

Our Need for Women in Ministry

by Michael Rudolph

Delivered to Ohev Yisrael August 1, 2015

Messianic Judaism has a problem that we brought upon ourselves, but one that we can fix. It is that we have not raised up enough elder-level and *shamash*-level women in servant ministry, to meet the needs of our women, our children, and yes – even our men. Now by using the term “elder-level women” I am not proposing that we ordain women as our governmental overseers, because Scripture clearly precludes that. The New American Standard translation of 1 Timothy 3:2 says:

“An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money.”

The word for “overseer” (which we at Ohev Yisrael understand to mean “elder”) is ἐπίσκοπον (*episkopos*), whose literal meaning is “superintendent” or “overseer.” Now, we understand that Scripture often speaks in the masculine for simplicity, and is not “hung up” on being politically correct and having to say “he or she,” or “him or her” in each sentence. Nevertheless, it is too much of a stretch to think that when Paul says “husband of one wife,” he also means “wife of one husband.” So, our governing elders and *shamashim* at Ohev are men. This, by the way, is consistent with Ephesians 5:22-24 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 that speak of the husband as being the head of his wife, and Genesis 2:18 and 1 Corinthians 11:9 that speak of woman as having been created to be a helper to man.

So, for these reasons, we do not ordain women as governing elders or *shamashim*, but the Messianic Jewish movement (and yes, Ohev Yisrael as well) has been remiss by not giving sufficient attention, or committing sufficient resources, to raising up women leaders. The result is (1) that fewer women than men receive seminary level training in leadership, teaching, and counseling, (2) that fewer women than men receive leadership internships, and (3) when we need a woman to minister in an appropriate context or in a situation where a man should not minister, we are often hard-pressed to find one who is trained, ready, and available.

Some of our slowness in raising up women leaders is the “chicken and egg” dilemma of not having enough women to train women. But it is also due to an historic misinterpretation of Paul’s writings:

1Corinthians 14:33b-35 (CJB) “As in all the congregations of God's people, let the wives [some translations say “women”] remain silent when the congregation meets; they are certainly not permitted to speak out. Rather, let them remain subordinate, as also the *Torah* says; and if there is something they want to know, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for a woman to speak out in a congregational meeting.”

1Timothy 2:11-14 (CJB) “Let a woman learn in peace, fully submitted; but I do not permit a woman to teach a man or exercise authority over him; rather, she is to remain at peace. For Adam was formed first, then Havah. Also it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman who, on being deceived, became involved in the transgression.”

In these Scriptures, Paul appears to restrict women to a role of total silence in the congregation, thereby forbidding them from any activity, including teaching, which would require public speech. It would further appear from Paul's comment concerning women not exercising "authority over men," that his reason for requiring women to be silent is related to the presence of men.

The "difficulty" with interpreting Paul literally is two-fold. First, it is out of character for Paul who, in other places in Scripture, shows a high regard for women's abilities in ministry. In Romans 16:1, Paul refers to Phaebe as a “*shamash*,” in Romans 16:3, he refers to Priscilla as his “fellow coworker(s) for Messiah Yeshua,” and in Philippians 4:2-3, he refers to Evodia and Syntyche as two women who “have worked hard proclaiming the Good News with me.” Clearly, they are not silent roles that these women have played.

The second difficulty is that interpreting Paul literally conflicts with several other Scriptures that show godly women speaking in public, and also teaching men. In Acts 1:13-14, both men and women are praying together in the upper room as they await the promised comforter; there is no indication that either the women or the men in that room were praying in silently. Also, in explaining the first public occurrence of tongues, in Acts 2:17-18, Peter quotes Joel 2:28-29 (3:1-2), in which the prophet says:

“And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on *My* menservants and on *My* maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. (NKJ)

The inference here is that women will prophesy and will communicate their prophecies, for what is the value of prophecy if it is not spoken?

A reference to both men and women prophesying in public may also be found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 11, verses 4-5a:

“Every man who prays or prophesies wearing something down over his head brings shame to his head, but every woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled brings shame to her head ..” (CJB)

I did not quote that Scripture to discuss head coverings (which is a subject for another day), but rather to demonstrate that women prophesied publicly even in Paul's day. Prophecy is informative, instructive, and often corrective, and therefore its public proclamation constitutes "teaching" to all those who hear it.

We also have examples in Scripture of women teaching men – not authoritatively, but teaching just the same. In Acts 18:24-26 we read of how Aquila and his wife Priscilla taught the Word of God to Apollos:

“Meanwhile, a Jewish man named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent speaker with a thorough knowledge of the *Tanakh*. This man had been informed about the Way of the Lord, and with great spiritual fervor he spoke and taught accurately the facts about Yeshua, but he knew only the immersion of Yochanan. He began to speak out boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the Way of God in fuller detail. (CJB)

That was the same Priscilla to whom Paul referred as his “fellow coworker” in Romans 16:3.

Then, in Psalms 68:11 (68:12), there is a reference to women proclaiming news publicly. It is not treated as such by all English translations, but here are some of the ones that do:

The Complete Jewish Bible: “*Adonai* gives the command; the women with the good news are a mighty army.”

The New American Standard: “The Lord gives the command; The women who proclaim the *good* tidings are a great host:”

The Holy Bible (The Hebrew Publishing Company New York, 1845): "The Lord gave (happy) tidings: they are published by the female messengers, a numerous host."

The Holy Scriptures (The Jewish Publication Society of America , Philadelphia, 1955): "The Lord giveth the word; the women that proclaim the tidings are a great host."

The Writings (The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1982): "The Lord gives a command; the women who bring the news are a great host."

The reference to women in these translations is somewhat hidden, which is probably why several prominent translations do not pick it up. It is due to the Hebrew word הַמְבַּשְׂרוֹת (*hamvashrot*), which is a feminine plural word.

Finally, who can deny that when God created woman to be a helper to man (in Genesis 2:18-24), that part of her role was to give her husband verbal help? And what is verbal help but a mode of teaching?

Well, I have gotten a little academic on you with all of this, but my reason for doing so has been to show you that, throughout biblical history, the role of women among men has not always been one of silence, and that women leaders are valuable and greatly needed. So, where do we begin? As with men, a woman's first and primary leadership role is within the family, and her first duty of leadership is to her children. Scripture instructs children to honor and obey their parents, and this implies a responsibility for parents to be good role models, and leaders of their children:

Exodus 20:12: "Honor your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land which *ADONAI* your God is giving you." (CJB)

Proverbs 1:8: "My son, heed the discipline of your father, and do not abandon the teaching of your mother;" (CJB)

Ephesians 6:1: "Children, what you should do in union with the Lord is obey your parents, for this is right." (CJB)

Colossians 3:20: "Children, obey your parents in everything; for this pleases the Lord." (CJB)

But the woman's responsibility of leadership does not stop with her children, but extends to her husband as well. Now that's a peculiar thing for me to say in view of 1 Corinthians 11:3 that establishes the husband as the head of the wife:

1 Corinthians 11:3: "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is the Messiah, and the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of the Messiah is God." (CJB)

And also Ephesians 5:22-24:

"Wives should submit to their husbands as they do to the Lord; because the husband is head of the wife, just as the Messiah, as head of the Messianic Community, is himself the one who keeps the body safe. Just as the Messianic Community submits to the Messiah, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything." (CJB)

Well, look at it this way. I am Ohev Yisrael's Congregational Leader. If I come to any one of you and ask: "As between you and me, which of us is the leader?" you may be tempted to quickly answer: "You, of course, because you are the congregation's leader." But if you come to me with a recommendation for something I have not thought of, or you tell me something that I did not know, or you correct me when I forget something or do something wrong – who is the leader then? Of course, you are!

And it is that way with husbands and wives as well. You may recall an incident that occurred between Moses and Tziporah that is recounted in Exodus 4:24-26:

"At a lodging-place on the way, *ADONAI* met Moshe and would have killed him, had not Tziporah taken a flintstone and cut off the foreskin of her son. She threw it at his feet, saying, "What a bloody bridegroom you are for me!" But then, God let Moshe be." (CJB)

Who was the leader in that case? Certainly, it was not Moses!

And let's consider, for a moment, the implications of Proverbs 31:10-31 that describes a capable wife. We read in the Scripture that she:

- Procures wool and flax
- Works with her hands

- Purchases fields, & plants vineyards
- Manages the family's business
- Feeds her family
- Supervises servants
- Manufactures clothing
- Handles money
- Gives to charity
- Speaks wisely
- Instructs

Is this not a very high level of leadership?

Now, a woman's call to leadership is not only within her home but outside the home as well, for Scripture gives her a special and unique leadership role in training younger women:

Titus 2:3-5: "Likewise, tell the older women to behave the way people leading a holy life should. They shouldn't be slanderers or slaves to excessive drinking. They should teach what is good, thus training the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to take good care of their homes and submit to their husbands. In this way, God's message will not be brought into disgrace. (CJB)

In its use of the term "older women," the Scripture does not just mean older in age, but rather more mature in the faith. It is hoped and expected that as one becomes older in age, one also matures in the faith, but we know that it is not always so and, therefore, younger women, who are mature, can fulfill this role as well. Women training women is a key area in which our communities need mature, spirit-filled, elder-level women. As a man, I am limited in my ability to disciple a woman, and it would be improper for me to attempt to counsel a woman (in any degree of depth) over an extended period of time. It is not only because of our physical differences, but also because men and women tend to perceive things differently, process information differently, and react to things differently. By the grace and wisdom of God, the ways in which we are different are complementary, which is why God ordained that when a man is properly joined to a wife, the two (in very real ways) become one.

I would be remiss were I to end this message without calling attention to several notable women leaders in the *Tanakh*. There is Aaron's and Moses' sister Miryam

the prophet (Exodus 15:20), there is D'vorah the prophet and judge of Israel (Judges 4:4-5), there is Queen Esther who literally saved the Jewish people through her intervening leadership (Esther), and there is Hulda the prophet (2 Kings 22:14).

To summarize, I have identified our need to raise up more women in ministry, and I have faith that the Lord will show us how to do it. Women who want to be raised up and equipped should let their desires be known, and the Lord will provide the means.

Meanwhile, Ohev will begin, this Fall, to devote one *beit midrash* session each month to a leadership subject. These teachings will, of course, be available to women and men alike. Also, beginning this Fall, we will attempt to organize a beginner's course in biblical counseling, similar to the one we held several years ago. That will also be available to both women and men, and because it has been our general experience that more women than men sign up for counseling training, we want to especially appeal to our men, because we need men counselors as well as women counselors.

But getting back to our subject, which is raising up women for ministry, a way that you can help us do that is to make your own desire for training in ministry be known. If you do, Ohev's elders will discuss it with you, pray with you, and do whatever we can to help you achieve your worthy goal. You should know that there are UMJC and Tikkun funds earmarked for training emerging leaders, both men and women, and we may be able to take advantage of them.

Lord, I pray that this message will inspire our women to be emboldened for ministry, and seek you for how you would have each of them raised up and equipped to serve.