

Jan. 24 (D) Sharing the Light: Intrusive Proselytization

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Torah: Ex. 6:2-9:35
Haftarah: (Ez. 28:25-28:21) (Is. 66:1-24)
Brit Chadashah: Rev. 16:1-21

In this series, I have been talking to you about sharing the light, and I wanted you to understand the most effective way of sharing your faith biblically, for maximum results. If we learn to do things properly, then we don't have to keep doing them over and over again, until we somehow get it right by accident.

When I was teaching a course on Evangelism and Church Growth, I came across some very interesting statistics about the most effective approach to sharing our faith, and it had to do with building personal relationships. In the eighties, people from the churches of a large evangelical denomination who were not raised in church were asked why they had become involved with the churches of this particular fellowship. Their answers were collected and the results were sent to all the ministers in that fellowship. Here are some of the main reasons which people gave.

80%	I was invited to church by a friend
4%	I came through Sunday School programs
4 %	I attended a Vacation Bible School
5%	I came because of a Pastoral Visit
3%	I heard about the church of various forms of advertising
2 %	I responded during an Evangelistic Crusade
1.5 %	I came through Door to Door Evangelism
<u>0.5%</u>	I was reached by Literature Evangelism
100%	

The interesting thing about these statistics is that they showed that the top four reasons why outsiders joined a church had to do with personal contact. The fifth highest reason involved advertising, and in our increasingly internet conscious age, the number who may get involved with a religious community this way may be slightly higher. Only 4% became involved in these churches through formal presentations of the Gospel which did not involve a prior personal relationship.

The point I am trying to make is that the most effective way of sharing our faith involves outreach to our friends. To me this would suggest that we should be expending most of our energy with what is the most effective form of outreach, which is making friends and sharing with our friends and not looking for newer and more creative ways of making formal presentations of the Gospel to strangers. This morning I want to talk to you about one of the most unfortunate ways of using a formal approach to share your faith with strangers - intrusive proselytization.

That is quite an ominous sounding couple of words. It means *sharing your faith with people you don't really know and who are not really interested in hearing what you have to say* – sort of like intruding into their lives, without a proper invitation, like a door to door salesman and trying to share your faith with them through an aggressive "religious" sales pitch.

This form of sharing remains popular with various religious fringe groups who knock on our doors and try to engage strangers in a religious dialogue. Even there, when these groups come knocking, I am willing to bet that most of the results they have are with people with whom they succeed in establishing a personal relationship.

Now right away some of my more enthusiastic evangelical friends would accuse me of lacking in zeal, and not really having a desire to save souls. They use verses out of context like I Cor. 9:22 (I am all things to all men that by all means I may save some) and 2 Tim. 4:2 (preach the Word, be persistent whether the time is favourable or not) to justify a combative, aggressive approach to sharing their faith. Like our calling is being grumpy and yelling at people for Jesus.

In I Cor. 9:22, Rav Sh'aul is explaining how he did not require people to change cultures, in order to come to faith in our glorious Messiah. He was not advocating the use of any means whatsoever, in order to reach people. Also, 2 Tim. 2:24-26 stipulates that arguing is something a servant of G-d is not allowed to do. In 2 Tim. 4:2 Rav Sh'aul is giving instructions to a young leader about his need to stay focused and not back off on his ministry during times of opposition. Believers do not wait for ideal conditions, in order to fulfill their calling.

Verses like Matt. 28:19, 20 are used along with Acts 1:8 to justify intruding into people's lives without taking the time to build the kind of relationships where true sharing can occur. The L-rd wants us to go to ends of the earth and to make disciples. How? We are to do this by teaching them all things which we have learned from Him, because He is with us everyday, until the end of the World. Yes, we are to engage people in religious dialogues, but according to the model of our Messiah, and not like a high pressure salesman, fighting to get that commission and fill that quota.

He is with us every day, and it is His presence in and through us which is the context where sharing should occur. This does not mean we wait for a tingle in our spine to share, it means we trust in the activity of our L-rd in the lives of all people and learn to recognize the spiritual hunger and soul searching which people need before they can truly come to faith in the L-rd.

Kamikaze evangelism, where we try and scare people into giving their hearts to the L-rd before its too late reminds me too much of the endless biggest "One-Time Only Sale Ever" pitches which stores are always making, and which we had better take advantage of before it is too late. This may actually be where the expression: "scaring the Hell out of somebody" came from. Let's look honestly at some of the obvious pitfalls of this approach.

First of all, I have never met a soul. I have only met people with souls. The way to reach people's souls always involves dealing with the person and discovering the spiritual priorities which they are working through in their souls. Yeshua said He was going to send us to reap where we had not sown, to benefit from another's soul work (John 4:38). He was talking about working among the Samaritans, and other people groups with whom we may have never had any contact before, and yet among whom the Spirit of G-d already has done considerable soul work.

Second of all, everyone in the world has some kind of relationship with G-d, they are either drawing closer to Him, or running away from Him (John 3:14-21). They may have some pretty bizarre ideas about G-d (Acts 17:22-31 idols of sticks and stones, in the form of beasts and men – Rom. 1:23) and may even think that somehow all people, or certain special people are gods (Acts 14:15-18). Some people even do not believe in a god, and are kind of like cosmic orphans lost in time and space, accountable to no higher power –like the laws of physics just happened, silly people.

The weirdest is the one where some people truly believe that life began as a cosmic accident in some slime pit of amino acids, billions of years ago, and that the human spirit is slowly evolving into higher and higher forms of existence, until one day we attain some kind of spiritual perfection and become a god. Instead of going berserk and attacking this silliness with a spiritual

frenzy which must always have the last word and defend the honour of the King of Glory, we need to avoid this snare of the enemy and not get drawn into a spiritual confrontation.

We are engaged in spiritual warfare, but not as religious terrorists trying to blow up and destroy all the stupid ideas about G-d this old world seems to endlessly generate. As I was preparing this, I ran across two verses which have always troubled evangelical theologians: Matt 10:5 (do not go to the Gentiles or to the Samaritans, go only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel) and Matt. 15:24 (I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel).

Now some theologians explain the Jewish only focus of the ministry of the L-rd and of the disciples as the initial stage of the Gospel, which is now over. In other words the Jews had their chance, they lost it and the time of the Gentiles is at hand. No. Rom. 1:16 says that the Gospel is still first to the Jew, and Luke 21:24 says that Jerusalem will be trodden under foot by the Gentiles, until the time of the Gentiles is over. However, the Gospel is never reserved for only one group, or for one stage, because it a message for all generations, nations and cultures of mankind.

However, each of us only belongs to a single generation and to one nation and culture. We may change nations and cultures, and with liposuction, plastic surgery and steroids, we may pretend to belong to another generation, but it is not our job to personally reach every generation, culture and nation of the world, like some kind of Gospel superhero, or evangelistic action figure.

It is the job of the generational, multi-cultural, international body of our Messiah. We must figure out how to reach our generation, our culture and our nation, and we may receive a call, like Rav Sh'aul to go to other cultures. And sometimes, like with the apostle Peter, other cultures may even come to us, while we are having a Jewish nightmare on a roof (Acts 10). Yeshua was called to the House of Israel. During His earthly ministry, He instructed His followers to focus on the House of Israel.

After He had accomplished His atoning work on the cross to pay for the sins of all the generations, nations and cultures of all mankind, and after the resurrection, He set in place a multigenerational response to the Gospel, which we are a part of today. Acts 1:8 really says that the followers of Yeshua, both Jew and Gentile, are called to go to the ends of the earth, but not all of us, all the time to everybody, everywhere. One generation at a time.

Lastly, I want to learn to share my faith effectively and see results which will last, from generation to generation, until the end of the world. Sometime ago, Billy Graham made an interesting statement about the results of his crusade evangelism. Now, you must understand that I am a fan of Billy Graham and I like the way he runs his crusades. However, he said that in his experience, one year after a crusade, only 10% of the people who accept the L-rd during the crusade, are still walking with the L-rd. Since only about 5% of the massive crowds are not already believers, 10% of 5% drops the figure to only .5% of those who stick with it.

This is why he emphasizes follow up so much and teaches his workers how to become involved in people's lives. I've heard it put this way – bringing a child into the world takes a moment of passion, nine months of growth and a rather painful labour and birthing. To raise that child is a 20-year commitment at the very least. Having sex and giving birth are not complicated procedures, compared to the heartbreak and hard work of raising children.

We are all merely pilgrims in this life, journeying home to our Father's House, generation by generation. Each generation is called to reach out to each generation, and some in each generation are called to plant the seed among the other nations and cultures of that generation who may not have had an opportunity to respond to the Gospel. It is more of a community endeavour, where our lives and our spirituality draw people into our extended family. This is what Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did.

Israel has always been an open society, welcoming strangers, even from other nations and cultures, and showing them how to fulfill a covenant based relationship with G-d.

The church has the same mission to be an open community, for all cultures and nations, welcoming strangers and showing them how to fulfill a relationship with G-d based on the model of the covenants of Israel. Barging into people's lives and trying to wrestle them into the Gospel against their will is not a very effective technique. G-d is a better wrestler, as both Jacob and Rav Sh'aul found out. Prov. 1:20-23 speaks of this initial spiritual dialogue which the Spirit engages in.

Don't get me wrong, I love talking with people about my faith and I am always fascinated by the weird and wonderful nonsense which ordinarily sensible people believe. But I don't fight with them, because then they will become defensive and actually cling harder to the silliness G-d's Spirit is working to wean them away from. Instead I look for **divine appointments** (remember the five "C"'s cosmos, conscience, culture, circumstance and canon) and **redemptive analogies** (stories G-d is telling them), and try to listen as much as I talk. And, rather than running off to the modern equivalent of the Gentiles and Samaritans, which Yeshua forbade His disciples to go after, I want to focus on my local community and the people who are already in my life.

He will bring people into my life and take people out of my life. He will bring me into people's lives, so that they may see my light and ask me a reason of the hope which is within me. ***Dwelling in the light and being reasonable with the hope that is within me is the best and most efficient way for me to share my faith.*** It is also the hardest part of the task we are called to fulfill. Arguing and pressuring people is carnal. We may be cornered into an argument, like Rav Sh'aul and Yeshua were, but we need to learn how to disengage ourselves from these traps. This is because nowhere in Scriptures do we see that they were very successful and they are never held up as the model for us to use in learning how to share our faith.

Intrusive proselytization is not only rude and unnecessary, but it does not work. When it was tried on me, I gave them back worse than they gave me and scared all of them away. When the time was right, one of them accidentally lead me into faith, because he was in the right place at the right time. Making friends with people and building a religious dialogue with those who express an interest in spiritual things may seem like a slow, inefficient way of going about sharing our faith. But which would you rather have, a 10% success rate (which is really a .5% success rate), with lots of effort, expense and time disruption, or an 80 to 90% success rate as part of a spiritual lifestyle which people are attracted to? Such a deal, and like Wal-Mart, the L-rd offers this to us everyday of the year!

Next week, we have the privilege of hearing my wife preach, and the week after that, I have asked Devorah from the JNF to come and share her vision for the rebuilding of Israel. In three weeks, in my last message in this series, I want to talk to you about being truly effective in how we share. I want to share my burden for our generation and for all the cultures and nations of our world. I want to share my burden for our Jewish people worldwide and I want to express my understanding of how G-d would have us fulfill our calling as a Messianic Jewish congregation, both locally and as part of a larger movement, first Jewish, then also Gentile. Just in time for Missionsfest too!

Let's pray.