

# Vision, Leadership & Outreach

by Michael Rudolph

Delivered to Ohev Yisrael August 6, 2011

Since I became Ohev's Congregational Leader about six year ago, several Ohev members approached me with the same question which was: "What is Ohev's vision?" They clarified their use of the word "vision" by asking: "Where are we going as a congregation?" Now I found this a little strange because I didn't understand why they thought we should be "going" somewhere. Certainly, there were things about Ohev that I thought could use change or improvement and I was willing to list them, but a vision for "going somewhere?" I didn't get it, so my standard answer was something like: "I like Ohev the way it is, so look around you. My vision for Ohev is pretty much what you see!" I could tell that, in each of these encounters, the person to whom I was speaking didn't find my answer very satisfying.

Yesterday, it happened again. A dear sister member asked me the same question after opining that Ohev's "Vision Statement" in our *Shabbat* Bulletins is really a statement of mission rather than of vision. To save you the trouble of looking for it, here is what it says:

"Providing a congregational home for Jewish believers in Yeshua and for believing Gentiles called to serve Messiah within the Messianic Jewish Community."

At first, I didn't understand why she did not consider it a vision statement, and when I asked her she responded that it professed who we are rather than where we are going. There it was again: The question "Where are we going?" Well, I decided to probe further, so I asked her why she thought we had to go somewhere. I acknowledged that our congregation needs improvement in a number of areas, but that we are multi-faceted and are stronger than many Messianic Jewish congregations in much of what we do. Her response, if I understand it correctly, was that she does not often hear our leaders communicate what they want from congregants in the way of participating in programs and activities that promote a direction for where the "congregation is going." She felt, therefore, that the congregation does not have a clear vision, and is therefore not moving.

There were those words again, and truly I had not previously focused on this matter of vision and movement, but at least I now knew how the words were being used. The inquiring member was assuming that whatever Ohev was now, it ought to progress to something else in the future; it ought to have some kind of defining goal. I disagreed and explained myself in a way that may or may not have satisfied the sister, and later thought that perhaps I ought to raise the subject here today for you all to hear and consider.

At the outset, let me address part of a verse of Scripture on vision that I have heard wrongly construed as meaning "vision for the future;" it is Proverbs 29:18 that in the King James Version says:

*"Where there is no vision, the people perish ..."*

Well, if the Scripture is saying that we have to have a visional goal for the future, then we are on the road to perishing as a congregation if we do not have one, and of course that is a terrible situation. But that is not at all what the Scripture means. To understand its true meaning, look at translations other than the King James; for example:

New King James Version

*“Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint ...”*

Complete Jewish Bible

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

Clearly Proverbs 29:18 is not talking about a vision for the future; in fact it isn't talking about a single vision at all and isn't putting emphasis on the future either. Rather, it is talking about knowing God's will through the Holy Spirit. It could have implications for the future, but mainly it is talking about connecting to God's will in the present.

In my opinion, declaring some goal as a congregational vision is too biblically narrow unless the vision is something broad and general like continually receiving guidance from the Holy Spirit. A godly congregation, whether it is traditional Jewish, Messianic Jewish, or Christian, should not limit itself to a single defining goal or even to a few goals. Scripture is clear that congregations have a broad assortment of both in-reach and out-reach responsibilities. In-reach responsibilities include teaching, maturing disciples, praying for the sick and needy, caring for widows and orphans, resolving disputes among the brethren, and so on. The out-reach ones include preaching God's Word, making and immersing new disciples, demonstrating God's power through the laying on of hands, resolving inter-congregational disputes, and so on.

I mentioned that my inquiring congregant was a bit unsettled by not often hearing our leaders communicate what they want congregants to do in the way of following their lead in programs and activities. Please permit me a few minutes to speak about that. Some of us come from churches, Messianic congregations, or even businesses, where the leaders typically initiate programs and call for the rank and file to implement them. I remember years ago when the leaders of Beth Messiah tried to organize its members into teams to make door-to-door visits in the neighborhood in an effort to interest people in the Gospel. It was a harder sell to the congregants than to the neighbors; it lasted awhile but finally petered out. Then there was the 6:30 AM prayer expectation for leaders at all levels. There were many good soldiers that showed up, but their hearts were not in it and it didn't last.

What I took away from experiences such as those was that people will do what they believe they are called to by God, but not what someone else tells them they are called to. So when I became pastor of Ahavat Yeshua, I took very seriously the lesson of Ephesians 4:11-12 that says:

*“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,..”*

That is the principle and the style of leadership I brought to Ohev. Yes, you will see me participate in hands-on ministry, but I consider that my main task – the one God sent me here for – is to equip others to do the work of the ministry from teaching, to preaching, to pastoring, to interceding in prayer, to managing the sound system, to serving tables at the *oneg*. To take best advantage of that kind of leadership, what you have to do is pray and ask God to reveal to you the main gifts He has given you, and how you should use them to serve others. When you think you know, tell me or one of the other elders, and we will join you in further discerning it, and we will try to help you fulfill your calling. The result of this should be a congregation that has lots of diverse and exciting things going on, each led by a congregant or a team of congregants who are highly motivated and gifted, and not necessarily its ordained leaders. And by the way, there is no age limitation in this approach, so the youth who are hearing this message should take note and realize that they can ask and receive similar help to fulfill what God may be calling each of them to as well.

.....

Now I want to change subjects. A few weeks ago, Jeff Bernstein addressed us at the Tikkun Leader's Institute on the subject of outreach. His message was excellent, and it reminded me that at Ohev (as at most Messianic Jewish congregations) outreach to both the Jewish people and the Gentile nations is among our weakest ministries. When I drove back from Baltimore at the end of the day, I resolved to share with Ohev's members who were not there, three things in particular that Jeff emphasized; they were (1) that our outreach should be first to the Jew and then to the Gentiles, with equal effort given to both; (2) that our congregation needs to promote outreach as the lifestyle of its individual members – mostly conducted privately rather than through congregational programs; and (3) that outreach is best accomplished by pairs of people ministering two by two.

I will say a few words about the third item and then come back to the first two. The principle of doing outreach two-by-two is documented in the New Covenant Scriptures where we read:

Mark 6:7-13: *“Yeshua summoned the Twelve and started sending them out in pairs, giving them authority over the unclean spirits. He instructed them, “Take nothing for your trip except a walking stick - no bread, no pack, no money in your belt. Wear shoes but not an extra shirt. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place; and if the people of some place will not welcome you, and they refuse to hear you, then, as you leave, shake the dust off your feet as a warning to them.” So they set out and preached that people should turn from sin to God, they expelled many demons, and they anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.”*

Luke 10:1-3: *“After this, the Lord appointed seventy other talmidim and sent them on ahead in pairs to every town and place where he himself was about to go. He said to them, “To be sure, there is a large harvest. But there are few workers. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the Harvest that he speed workers out to gather in his harvest. Get going now, but pay attention! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.”*

The value of ministering outreach in pairs is for support and accountability. As the Luke Scripture suggests, doing outreach makes us vulnerable like “lambs among wolves.” Having a partner to accompany us motivates us, helps to protect us, and serves to hold us accountable – not only for how we conduct ourselves in ministry, but for getting us out of our warm beds to do ministry at all.

Second, what Jeff meant by developing outreach as a lifestyle is that part of each believer’s discipleship experience should include training and regular practice in some form of outreach – that is, some form of service or ministry to people who are not part of one’s family or congregation. This can include preaching the “Good News” of Messiah in public parks, conducting Bible studies at work, volunteering in hospitals, prisons, or old-age homes, preparing meals in soup kitchens, and so on. Giving such service should also be modeled by parents as they “*train a (their) child in the way he [should] go; and (so that) even when old, he will not swerve from it* (Proverbs 22:6). Over time, we develop a sense of identity that is so connected to serving others that we wake up each morning asking God: “Okay, Lord, what do you have for me to do for you today?” Then, for the rest of the day, we walk in awareness and expectation that God will bring across our paths, people and situations that cry out for our help.

Finally, I want to talk about Jeff’s urging that our outreach should be to the Jew first, and then to the Gentiles. This is consistent with Paul’s words from the Book of Romans:

*Romans 1:16: “For I am not ashamed of the Good News, since it is God’s powerful means of bringing salvation to everyone who keeps on trusting, to the Jew especially, but equally to the Gentile.”*

*Romans 2:9-11: “Yes, he will pay back misery and anguish to every human being who does evil, to the Jew first, then to the Gentile; but glory and honor and shalom to everyone who keeps doing what is good, to the Jew first, then to the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism.”*

Since hearing Jeff’s message, I have had a much better idea of why it is “first to the Jew.” It is because the Jews are those to whom the Covenants and resulting priestly responsibilities to the Gentile nations was given. It began with Abraham’s encounter with God that we can read about in Genesis chapters 12, 17, 22, 26, and 28, and was confirmed and continued in the Sinai Covenant. We read in Exodus 19:3-6 :

*“Moshe went up to God, and ADONAI called to him from the mountain: ‘Here is what you are to say to the household of Ya’akov, to tell the people of Isra’el: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you will be a kingdom of cohanim for me, a nation set apart.’ These are the words you are to speak to the people of Isra’el.’”*

“Cohanim” are, of course priests, so we see that God’s purpose for blessing Abraham was not merely a reward for his faith and obedience. It was to define a people – the Jewish People – through whom God could work to bring the rest of the world (the Gentile world) to Him. Romans 3:1-2 and Romans 9:1-5 clarify this covenantal responsibility by explaining:

*“Then what advantage has the Jew? What is the value of being circumcised? Much in every way! In the first place, the Jews were entrusted with the very words of God.”*

*“I am speaking the truth - as one who belongs to the Messiah, I do not lie; and also bearing witness is my conscience, governed by the Ruach HaKodesh: my grief is so great, the pain in my heart so constant, that I could wish myself actually under God's curse and separated from the Messiah, if it would help my brothers, my own flesh and blood, the people of Isra'el! They were made God's children, the Sh'khinah has been with them, the covenants are theirs, likewise the giving of the Torah, the Temple service and the promises; the Patriarchs are theirs; and from them, as far as his physical descent is concerned, came the Messiah, who is over all. Praised be ADONAI for ever! Amen.”*

You see, ministry must be to the Jews first – not because God prefers Jews over Gentiles – but because Jews comprise a priestly nation and must be brought to the place where they are able to perform their priestly duties of bringing God’s blessings to the Gentile nations of the world. This is the same principle that we read about in Leviticus 16:3-6 where Aaron the High Priest had to conduct a sacrifice for himself and his family before he could act as a priest for others on *Yom Kippur*:

*“Here is how Aharon is to enter the Holy Place: with a young bull as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering. He is to put on the holy linen tunic, have the linen shorts next to his bare flesh, have the linen sash wrapped around him, and be wearing the linen turban - they are the holy garments. He is to bathe his body in water and put them on. He is to take from the community of the people of Isra'el two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering. Aharon is to present the bull for the sin offering which is for himself and make atonement for himself and his household.”*

If, relying on 1 Peter 2:1-12, it is true that New Covenant Gentile believers in Yeshua become priests of God as well, it is nevertheless not a priesthood that is imparted to them directly as in the case of the Jews, but rather indirectly through grafting into the Jewish-owned olive tree that is described in Romans 11.

Finally, I want to address Matthew 28:16-20 (there are parallel Scriptures in the other Gospel books) that is often referred to as “the Great Commission:”

*“So the eleven talmidim 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, 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.'"*

This is not only a "Great Commission," it is a priestly commission, and a Jewish commission, intended to put Israel's priesthood to work fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 49:5-6:

*"So now ADONAI says - he formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Ya'akov back to him, to have Isra'el gathered to him, so that I will be honored in the sight of ADONAI, my God having become my strength - he has said, 'It is not enough that you are merely my servant to raise up the tribes of Ya'akov and restore the offspring of Isra'el. I will also make you a light to the nations, so my salvation can spread to the ends of the earth.'"*

I thank *HaShem* for clarifying the importance of our embracing lifestyles of outreach to the Jew first, but also to the Gentile, in fulfillment of our Jewish responsibility to be a "kingdom of priests."