

Well, I want to lead you into a discussion of what I feel are seven features of biblical encouragement, but first, we need to understand what encouragement is and how it is different from instruction. Encouragement is primarily that function of a community which gives its members a sense of belonging, kind of like the centrifugal force which holds us together, and which, eventually magnetizes each of us so that at the deepest gut level of our being, we are drawn to each other spiritually. This magnetism is formed by a spiritual electrical field, which is the flow of His love in and through each of us, in a constant exchange of energy which is increased by every new member, and which is, sadly decreased by departure of any member.

How is your love field doing this morning? How magnetically charged are we as a community? In Him, we all have this magnetic energy field, but it is only as we get together and let it flow through us that it builds, and gathers the momentum we need to flourish, to grow and to shine, so that people who are seeking for the L-rd will be drawn into our midst by the community magnetic pull we exert as spiritually charged believers. Now this charge is not to be confused with the static electricity of the world, which is what I want to talk to you briefly about.

I have attended pep talk sessions, both in the world and in the faith, where people tried to convince me that I had a deep reservoir of dynamic personal power, waiting to be released by a series of bizarre and expensive motivational techniques. I liken this approach to encouragement to the hyperventilation which spectators sometimes experience at sporting events, or to bipolar episodes which are caused by trauma or uneven brain chemistry. There is lot's of yelling and heavy breathing and an elevated level of excitement, which may be appropriate for soldiers and athletes, but is not really a form of sustainable encouragement. It is a form of not so subtle manipulation to push people beyond their normal limits, instead of learning to grow within them and develop the strengths which will allow our maximum potential to flower and become a finely tuned instrument for His kingdom. Oops, I think I just defined encouragement.

Limits are a kind of potential, which tell us how much we can do and how far we can go. Encouragement is the recognition that we are a community of limited people, whose collective potential belongs to each member and is energized by what each member contributes and receives.

It increases our community grip on three things: on our faith, on His Word and on each other. It is our spiritual connection to each other where we take the limitations of our personal and collective situations, with all of their complications, all of their advantages, tensions and details and where we work out three things. First of all, we design a community approach to spirituality – which for B'nai Chayim is outlined in our Constitution. Secondly we design strategies and responses to all and any of the situations which we face personally and corporately, so that this community approach is integrated into our lives as a means to increase our spiritual magnetic field.

And lastly we give each other the time, the space and the accountability so that the final product of all and everything we are working through, both as individuals and as a community, increases our collective grip on eternity and on the spiritual principles of His Word. In other words, encouragement is where we learn to pour ourselves into each other and learn to keep each other spiritually focused – which is another way of saying to drive each other nuts redemptively, every time one of us or all of us depart from the high calling of our L-rd through His Word.

Encouragement is the process where we organize and focus our lives so that the reality of our inner spirituality and our corporate spirituality links up with the life issues we are all facing, in a way that allows His presence to pour through our reactions as a sweet fragrance, as a fresh wind into a lost and dying world. It is the strength of this flowing which is the measure of how well His presence really dwells in us and through us. It begins with our individual walk with Him and matures into our corporate spiritual life, where we gather as a dynamic magnetic field.

Encouragement is also the living liturgy where our praise expresses the transforming power of His love to turn our lives from the mundane into the marvellous, because we have discovered that He is able to teach us how to overcome and live as more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37-39). Let me close by briefly examining seven features of this community encouragement so that we can refresh our community understanding of what it is we are about as a community, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

First of all, **encouragement** is the recognition we give each other, you know the greeting which acknowledges a community member and differentiates between community members and strangers. We want B'nai Chayim to always be a place where everybody knows your name, even without getting a liquor licence. Next is extending **acceptance** to each other, which is the confirmation that each Shabbat, that each time we are together, that we are in the right place, and belong as members and not as visitors. Part of this belonging is the next feature, which is the **approval** we extend to one another. This does not mean we always agree with everything each of us does or says, but is how we make each other feel that we are acceptable people who are valuable members of a caring community of praise.

This approval has the potential to grow into **friendship**, which is that double edged sword of involvement where we become part of each other's lives. This involvement is a mutual process where we eventually learn to enjoy each other and provide and receive the care which the growing resources of our community enable us to access. However, it is only as we move into this level of personal intimacy, called friendship, where we can meaningfully provide the last three features of encouragement. Once we learn what we are about we can provide each other with the **praise** we need so that people can see that we are trying our best and actually getting somewhere spiritually.

A balancing feature of this praise is the **accountability** we need to learn to extend to one another, where instead of flattery and criticism, we provide each other with productive feed back which says well done, when we succeed. It also says not yet when we are trying, and who do you think you're kidding when we flounder and wander away from our mandate as Messianic believers, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. Finally, it extends **forgiveness** so that when we hurt each other, or when we disappoint one another, we heal and grow closer together. None of us is perfect, but all of us are called to mature to our maximum potential.

When we instruct one another, we hold up the model of the Scriptures as a blue print for our lives, individually and corporately. When we encourage one another, we provide the community context where the principles of this blue print are integrated into our lives by the strategies for living which we develop and which we maintain. Wisdom is that which creatively and consistently seeks to connect our lives with His word and with each other, so that our magnetic field grows and attracts other people hungry for the kind of spiritual reality we are working out among ourselves. Let us grow in our ability to provide spiritual encouragement in this spiritually unreliable world. How's your spiritual magnetic field doing today? Let's pray.