

11 Kislev, 5764 (Dec. 6, 2003) **A Messianic Jewish Approach to  
Community** J. M. Terrett

**Volunteer (Willing) Rev. 3:20; Matt. 11:28-  
30**

**(Mitzvoth, Tzedakah, not grudgingly – Deut. 30:19, 20)**

<b>Vayetze</b>	<b>And He Went Out</b>
Torah:	Gen. 28:10-32:2(3)
Haftarah:	Hos. 11:7-14:9(10)
Brit Chadashah:	John 1:19-51

Concepts:

1. Volunteerism is based on accepted conditions and trust
2. Volunteerism implies ownership and commitment
3. Will power is not the same as feeling like doing something

Introduction

Working with volunteers can be the most satisfying and the most annoying experience our society has to offer. People love to help, and often are willing to expend a great deal of time and energy participating in what amounts to unpaid labour. The problem is twofold. First of all, the wages people expect from this kind of involvement is **appreciation**, and many who volunteer, feel very underpaid. Secondly, there is a perception that unpaid participation does not require the same level of accountability, and should be carried on as each individual volunteer sees fit. So, sometimes those who work with volunteers are left with people who do not expect to be held to a very high standard of performance, but yet who expect a high degree of recognition for their effort, versus their performance.

In a faith setting, this is often compounded when people feel a calling to do a certain task, and are convinced that this calling will show them how things should be done. If there is a perceived dissatisfaction, then the volunteer may disappear back into the woodwork, under the guise of "receiving a calling to go elsewhere". This is obviously a very sensitive issue, and as we discuss the three principles I have mentioned, I want to help B'nai Chayim volunteers to both feel very appreciated, and to be held to a reasonable standard of performance.

What we do in the L-rd, and especially for each other in our community involvement, says a lot about our walk with the L-rd in the work-a-day world, and also provides us with an opportunity to exercise the heart lessons the L-rd is teaching us in an environment of **mutual accountability**. That is to say, we are all co-labourers in Him and we want to shine first and best together: John 13:34, 35 and Rom. 12:9, 10. However there is a difference between a volunteer commitment and a clergy commitment. What is it?

Church growth specialists stipulate that for a congregation to be healthy, unpaid volunteers should not be required or allowed to work for the congregation more than eight hours a week, including service times. There are three reasons for this. First of all enough time must be given to the earning of a living, so that a reasonable financial contribution can be made to the community. Second of all, personal needs, beyond work, require time, and if too much time is spent volunteering, these needs will become neglected and the person's quality of life will suffer. Third, in the Bible Israel was an agricultural community, and the only full time people were to be the leaders, both secular and spiritual (I Cor. 9:14).

Now, as the spiritual leader, I want to model volunteerism, even though I am a paid employee, and here's the rub. Clergy are often expected to be on call 24/7 and are expected to volunteer to perform tasks which may require them to wait on tables more than wait upon the L-rd and the spiritual needs of the flock. I need to learn when to say no sometimes as part of the example I set.

In my sermon this morning, I want to expand on a **community understanding of volunteerism**, from a Messianic Jewish perspective, so that as we decide how best to express our commitment to the various tasks and ministries of our volunteer community, we will be able to do it willingly, with all of our heart, as unto the L-rd and not as unto men – without either neglecting the valid needs of our families or disappearing back into the woodwork when we feel unappreciated and asked to perform our tasks according to established standards. And in this task we all need pray and lots of grace. Let's look at the first principle.

Volunteerism is based on accepted conditions and trust.

And here we have an interesting **perceptual difficulty**. Israel was asked to choose the L-rd according to the conditions of His covenant, and yet that choosing had to be both willing and acceptable to the conditions established by the L-rd. We know that our eternal destiny will be based on the lifestyle choices we make, so in a very real sense, what choice do we have? It is like saying, look here are two choices, one will help you, the other will kill you, but you have to make up your own mind. And yet people will often make self destructive choices – go figure.

Here I want to speak to the nature of willing, and of volunteering. It is not a one time event, with irrevocable consequences. It is an understanding of how our hearts and minds work, and accepting the fact that **in the place of instinct, G-d gave us free will**. Even in the performance of habitual activities, we are still choosing. When I lost 70 pounds, it was not only an event which occurred last year. It is a daily decision to watch what I eat and to go to the gym.

When the L-rd delivered Israel from Egypt, it was in response to a **community request**, and no one was forced to leave Egypt. Right from the beginning, the L-rd stipulated His conditions, one of which was trust. Here is one of the biggest apparent contradictions of the Gospel, **we are required to choose**, and thus are **obligated to be willing**. How fair is that? Eccl. 3:11 speaks of our desire to know everything, which shall never be satisfied in this life. Prov. 27:20 says the same thing. *Why do we have to choose, if what we choose can be used against us?* Not an easy question, but one with a special kind of answer.

We are asked to trust the L-rd and He only requires **greater degrees of willingness** from those whose experience has taught them a **greater degree of trust** (Ps. 34:8, verse 9 in French) The choice Israel was presented with in Deut. 30: 19, 20 did not occur in a vacuum or without a context of preparation. G-d showed Himself able to deliver them from Egypt, and to provide for their needs in the desert. **The next stage involved a higher degree of voluntary trust, based on an experience, which lead naturally to a lifestyle of greater obedience.**

What we believe about G-d has eternal consequences, and how we respond to these beliefs, also has eternal consequences. We are called to **voluntarily commit** to Him, and to voluntarily commit to each other, based on acquired trust. If we are not trustworthy, we have a double problem, which comes with an interesting solution – something about a millstone and the depths of some sea... I am not saying that unless all of us get highly involved in B'nai Chayim, we are going to be judged and condemned by G-d. *I am saying that a high degree of involvement in a trustworthy community, by trustworthy people is a non-negotiable prerequisite of walking with the L-rd – and the sword cuts both ways.* Let's move on to the second principle.

Volunteerism implies ownership and commitment.

We are building a team which is responsible to itself, and which is prepared to nurture itself – not indulge, spoil or beat itself up. We must follow the following process, if we are to build and to maintain a biblical community of believers, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. First, we must recognize the Bible as our **final authority**, our **bill of rights** and **constitution**. Second of all, we must agree on what that means for us in the local context which we find ourselves in. And finally, we must maintain that fascinating and elusive essential ingredient of our community participation – we must be willing and obedient, and it must be voluntary. Which leads me to my third and final concept.

Will power is not the same as feeling like doing something.

As your spiritual leader and rabbi, I must confess that I do not always feel like doing the things which my ministry mandate calls me to perform. I do not wait until I feel like picking up my Bible, in order to read and to pray. I have made a commitment to a lifestyle, and while I may not always be successful in my performance of that lifestyle, *my will is willing, even when my feelings do not feel the same way.*

As a young believer, I was under the mistaken impression that as I grew in the L-rd, my feelings would somehow cause me to stop wanting to sin, and that I would grow into this perfect saint, always full of good will and the great desire to walk with the L-rd 24/7. Well, I am learning that in this life, it ain't gonna happen. In the L-rd, our need to choose never goes away, and our feelings remain an annoying mixture of charnel and spiritual, untamed and untameable. So what do we do? How does a frontal lobotomy sound? The church father Origen took the words of our L-rd literally when it came to cutting off any member which caused offence, and consequently, and fortunately did not produce any descendants who would recommend the same senseless solution.

**We are the temple of the living G-d, which is maintained by the spirituality we practice and the willingness we maintain.** As your rabbi, this applies very strongly to me, because I have a calling. If I fulfill it willingly, it is a good thing. If not, boy am I in trouble. I am required to be willing, which means at least three things, and I will close with this as we move onto the L-rd's Table.

**First of all**, I must maintain a spirituality which based on **choices I willingly make**, both in the area of **obedience** and of **repentance**. **Second of all**, I must clearly distinguish between what I feel and what I decide. I am called to decide, and to let my feelings catch up. When they do not catch up, there is a problem. Either my choices are wrong, or there is something inside me which needs to be dealt with, in order for my choices to produce the drive which will power my spirituality, and keep my feelings in check.

I may go through experiences where my trust is challenged, and where I am wounded, abandoned and messed around. Big deal, He never promised us a rose garden, only a **guided journey home**. His goodness and mercy will accompany us through the valley of the shadow of death. So, **third of all**, It is our job to move through the valley and not get stuck in it. Beyond the pain I may absorb along the way, I can also be overwhelmed at times and I can be deceived and rebellious as well. My job is to recover. How? **(1) I must remain willing. (2) this willingness must be expressed through obedience.** And finally, whenever this obedience or this willing trust falter, **(3) I must repent, return, and recover.** *The only personal reality about any one of us, at any stage of our lives which reality matters for eternity is our spirituality.* Whenever we cease to willingly trust and to willingly obey, we start to rot and to decay.

Be willing to become involved in and committed to the life of your community to the best of your ability, without neglecting the needs of your career or your family. This will mean different things for each of us, depending what is happening in our lives, and on the particular stage of our life. But a voluntary, willing commitment to our community in the L-rd is an essential part of the trust and obedience we are called to maintain, especially in the Messianic Jewish community we are building, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. Lets pray.