

Vision – Congregational & Personal

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An Ohev member recently asked me: “What is Ohev Yisrael’s vision?” When I heard the question I was momentarily at a loss to answer, and I thought: “What a strange question.” But then I recalled Proverbs 29:18, in which the King James Version states in part:

“Where *there is* no vision, the people perish:”

Could it be, I thought, that the member who asked the question was thinking that the King James translation’s use of the word “vision” was inferring that we as a congregation (and we personally) have to have a defined plan (like a five-year plan) for where we as a congregation are headed? A goal for where we will be in the next – say – year, five years, or ten years? I knew that that is not what the Scripture meant because it is better paraphrased in the Complete Jewish Bible as:

“Without a prophetic vision, the people throw off all restraint;”

And, in fact, the rest of the verse, not often quoted, says:

“but he who keeps *Torah* is happy.”

I thought about it quite a lot since that conversation and wondered: Do all of Ohev’s members know why they are here? We come together to pray every *Shabbat* and every Holy Day, but is there more to our congregational life than that?

Ohev’s web site states:

“We are a congregational home for Jewish believers in *Yeshua* and for Gentile believers called to serve *Messiah* alongside their Jewish brethren.”

What exactly that means, and what the full scope of it is, are what I want to speak about today.

To begin with, Ohev Yisrael is (as are all biblically-established congregations) a family. Most families are comprised of husbands and wives, parents and children, and brothers and sisters; and Ohev Yisrael is as well. I am not speaking of the natural families that make up Ohev – the married couples and children who attend, but rather the family of Ohev itself. The Ohev family has a father; He is our Father in Heaven and is the leader of our family. And the Ohev family has children – not only the youngsters who attend, but all of us. We are all God’s children, and that makes us brothers and sisters to each other. But what about husbands and wives, you ask? Well, Scripture tells us that God is not only the Father of us as individuals, but that He is the Husband of us corporately. In Isaiah 54:5 we read:

“For your husband is your Maker, *ADONAI-Tzva'ot* is his name.”

And speaking of Israel, we read in Hosea 2:18a:

“On that day,” says *ADONAI* “you will call me *Ishi* [My Husband] ..”

Now, imagine yourself returning home today and asking your husband or your wife or your father or your mother: “What is the vision of our family?” You are likely to be met with a blank stare and a question like: “What do you mean by that? We are a family and our vision is to stay that way.” Still, there is something deeper that could be said, that has to do with Proverbs 29:18 and also with our congregation’s statement of purpose.

Like all families, Ohev Yisrael is a protective and nurturing unit and, like our natural families, it has a family head (under God) that is its congregational leader assisted by elders. And like our natural families, each member of Ohev has (or should have) specially assigned duties. Yes, even congregations have to take out the garbage, but there are other assigned duties as well, such as manning the office; setting up chairs for the *Shabbat* service; serving meals – the *Shulchan Adonai* and the *Oneg Shabbat* for example. Also, participating in worship, leading the *Sh’ma*, reading Scripture, etc.

And there are non-assigned duties in most families such as bandaging and praying over boo-boos (at Ohev we call it pastoral care or counseling). And there is seeing to the children’s upbringing and education (At Ohev we call it discipleship and – well – education).

“Ahh,” says one of our teen-age members (thinking he has got me), “your analogy to the natural family breaks down in that the Ohev family does not bear children.” “*Au contraire*,” I say to him (I throw in a little French to impress him). “We do bear children if we are obedient to Yeshua’s instructions to His disciples in Matthew 28:19, which says:

“Therefore, go and make people from all nations into *talmidim*, [disciples] immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the *Ruach HaKodesh*,”

Making disciples from unbelievers is like bearing children because it gives them life. John 3:16 says of Yeshua’s disciples that:

“.. everyone who trusts in him may have eternal life ..”

And Yeshua said to Nicodemus in John 3:3-6:

“‘I tell you that unless a person is born again from above, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.’ Nakdimon [Nicodemus] said to him, “How can a grown man be 'born'? Can he go back into his mother's womb and be born a second time?” Yeshua answered, “Yes, indeed, I tell you that unless a person is born from water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. What is born from the flesh is flesh, and what is born from the Spirit is spirit.”

Also, in 1 Peter 1:23 we read:

“You have been born again not from some seed that will decay, but from one that cannot decay, through the living Word of God that lasts forever.”

So, by our congregation seeking to make disciples of Yeshua among both Jews and non-Jews, Ohev Yisrael does bear children because we lead those who will receive the truth of Yeshua, from a life that has an end, to a newly born life with God that is eternal. So, does Ohev Yisrael have a corporate vision? I think of us as having a vision to remain and improve as a family of Messianic believers – not a vision for becoming something in the future that we are not at the present. And as a family, we rely upon Scripture and the leading of the Holy Spirit to guide us in bring up our children – God’s children – who are all of us that have chosen to make Ohev our congregation. Our statement on our web site says that we are “a home,” and that is exactly what we are.

Now that doesn’t mean that we have no aspirations to expand and grow – to add new members, enlarge our facilities and increase our ministry capabilities. We certainly do have those desires, and it appears that Fairfax County has decided to help us out by condemning our upstairs space so that we will soon have to move elsewhere. But, since as a family we want to improve, let’s explore how we can do that.

To begin with, the dynamics within all successful families are a two-way street. Parents are charged with bring up their children, and children are charged with honoring their parents and obeying them. To parents,
Proverbs 22:6 says:

“Train a child in the way he [should] go; and, even when old, he will not swerve from it.”

And Ephesians 6:4 says:

“Fathers, don’t irritate your children and make them resentful; instead, raise them with the Lord’s kind of discipline and guidance.”

Those are the responsibilities of parents, but children have their responsibilities as well. Most important, they are charged with respecting, obeying, and honoring their parents, for we read in Ephesians 6:1-2:

“Children, what you should do in union with the Lord is obey your parents, for this is right. Honor your father and mother”- this is the first commandment that embodies a promise-“

And in Colossians 3:20 we read:

“Children, obey your parents in everything; for this pleases the Lord.”

But we are speaking here about congregations, so how do these natural family responsibilities translate to congregational family responsibilities? Well, as to a congregation’s fathers (its leaders), we read in Acts 20:28-29:

“Watch out for yourselves, and for all the flock in which the *Ruach HaKodesh* has placed you as leaders, to shepherd God's Messianic community, which he won for himself at the cost of his own Son's blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you; and they won't spare the flock.”

And in 1Peter 5:1-3 we read:

“Therefore, I urge the congregation leaders among you, as a fellow-leader and witness to the Messiah's sufferings, as well as a sharer in the glory to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is in your care, exercising oversight not out of constraint, but willingly, as God wants; and not out of a desire for dishonest gain, but with enthusiasm; also not as *machers* [i.e. movers and shakers] domineering over those in your care, but as people who become examples to the flock.”

So, congregational fathers – elders and pastors – are responsible for protecting the congregation's children (who are its members), and also for leading them in godliness and for providing oversight. And, in the same way as children in natural families have responsibilities to their parents, so do a congregation's children (who are its members) to their congregational parents, for Hebrews 13:7 says:

“Remember your leaders, those who spoke God's message to you. Reflect on the results of their way of life, and imitate their trust-:

And Hebrews 13:17 follows up with:

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your lives, as people who will have to render an account. So make it a task of joy for them, not one of groaning; for that is of no advantage to you.”

But there is more. You recall that Proverbs 22:6 that says to natural parents:

“Train a child in the way he [should] go; and, even when old, he will not swerve from it.”

Well, it applies as well to congregational parents and congregational children, for we read in Ephesians 4:11-14:

“Furthermore, he gave some people as emissaries, some as prophets, some as proclaimers of the Good News, and some as shepherds and teachers. “Their task is to equip God's people for the work of service that builds the body of the Messiah, until we all arrive at the unity implied by trusting and knowing the Son of God, at full manhood, at the standard of maturity set by the Messiah's perfection. We will then no longer be infants tossed about by the waves and blown along by every wind of teaching, at the mercy of people clever in devising ways to deceive.

“We will then no longer be infants,” the Scripture says, so part of congregational family life involves growing up in the Lord, and our pastoral leaders have been put here to equip us for

adulthood. Borrowing from the United States Army's motto, God wants us to "be all that we can be," and our congregational leaders want to help us be just that.

I began this message by a congregant asking me: "What is Ohev Yisrael's vision?" Well, according to the Scriptures we have just read, the question should rather have been directed to each Ohev member, and each member should be asking him or herself: "What is my vision for where God wants me to be in the future?" Our Ohev family is here to help us receive and clarify our respective visions and to help us achieve them. However, if we want our congregation's help, we have to make our desires known.

Do we want to learn more about the Scriptures? Part of what Ohev has to offer are our weekly messages, our *bet midrash* teachings, and the teachings given in our mid-week *chavurot*. But we have other things to offer as well, such as personal mentoring and formal coursework for which any of us can sign up online at a variety of schools – some free and some not free. Perhaps we are troubled about something or are going through a difficult season in our lives. We have trained counselors among our leaders who can help us or can refer us to counselors outside of Ohev. Perhaps there is an area in which we would like to serve but have not been asked. If we make our desire known, Ohev will train us, and try to place us where we are best suited. Perhaps we have encountered an emergency and need financial help. Ohev maintains a modest benevolence fund for just such a purpose, and we have experts among us who can guide us in budgeting and in other financial skills. These are things that our congregation can give to us! But borrowing from our former national rabbi John F. Kennedy (with a touch of poetic license): "Ask not what others can give to us, but what we can give to others."

Ephesians 4:12 that I previously read to you concerning our leaders, states:

"Their task is to equip God's people for the work of service that builds the body of the Messiah,"

And that brings me to the last part of my message, but a part that is extremely important because it has to do with what God would have us give after we receive. Reading from Matthew 28, verses 16-20:

"So the eleven *talmidim* [disciples] went to the hill in the Galil where Yeshua had told them to go. When they saw him, they prostrated themselves before him; but some hesitated. Yeshua came and talked with them. He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make people from all nations into *talmidim* [disciples], immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the *Ruach HaKodesh*, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember! I will be with you always, yes, even until the end of the age."

We can see by this Scripture that the work of the evangelist and of the discipler of others is ours if we are disciples of Yeshua, and the work of our elders, *shamashim*, and gift ministers, is to equip us, as individuals, for the service of ministry. So, each of us must ask our self: "Does the vision I believe that I have include ministering to others?" If it does not, the vision is not the one that God gave us, and we need to seek Him for the correct one. From time to time, Ohev Yisrael

will conduct outreach events, but the main responsibility for reaching out to others – for bringing unbelievers into the fold and starting them on a path of discipleship – that responsibility lies at our feet as individual members.

I pray that the truth of this message be received, remembered, and acted upon by all who have heard it.