

## The Messiah and the Scandal of Messianic Jewish Non-engagement

*Prepared by Michael A. Kashdan*

I met Moshe several years back, when he visited the congregation that I was leading. Moshe is a Sefardi Orthodox Jew. He also believes that Yeshua haNatzrati (whom he refers to as “Yehoshua”) is the Messiah. But while Moshe thinks highly of the historic Yeshua as he perceives him, my friend claims (both to me in person, and in writing in a local Jewish journal) that the “Jesus of Christianity” is not the same person. Moshe normally davened at a Chabad synagogue, but he also visited our services on several occasions. In discussions, he expressed to me his opinion that Yeshua had been misrepresented by Christianity (and Messianic Judaism), and that his biggest problem was with the deity of Yeshua. He asserted that the idea that a “created being” could attain divinity – no matter how good that person might otherwise be – was unacceptable.<sup>1</sup> One activity that I particularly enjoyed was attending a weekly Talmud class to which Moshe invited me – a class led by a local Chabad rabbi and held at the house of Leonard.

Leonard had previously served on the board of a major Messianic synagogue. Unlike Moshe, Leonard no longer believed in the messiahship of Yeshua, but he was not hostile to Messianic Jews such as me.<sup>2</sup> After his mother’s death, he was honored to have me serve as a shomer and also asked me to be a pallbearer at her funeral – even though I had never met her. One reason that Leonard expressed to me as to why he no longer

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<sup>1</sup> When I informed Moshe that I did not believe that Yeshua was a created being that had attained deity, his attitude softened a bit and he conceded that the *Tanya* does refer to a blurring of the lines between Hashem and his Anointed One.

<sup>2</sup> Both Leonard and Moshe supported my son’s retention in one of the local Jewish day schools when the school administration was deciding whether or not to permit him to attend for another year.

believed in the messiahship of Yeshua was the matter of his deity. He said that there was no indication in Tanakh that the Jewish people were expected to worship Mashiakh.

Moshe and Leonard had become acquainted with one another via Lubavitch Chabad, and both of them eventually drifted away from that movement – to other Orthodox circles – in part because of messianist trends.<sup>3</sup> Both were scandalized by claims of deity on behalf of the departed Lubavitcher Rebbe. But they are not the only Orthodox Jews to have been scandalized by “messianist”<sup>4</sup> trends. One scholarly Orthodox rabbi – David Berger – has been scandalized not just by messianist claims among some Lubavitchers, but also by the lack of a more forceful response on the part of Orthodox Jewish leadership. He has been so scandalized that it influenced the title of his book, *The Rebbe, the Messiah and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference*. There have been several prominent men with the name “David Berger.” These include a Canadian ambassador to Israel, a deputy district attorney of Los Angeles County, and an Israeli weightlifter murdered by Black September terrorists during the 1972 Munich Olympics. The David Berger focused upon in this paper is a Modern Orthodox rabbi who is dean of the Bernard Revel Graduate School at Yeshiva University, previously served as a history professor at Brooklyn College, and is a past president of the Association for Jewish Studies. Dr. Berger is also a scholar of historic Jewish-Christian dialogue and debate.

### **Tikun Olam?**

Dr. Berger’s objections to the messianist claims on behalf of the seventh Lubavitcher rebbe – Menachem Mendel Schneerson – can be analytically divided into two categories.

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<sup>3</sup> Each also had personal reasons for beginning to daven elsewhere than Chabad.

<sup>4</sup> To avoid confusion, I will follow the practice of referring to followers of any Jewish “messiah” – real or supposed – as “messianist” and reserve the term “Messianic” for Messianic Judaism as practiced by Jewish followers of Yeshua haNatzrati.

One category might be called “Second Coming Theology.” That is, the teaching that Mashiakh appears in history a first time and does many good things, but leaves the world stage with his mission unfulfilled (or, in possibly more sympathetic terms, we might say that his work is not complete when he leaves the scene), *i.e.* he comes and goes, yet creation is left unredeemed. Dr. Berger admits that the Lubavitcher Rebbe might have done sufficient good work to qualify as a “presumptive messiah” but we cannot have positive certainty regarding an individual’s messianic claims if he fails (to put it somewhat crudely) to finish the job.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Berger points out that the Lubavitcher Rebbe passed away<sup>6</sup> in 1994, and that it is a manifest fact that he did not complete the redemptive work that is expected of Mashiakh. With that event, his followers thereby forfeit any claims that we can identify him with certainty as the Messiah. Dr. Berger goes to great length to demonstrate his claim that we cannot be expected to rely on any expected “second coming” (to put it crudely again) to get their candidate off the hook.

If Dr. Berger’s objections to the idea of a “second coming” sound familiar to some Messianic Jews, that should come as no big surprise. According to Berger:

Jews have written numerous works through the ages describing the career of the Messiah...Differences abound. Alternative scenarios are proposed. But nowhere—nowhere—does Messiah son of David appear on the eschatological stage only to die and be buried before the end of the final act—not in the *Bavli* ...not in the *Yerushalmi*...not in the *Zohar*...not in the standard midrashim... not in the apocalyptic midrashim...not in the...Ramban...not anywhere.<sup>7</sup>

Some of us may remember the booklet by Steve Schwartz, *Dear Rabbi*, in which “Rabbi Cohen” asserts that,

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<sup>5</sup> David Berger, *The Rebbe, the Messiah, and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference*. (London/Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008), 58.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Berger does not fail to mention (*e.g.* p. 86) those among the Lubavitch messianists who deny that their rebbe ever died.

<sup>7</sup> Berger, 41-42.

The Jews expected a Messiah who would come to change the world order – who would bring peace on earth and resurrection of the dead. Jesus of Nazareth came and died and did not do this...prophecies were certainly not fulfilled in the life of Jesus – at least for the Jews. If anything, the world got worse rather than better. The Jews could not accept him as a Messiah because he did not do what the Messiah was supposed to do.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, Dr. Berger refers to the proposed messiahship of the Lubavitcher Rebbe:

By confidently identifying a presumed descendant of David as the Messiah despite his death in an unredeemed world, Lubavitch messianists invalidate Judaism's bedrock requirements for making such identification...To affirm the messiahship of the deceased Rebbe is to undermine a foundational belief of the Jewish religion.<sup>9</sup>

Claiming that a Jewish person follows a “messiah” who, in fact, failed to properly fulfill *tikun olam* is a serious charge. Few people would enjoy being told that the man to whom they look as a great redeemer failed to accomplish his redemptive duty, but it is something that Messianic Judaism and Lubavitcher messianists have in common.

### **Divinely Anointed?**

Berger's second main objection to messianist claims within Chabad relates more directly to the theme of this Hashivenu forum, as well as the most prominently expressed objections of my friends Moshe and Leonard. I also recall Dr. Levi, a retired (yet vigorous for a nonagenarian) physician who regularly attended a weekly Bible class at his upscale nursing home that was sponsored by the Messianic Jewish congregation that I attended. He did not object to studying with Messianic Jews, but the objection that I *did* hear him address regarding Messianic Judaism was that – according to him – we worship a deity in addition to Hashem, and that Judaism is monotheistic.<sup>10</sup> Many Jewish people feel

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<sup>8</sup> Steve Schwartz, *Dear Rabbi*. (Orangeburg, NY: Chosen People Ministries, 1980), 13.

<sup>9</sup> Berger, 60-61.

<sup>10</sup> A simplistic invocation of Trinitarian doctrine would probably not satisfy many Jews who voice such objections, since they might consider such creedalism to be little more

that they have plenty to object to regarding the deity of Mashiakh without having to claim that it technically constitutes a case of polytheism. Even if we can verbally express a christology which satisfies ourselves that we are bona fide monotheists, that mere fact will not automatically negate concerns among many Jewish people that we are sharing devotion to Yeshua that should be restricted to the G-d of Avraham, Yitzkhak and Yaakov.

Similar concerns have been raised by some Jewish people about messianist theology among the Lubavitch. According to Dr. Berger, the deification of the Lubavitcher Rebbe raises “The Spectre of Idolatry.”<sup>11</sup> Berger writes that we must:

Examine an additional, technical question of considerable moment. An idolatrous act is *minut*, or heresy, in Jewish law; only the act makes the believer a *practitioner of avodah zara*. Any hasid who faces the Rebbe’s picture while praying because he wants to worship in the direction of a manifestation of pure divinity is certainly practicing *avodah zara*.<sup>12</sup>

“Avodah zara” is not limited to religious activity that involves a physical image. This is one reason why “idolatry” may not be the best translation. According to Berger:

...let us say further that you believe in a [G-d] whose infinite Essence is manifested in all its force in the most recent Rebbe, who continues to exist in body or soul as pure divinity. When you prostrate yourself before [G-d]—with or without an image—it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that you are practicing *avodah zara*. This is the case, I think, even if you do not bow to the Rebbe as a separate entity or explicitly address him as [G-d].<sup>13</sup>

It should be clear that David Berger finds fault not just with the identification of the Lubavitcher Rebbe as Messiah, but also with the practical implications that such

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than mental gymnastics. Even if they were to acknowledge that Christian monotheism is an improvement upon polytheism, they might deny that the Jewish people are in need of any such “new and improved” spins upon the unity of G-d.

<sup>11</sup> Berger, pp. 81-94.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 170-171.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 171.

identification has for the practice of Judaism. Some people may wonder why Lubavitch messianism bothers a Modern Orthodox Jew like Dr. Berger as much as it does. After all, Chassidism has for centuries seemed somewhat eccentric (at least from a Litvak perspective), and the tactics of Lubavitch (Chabad houses, public Menorah lightings, Mitzvah mobiles [*a.k.a.* mitzvah tanks<sup>14</sup>], etc.) have certainly been outside of the realm of the ordinary in Orthodoxy. Lubavitch was the object of “the most heated criticism” of the fifth Satmar Rebbe Yoel Teitelbaum<sup>15</sup>, and the Ponevezh Rosh Yeshiva Eliezer M. Shach criticized the Lubavitcher Rebbe (as early the 1980s) for “fostering a cult of personality and for implying that he was the Messiah.”<sup>16</sup>

On the occasion of the Rebbe’s *petira*, Agudath Israel of America was quite restrained in its response. Unlike the multi-page (sometimes multi-article) memorials which have often been featured in the pages of *The Jewish Observer* upon the death of a leader in the world of Torah Judaism, there was a one-page remembrance that mentioned the Rebbe’s passing with sorrow, and briefly made note of his good works, but included the following caveat:

It must be noted for the record that many segments of the Torah camp had deep differences with various aspects of the Chabad movement during his tenure as *Rebbe*, particularly with the tragic rise of the misplaced Messianic fervor that surrounded him and consumed so many of his *Chassidim*. The separation and isolation of Lubavitch from the large mainstream *Chareidi* community was also a source of pain and frustration for many Torah leaders.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Tzvi Rabinowicz (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Hasidism* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996), 431.

<sup>15</sup> Jack Fischel and Sanford Pinsker (eds.), *Jewish-American History and Culture: An Encyclopedia* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), 562.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 374-375.

<sup>17</sup> *The Jewish Observer* (Tammuz 5754/June 1994), 13.

It is interesting to note that the table of contents page of the same issue of the magazine featured a brief note that the Klausenberger Rebbe – Rabbi Yekusiel Yehuda Halberstam – had died shortly before the issue went to press. A “biographical appreciation” was being planned for a future issue.<sup>18</sup> It was hard to avoid the impression that accolades would flow much more abundantly, and much less reservedly, with memorials for the Klausenberger Rebbe than had been the case with the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Despite these demonstrable facts, Dr. Berger is particularly troubled by stated messianist beliefs, and is particularly scandalized by the lack of a more forceful and consistent response from the leadership of the mainstream Orthodox Jewish community. According to Berger, the Jewish community faces, a confrontation with,

an even greater problem than ‘mere’ messianist heresy. One who habitually engages in *avodah zara* is disqualified as a ritual slaughterer, and any animal that he does slaughter is not kosher...we must remind ourselves that mainstream Lubavitch has produced literature justifying prostration to a righteous man because he is pure divinity...major yeshivas in the movement...advocate a theology of *avodah zara*. Highly educated lay-people are comfortable with the term ‘man- [G-d]’, asserting that when you speak to the Rebbe you speak to [G-d], and a sophisticated author emerges from exposure to Chabad principles with the conviction that there is no material difference between Lubavitch beliefs about the righteous and the Christian affirmation of the divinity of Jesus. To dismiss adherents of this theology as so marginal that they can be ignored in making halakhic assessments is to close one’s eyes to reality. At the very least, we are dealing with a level of heresy more egregious and unambiguous than that of messianism alone.<sup>19</sup>

### **How Should Messianic Judaism Respond?**

What should be the nature of Messianic Jewish involvement in this matter? On the surface, there might seem to be no role for us. It is – technically speaking – an internal Orthodox Jewish matter, so unless Lubavitch Chabad, Agudath Israel, or the Rabbinical

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Berger, 141.

Council of America ask our advice, it would appear to be none of our business. But while we may not be directly involved, this dispute does have implications for us in matters relating to apologetics, kiruv, communal involvement, etc., and there are many directions that we can go – not all being mutually exclusive. I will try to summarize (and, to some extent, evaluate) some of those below.

### **Our Seat at the Pluralistic Table**

We can use the “Rebbe phenomenon” as a tool of sorts to try to claim our place at the Jewish pluralistic table. If a Jewish friend or loved one questions the legitimacy of Messianic Judaism due to their objection to a doctrine of the deity of Yeshua, we could reply by asking if they similarly question the Jewishness of Lubavitch since that group believes similar things about the man whom they believe to be Messiah. Our reasoning might be that it is inconsistent and unfair to exclude Messianic Judaism from the Jewish table if Lubavitch is not similarly excluded.

Such a line of reasoning, depending upon how we approached it, might be quite clever. It also might be a useful go-to argument under certain circumstances. It would be faulty, however, to put too much emphasis upon this argument. What have we gained if our Jewish friends and loved ones concede the point? If they consider the deity of Yeshua to be the brand that excludes Messianic Jewish ideas from the ranch of Jewish discourse – but would otherwise be favorable to giving us a hearing – than a tactful mention of Lubavitch “christology” might remove this barrier. Many Jewish people, however, do not necessarily have a high level of respect for Lubavitch views regarding the Messiah (my friends Moshe and Leonard being two of them), and associating



Messianic Judaism with Lubavitch might elicit little more than something along the lines of: “So your no more right than the Chabadniks.”

### **An Inconvenient Truth**

Rather than a simplistic “right idea, wrong man” approach to Chabad messianism, we might want to approach the phenomenon as an “inconvenient truth” of sorts. While Dr. Berger and others have documented what are striking similarities between Messianic Judaism and the messianism of Lubavitch, we should not rush to minimize the differences. It is not as if one could write a biography of the Messiah, but just leave a blank where the name would be mentioned which would allow the reader to fill in either “Yeshua haNatzrati” or “Menachem Mendel Schneerson.” Differences abound, not the least of which in the minds of many of our people would be the results of those two lives. In the case of the latter, despite the extremes of some of his followers, many see Jewish people who had been alienated from Judaism adopting more Torah-observant lives. In the case of the former, many of our people see (despite the positive results of the spread of monotheism) widespread historic persecution of Jewish people on the part of the very followers of Yeshua. One Lubavitcher rabbi summarized the life of Yeshua at a class in which I was in attendance by asserting that any positive effects of his life for the Jewish people were “inconsequential”, while – on the negative side – he was the cause of more suffering than any other individual in history.

I do believe that there are reasoned, sensitive responses that we can give when such concerns are expressed. When informed, by a Jewish friend or family member, that they have a problem with the idea of the deity of Yeshua, we might prayerfully consider mentioning the phenomenon of Lubavitch messianism. Not for the purpose of cutting off

discussion with some sort of verbal jab like, “Well, many Lubavitchers believe in the divinity of their Messiah, and they’re part of a respected Jewish movement, so Messianic Jews are no less Jewish for believing in the deity of Yeshua! Case closed!” Cloturing mechanisms are seldom worthy of reasoned spiritual dialogue. On the other hand, if a Jewish inquirer is really interested in considering Yeshua’s messianic claims, yet the whole idea of a divine messiah is a stumbling block to them because they consider it to be thoroughly un-Jewish<sup>20</sup>, we might want to point out that a significant portion of Lubavitch acknowledges some blurring of the lines between Hashem and his Anointed One, and that it is worthy of consideration that they might be on to something. I doubt that most Jewish people would be prepared to exclude Lubavitch Chassidism from the pale of Judaism solely due to messianist teachings, and many of them might see the logic in not excluding, *carte blanche*, Messianic Judaism from the community due solely to our christology.

### **Common Ground**

Regarding dialogue between Messianic Jews and other Jews, we should emphasize what we have in common rather than our differences. That concept originated, not with me, but with my friend Leonard. Does this mean that we avoid all controversy in the interest of diplomacy? Do we avoid anything that might cause offense in the teary-eyed hope that we might eventually secure reservations at the Jewish communal table? I think not. They say that if you poll two Jews, you’ll get three opinions, and I don’t see why we should expect controversy to be avoidable in Messianic Judaism. But neither should controversy be our scarlet letter. There sometimes seems to be – although, thankfully,

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<sup>20</sup> I recall a Jewish friend who considered the idea of a divine messiah to be more akin to the Greek demigod Herakles, than to anything Jewish.

not as commonly as in the past – a temptation in Messianic Jewish circles to assume that if we are not at each others’ throats with the mainstream Jewish community, it can only be credited to an unhealthy de-emphasis upon the *Besorah*. No Messianic Jewish congregation should leave a reasonable perception that Yeshua as Mashiakh is a matter of only secondary importance, but neither need we bang visitors over the head with concepts that many professed believers have difficulty comprehending (and even more difficulty explaining) and that virtually invite misunderstanding.

For example, one Messianic synagogue upon whose outreach committee I served put on a free showing of the film *Europa Europa* at a park in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood. I think it was a good idea and potentially part of a coherent kiruv program. Unfortunately, the movie was introduced with the explanation that at the local Messianic synagogue “We worship Yeshua.” The statement was true, of course, but was not uttered in a context in which further explanation would be forthcoming, or open dialogue possible. The brief proclamation almost invited misunderstanding – *i.e.* so you worship “Yeshua” not “G-d.” Perhaps we should demonstrate no less tact than did Rabbi Leopold Cohn, the founder of Chosen People Ministries, regarding his wife who had not yet immigrated to the United States. Regarding correspondence with his wife:

She told all about the news that had come from America, announcing my apostasy which some believed and others did not...I wrote that I talked too much about the Messiah, and when she came to me personally, I would tell her more fully. I could not say that the report was true and that I had become a Christian, because in the sense of the word Christian as she knew it, it was not true, and would have killed her affection for me forever.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Leopold Cohn, *To An Ancient People* (Charlotte, NC: Chosen People Ministries, 1996), 22-23

Leopold Cohn's wife had preconceived notions regarding what it meant to be a follower of Yeshua. My friend Moshe had a preconceived notion of what the deity of Yeshua meant (*i.e.* that a created being had attained divine status) as well. We should not assume that our Jewish friends and relatives always understand our beliefs in a straightforward manner. They may be more in need of a relationship than a bumper sticker reply. They may need to see, via our actions and community standards, that -- whatever else they currently think about Yeshua being the Messiah -- these Messianic Jewish congregations are real synagogues, and these Messianic Jews are real Jews (in lifestyle, not just in ancestry). Many Jewish people might be ready to conclude that Yeshua *might be* the Messiah before they will conclude that he *is* the Messiah. I was one such Jewish person.

### **Choosing our Battles Carefully**

Though I served in the armed forces, I am not very comfortable with the use of military terminology to describe religious endeavors. Yes, I have read Romans 13:12 and Ephesians 6:10-17, but I have never been thrilled with the idea of "harvest crusades", "prayer warriors", or "evangelism explosions." In light of this, I would tread carefully when describing encounters with our people -- even those hostile to Messianic Judaism -- as "battles." Nevertheless, to the extent we do refer to them as such, we might want to choose our battles more carefully than we sometimes have in the past. This certainly relates to the deity of Mashiakh.

Before we involve ourselves in argumentation about Yeshua's deity, we sometimes might want to count the costs of engaging in "battle." If an inquirer is going to deny Yeshua's messiahship anyway, we might want to ask what difference it makes to them. On the other hand, if Yeshua's deity represents a genuine stumbling block to

someone who is otherwise favorably inclined to him, we have another matter. We might need to carefully decipher what an inquirer believes about Yeshua's deity before responding. Like my friend Moshe, they may be coming from a different conceptual location than we might otherwise assume.

Before plunging into debates, part of a responsible counting-of-the-cost includes just what we gain if we "win" the debate/argument. For example, regarding Yeshayahu 7:14, we seem to invest an incredible amount of energy for going to the proverbial mat regarding what we believe to be true. But can anyone reasonably argue that either Yeshayahu or Mattityahu were the least bit concerned with whether the Hebrew term *almah* is better rendered, in English, as "young woman" or "virgin"?<sup>22</sup>

### **Aha! vs. Oh yeah?**

We sometimes run the risk of behaving as if kiruv and apologetics are matters of, not respectful dialogue, but cosmic boxing matches in which the name of the game is to deliver the knock out blow which will shut the skeptic up. Not only does such an approach run the risk of putting our friends in more of a defensive mode than may be necessary, but we might want to keep in mind that most "aha!" punches can be answered with an "oh yeah?" counter-punch. No matter how strongly we are convinced that Yeshayahu 9:5 supports the deity of Mashiakh (I think it does), a simplistic "aha!" which says "Kel Gibor—Mighty G-d...case closed", can be met with an "oh yeah?" which says "Avi 'Ad—Eternal Father...case back opened." Are we trying to communicate that Yeshua haNatzrati is the "Eternal Father"? That might cause some of us to think ahead if we have to step outside of a trinitarian comfort zone. But let's remember that we are not

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<sup>22</sup> This passage does have major implications regarding the virgin birth of Yeshua, but our Messiah's status does not stand or fall on the English rendering of this one word.

trying to deliver a knockout blow that will make Jewish people feel robbed of their free will. Rather, we want to help them to have a basis for trusting the G-d of Yisrael and his Anointed One, and for avoiding any stumbling blocks that might be encountered in their halakhah.

### **So, What do we do?**

Why does a man like Dr. David Berger encounter such frustration in his desire to see more of the leadership of the Modern Orthodox and Haredi worlds publicly distance themselves from Lubavitch, even though he thinks that their less-than-acceptable doctrines are clearly demonstrable? When many people think of Chabad, they don't think of strange theology or avodah zara. What they do think of are Jewish day schools and Hebrew schools, kashrut, community chanukiah lightings, weekday minyanim (often where none other are available), and a resource for the acquisition of tefillin, mezuzot, and Jewish knowledge. And if they do have views about the Messiah that seem somewhat idiosyncratic, they certainly do not come across as communicating that one had better believe the same thing as them or they're surely headed for an eternity in hell, along with almost all of their ancestors of the last two millennia.

If one is going to successfully anathematize Lubavitch, one must get past their demonstrably good works. Perhaps this is a model that Messianic Judaism could emulate, to a certain extent. While it would be naïve to expect a network of quality Messianic Jewish day schools and Hebrew schools, mohelim, shokhetim, mashgiakhim, mikva'ot, etc. to grow up overnight, we can commence a generational effort in this direction. In addition, there are smaller steps that Messianic Jewish individuals and congregations can begin, and continue, to do which will make our light shine before our

people, and may help to insure that if the deity of Yeshua is to be a stumbling block (1 Kefa 2:8<sup>23</sup>; Yeshayahu 8:14) to some of our people, *it* will be the stumbling block, rather than having Jewish people stumble over our inconsequentiality or our mishagoss.

What are we currently doing that we should keep doing and should do more of? Russell Resnik refers to Messianic Jews' increasing involvement in communal Jewish humanitarian projects in recent years.<sup>24</sup> My congregation, Ahavat Zion Messianic Synagogue, Beverly Hills, CA regularly donates imperishable foodstuffs and toiletries to SOVA<sup>25</sup>, a service organization of the Jewish Family Service of Los Angeles. Other Messianic Jewish congregations that I have attended in the past, or know of, have: maintained a tree planting fund to support of the Jewish National Fund (JNF); designated a regular portion of the congregational tithes to the local Jewish federation; arranged with a local Khevra Kadisha for pre-burial care of their members who pass away. In addition to being involved in mainstream Jewish communal benevolent endeavors, Messianic Jewish organizations (*e.g.* UMJC, Chevra USA, MJAA) have sometimes been directly involved in activities such as planting trees in Israel (when cooperation with JNF was not possible), and providing food and shelter to impoverished Jews in Eretz-Yisrael and the former Soviet Union. These sorts of activities need to be encouraged and expanded.

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<sup>23</sup> I am not asserting that the stumbling referred to in this passage refers exclusively to Yeshua's deity.

<sup>24</sup> Russell Resnik, "Hesed and Hospitality: Embracing Our Place on the Margins" in *Kesher* (Issue 23—Fall 2009), 12.

<sup>25</sup> Sustenance, Opportunity, Volunteerism, Advocacy

I would like to close with a few “easy ways to reach out to a Jewishly unaffiliated friend or co-worker”:<sup>26</sup>

1. Invitation to a Torah class of interest.
2. Invitation to spend Shabbat dinner (or all of Shabbat) with your family.
3. E-mail article explaining relevance of an upcoming holiday.
4. Hosting Chanukiah-lighting and latke/sufganiyot party. (Or party appropriate for another holiday.)
5. Giving of chanukiah<sup>27</sup>, candles, and list of blessings. (Or items appropriate to another holiday.)
6. Invitation to learn with you on a weekly basis (for as little as ten minutes at a time) in a Jewish text of mutual interest.

Hopefully, we are already doing many of these things, and can soon commence those in which we are not currently engaged. The good works of Lubavitch are not easily deniable or ignorable, and neither should be the good works of Messianic Judaism. The more we are known for these works, the more difficult it will be for those of our people who might stumble over the deity of Yeshua to first stumble over our lack of middot and mitzvot.

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<sup>26</sup> Adapted from Bayla Sheva Brenner, “Welcome to Torah High” in *Jewish Action*, Volume 70, No. 2 (Winter 5770/2009), 41. (This sidebar was, in turn, adapted from Kiruv.org)

<sup>27</sup> There are inexpensive chanikiyot that are mass-produced.