in Jerusalem were being instructed in the life and teachings of Marteen Lootheyr (Martin Luther in Hebrew), without even a mention of his diatribes against our people.

Another example of this Evangelical agenda is the growing trend in Israel of establishing Christian schools. They are called Messianic schools, but emulate Evangelical Christian schools. Some of the teachers are foreign missionaries, and many of the children are missionary kids. It is heartbreaking to see Jewish Israeli parents sending their children to these schools in order for their minds and worldviews to be shaped there. I see this as yet another shift toward the outer boundaries of, or even beyond the pale of Jewish community. Why in the Jewish homeland, in the company of our own people returned from every corner of the world would we continue to withdraw and to marginalize our children like this? Even worse in my estimation are new plans to build a Christian boarding school in a rural area of the Galil. It is almost certain to push these children to the fray of the fringes of Jewish life. Why?! What for?!

I realize that some of my comments here are speaking to the reality of the Messianic movement in Israel. Yet, I find that the more contextualized practices of the American movement are just that, contextualized practices. At the end of the day, these two parts of the movement are both on the fringe of and at times outside the wider Jewish community. Non-observant Messianic Jews in Israel are connected to the wider Jewish community through civil duties they share with their fellow citizens, mostly Jews, such

as army service. More-observant Messianic Jews in America have some connection with the wider Jewish community through shared tradition and through frequenting Jewish establishments such as Judaica shops and the JCC. But, both parts of the movement are essentially separate social and relational networks removed from and not fully loyal to the wider community.

### ***The Turning Tide***

I mentioned earlier two factors influencing the separation of Messianic havurot from the traditional synagogue community in the first century. They were the threat and actualization of exile and assimilation, and the prominence that non-Jews began gaining in these fellowships of New Covenant faith.

With the ongoing return today of our people to the Land of Israel, and the development of the modern Messianic Jewish movement, the tide has begun to turn. Nearly half of all Jews in the world are back in Israel, and this continues to increase. Also, within the Messianic movement, there is a growing network of solid groupings of majority Jewish Yeshua-believers living Jewish lives and reconnecting with the traditional Jewish community. Added to this, Messianic Jews outside the Land are increasingly making Aliyah (immigration to Israel). Conditions are developing toward enabling the establishment of an insider movement of Messianic Jewish havurot that is both healthy and sustainable.

The two main parts of the Messianic Jewish movement, in America and in Israel, each have prevailing strengths and prevailing weaknesses. Those in America have an increasing fluency in the tradition that is still seriously lacking among most members of the movement in Israel. Yet, those in Israel have the advantageous experience of a

shared civil life with other Jews in the Jewish homeland. Each of these two parts of the worldwide movement has much to learn from the other.

The overarching predictions and promises of both the biblical writings and the rabbinic writings tell us of a complete restoration to the Land. This would potentially, or ultimately, mean the uniting of the two major parts of the Jewish Messianic Jewish movement back in the Land. This merging would hopefully serve to combine our strengths and to dispel some of our weaknesses. G-d willing, it would enable us to best serve our people in preparing for the second coming of the Good News.

Our people Israel need you back in the Land. Do any of you not recognize that the future of the Jewish people is in Israel? So, what are you waiting for? Yes, there are nearly an equal number of Jews in the U.S. as there are in Israel, and they need you too. But, where is the future headed? Torah, the Prophets, the writings of Yeshua's emissaries, and rabbinic sages through the ages have all confirmed and re-confirmed where we're headed. And, nearly half our people are already there. So, when will half of all Yeshua-believing Jews be back in the Land? We've got a long way to go and a lot of catching-up to do. Yet, even the objective of catching-up could be considered sub-standard. Why not seek to advance ahead of the curve? To those of you who see a glimpse of the future, why not reach for it? To borrow a word from Dauermann's lexicon, we could call it *proleptic* Aliyah. Sadly, we are still a long way off even from status quo Aliyah.

We are promised a good future in the Land. Let's work together to create that future. Let's create it for our children and grandchildren, laying the strongest foundation we can for them to be able to actualize that hope. This should be the motivation for coming

home, not to run from difficulties or from fear of a bad future in exile, but because of a hope and a promise.

Let us welcome this new trend of insider havurot. Welcome those Jewish members in your congregations who want to re-enter traditional synagogues to do so. Offer to be a support to those who choose to. Please do not draw the line and make them choose between your congregation and the synagogue they wish to join. Encourage them to give their commitment and loyalty to the traditional community with the limit of never forsaking Yeshua. Don't just cut them loose, but rather continue extending the hand of friendship and regular Messianic fellowship by offering the alternative of a havurah. This could be a new weekly home meeting, or it could be something as simple as an occasional, but consistent, get together.

Any risks or dangers that could potentially result from this are greater in exile than in the Land. Added to this, taking your children to the margins of Jewish society in exile also has risks, such as likely assimilation and the loss of your grandchildren from our people. Embrace the margins of the assimilation of your exile. Embrace the margins of assimilation where they intersect the heart of the Jewish community. Better yet, make Aliyah.

Let us work together to turn back the tide of exile. Let us work together to reverse the historic separation of Messianic Jewish havurot from the synagogue community. The conditions, especially back in the Land, are indeed changing. Let us avoid creating a new and separate thirteenth camp among the "tribes" of Israel. Rather, may we re-enter the camps of the twelve tribes as those who recognize and follow Yeshua seeking to bring internal revitalization and renewal. May we stand at the margins as a place of

service while residing, and raising our children, at the center of Jewish life. May we reside at the center, strengthening the heart, while bringing healing and restoration to the margins.

### ***Footnotes***

<sup>1</sup> References to "outside the camp".

- Ashes from the altar taken outside the camp, and remaining animal parts of sacrifices also burned there. Shemot 29:14; Vayikra 4:11-22; 6:11; 8:17; 9:11; 16:27; BaMidbar 19:2-10
- Tent of meeting outside the camp, as a place to inquire of the Lord. Shemot 33:7
- Two sons of Aharon HaCohen HaGadol anointed outside camp Vayikra 10:4-5
- Outside the camp was a place to be cleansed of possible contamination and disease in order to prevent spreading to others. In the case of Miriam, this place of healing was also considered a place of disgrace. Rahab, rescued from the destroyed city of Jericho, was kept outside the camp. Vayikra 13:45 – 14:9 BaMidbar 5:2-5; 12:13-16; 31:12-20 Deuteronomy 23:10 Joshua 6:23
- Sacrificing outside the camp is unlawful bloodshed. Vayikra 17:3
- Outside the camp as a place of execution. Vayikra 24:14-23 BaMidbar 15:34-37
- Outside the camp as a place to relieve yourself. D'varim23:11-13
- Yeshua Messianic Jews 13:11-14
- In Talmud, "outside the camp" means outside Israel. This is in contrast to the commonly used phrase "outside the court" referring to the court of the Sanhedrin. Babylonian Talmud, tractate Sanhedrin 6:128

<sup>2</sup> Tsvi Sadan - Keruv As a Guiding Principle for Proclamation of the Good News, 2007, p.7 presented at the Borough Park Symposium, October 2007.

<sup>3</sup> [www.shlichut.com](http://www.shlichut.com)

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