

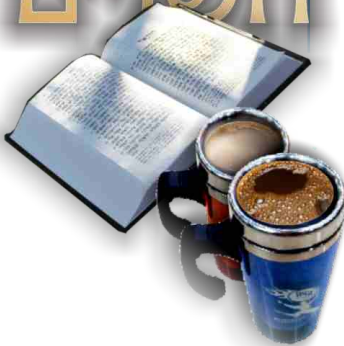


Caspari Center NEWS

September 2011

Equipping
the next generation
of Jewish believers
in Jesus

טובים
הנשואים



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To marry, or not to marry: that is the question

In our ministry to single Israeli believers, done in partnership with HaGefen Publishing, we answer it softly, but affirmatively; in fact, the title of our events for singles is "Two Are Better than One" (Eccl. 4:9). This year, before our fall seminar, in addition to regular preparations, we also fasted. In other words, we see this area of ministry as a spiritual battlefield. And I think there are some good reasons for such a perception.

In God's design, healthy believing families are pillars that support the community, guarantee its continued existence, and bless the whole society (let alone meet deep personal needs). The constant birth of new marriages, where two believers join their lives together in a God-honoring way, is therefore of great importance. Yet today marriage and family are under vicious attack the world over, and unfortunately, Israel is not an exception. Because of this, as well as for other reasons, many Israeli believing singles experience difficulties in their search for a spouse.

Looking from their perspective, the first thing I realize is that building a godly Israeli family seems to be a tough task these days. Individualism, consumerism, obsessions with sex and pleasure—to mention just a few of our culture's characteristics—wage an all-out war against basic biblical values in general, and specifically against such marriage foundations as exclusive life-time commitment and sacrificial love. Raising believing children in this culture is another very real challenge, especially with regards to practical absence of Messianic schools and particular Jewish opposition to Yeshua, which expresses itself in harassment and rejection by peers. Add to the above the high cost of living, which makes Israeli life very hectic, leaving little time for rest and recreation, and the never-ending security problem that accounts for continual tension and instability—and you see why making a decision to get married may indeed require some guts.

BUILDING A GODLY ISRAELI FAMILY SEEMS TO BE A TOUGH TASK THESE DAYS

The next challenge our singles encounter is the size of the community. In this situation, immigrants with connections to the country of exodus, and the more "international" Israelis who don't mind marrying a foreigner, have an advantage over others. So while the export and import of Messianic/Christian wives and husbands is going well, the rest often feel stuck.

It's all about place and time, of course. Paradoxically, "the best candidates" for marriage—those who study and/or work hard and are active in ministry—have little free time; and if, on top of that, the local congregation, i.e. the most natural place to meet your other half, is just too small to keep searching there (the average is 60-70 members), you have to go beyond. Meetings for young adults are an extremely rare commodity in Israel; in fact, besides our own activities, I know of only one other ministry—a local congregation in Jerusalem—that serves this group of people.

Therefore going beyond one's own congregation in practice usually means either joining local Internet forums for believing singles, or an altogether different choice, which, unfortunately, some do make: marrying an unbeliever. In most cases this leads to the loss of the person to the community.

Last but not least, in many Israeli congregations there is an unhealthy view of pre-marital romantic relationships. It is grounded in the fact that, sexuality still largely remains a 'taboo' subject, but also in such over-reactions to worldliness as stretching biblical norms to the point of making believers ashamed of natural attraction to the opposite sex, and the type of "super-spirituality" that condemns *all* courtship based on the belief that the couple is supposed to simply hear directly from God about his plan for them and make their decision with virtually no prior one-on-one communication. As a result, many singles are so afraid of "Messianic public opinion" that they don't dare to approach and invite a potential spouse even for an absolutely innocent and non-obliging cup of coffee, with the sole purpose of simply getting to know each other a little better.

With all of the above said, we are still optimistic: while it is not in our power to change some things, others certainly can and, by God's grace, *will* be changed. The seminar we've just had was even better than the first; what most encouraged me personally was hearing some very sound and practical ideas and tips from the lecturers. So while we are still waiting to receive an invitation to the wedding of some participants, let's keep it up!

Alec Goldberg



Singles' ministry update

Approximately two years ago, a conversation transpired between two (single) Caspari staff members, a conversation which served as the catalyst for our work among the single Messianic believers in Israel. It began with observation that there are so many

different activities organized for specific target groups in the body of Messiah (children, youth, etc.); developed as we expressed our frustration at there being so very little for us singles; and ended with an "aha!" moment and excitement bubbling inside of us: Could Caspari Center organize seminars for singles?

In October 2010, we started this work together with HaGefen Publishing and organized our first singles seminar. This groundbreaking seminar (the first of its kind in Israel) was an opportunity for singles to learn about God's purposes for marriage, and to fellowship together in a congenial setting. We received overwhelmingly positive feedback, and were inundated by requests to organize activities which would provide more opportunities for fellowship.

Aiming to please, in April of 2011 we organized an evening for singles at the Caspari premises in Jerusalem. People came from all over the country to participate. The evening began with an animated ice-breaking game. We enjoyed an excellent dinner and then split up into discussion groups led by various leaders from the Messianic community. The various topics of discussion included attitudes towards dating, challenges in finding the right person, and the criteria we use to help identify or exclude potential partners. The evening was lively and fun; we enjoyed organizing it and the singles that came enjoyed participating in it.

Wishing to diversify our activities, we organized a weekend trip to the north of Israel at the end of June 2011. Once again, approximately 55 singles from all over the country gathered at Shear Yashuv (one of the northernmost villages in Israel). We went rafting and hiking; we sat around a bonfire and fellowshiped; we assembled for a time of worship and a message.

And now, this past September, we organized our second annual singles seminar, which again took place in Haifa. This seminar was longer than the first, three days as opposed to the previous two. The extra day enabled us to allocate more time for fellowship (we even fit in a hike!) without taking away from the lectures and workshops. The seminar focused on our calling to serve the Lord (regardless of marital status and everything else) and on the value that each one of us has in the Lord. We were very blessed to have a number of wonderful teachers and leaders in the local Messianic body teach, lead discussion groups, and spend time fellowshiping with the seminar participants.

We've just begun this new ministry to singles. We are still learning how to reach more people in our target audience. We are still learning how best to serve them. We ask for your prayers for wisdom in this matter and for the Lord to continue providing us with qualified teachers who have a heart for the plight of the singles.

Jennifer Nataf



Another lap around Jericho

One foot in front of the other.

Again.

The tracks their feet had made during the silent marches each day of this surreal week were becoming ruts in the sun-baked ground surrounding the walled city. Fully-armed men were marching, marching, marching; the only sound, the heavy cadence of their own footfalls. They'd been instructed to carry their weapons, but had been prohibited from using them by their commander-in-chief. In contrast, the clatter of daily life – cooking and bartering and babies crying and old men arguing – carried from inside those thick walls.


I have wondered if any of the soldiers marching outside the city of Jericho were tempted to murmur, to voice their questions about this unorthodox way of taking a city after a generation of wandering in the wilderness. Did any of them think that these daily laps around the city were just another form of wandering? Could they trust that this was not just some strange game, or a sign that they were undergoing still more discipline from God because they hadn't yet learned their lesson?

Usually, when people speak about this story found in Joshua 6, it is framed in terms of God's miraculous deliverance of his people. I recently re-read the account, and found myself imagining what it must have been like to be a Jewish foot soldier on, say, day 5 of this strange siege of Jericho. What must have been going through the minds of these young soldiers as they marched each day?

In light of the story, I have pondered my own experience making laps around the same old issues in my own life. I have almost always viewed the rut worn by my footprints as a symbol of my failure to master whatever lesson I assumed God was teaching me. In other words, I'd assumed that God had put me into a remedial course, a "do over," because I didn't pass the test the last time I faced the issue.

I realized that though this may be true in some cases, there are other reasons why God brings us around the same "walled cities" in our lives more than once. What if the return visit(s) are designed by God to practice our growing trust in him? I am certainly not the same person I was at 20 or 30 or 40. Could it be that God is asking me to bring what I've learned about him and myself from earlier laps around an issue or test in my life into this leg of my journey with him, even if it feels like I'm making a repeat visit to the same old turf?

The soldiers were changed people by the time day 7 of Joshua's march rolled around and God brought down the walls of Jericho. They were completely obedient to every syllable of Joshua's commands. They spared Rahab, the prostitute who had earlier assisted their spies, as well as the other members of her family. And they didn't keep a single item of value from Jericho for their own personal use, but gave it all to the Lord. These behaviors were not the norm for a conquering army.



I am convinced that the experience of marching around Jericho day after day after day taught them to trust God. It prepared them to respond in full obedience to Joshua's God-given commands. They learned that there is more than one way to conquer an enemy. They learned their lessons well as they did laps around the same seemingly-permanent walls day after day.

And so can we. One step at a time.

Michelle Van Loon



Welcome, new volunteers!

This August we have welcomed two new volunteers, Heidi from Canada and Sarah from Norway. It is a great blessing to have them, both are very gifted and dedicated, and we are enjoying their presence in the office and contribution to the work.



media review

Caspari Center publishes a weekly review of material from the Israeli press documenting attitudes toward Messianic Jews, the mission, and the Christian faith. To receive the Media Review free of charge by email, sign up on our website at www.caspari.com/signup.html.

According to a report in **the Jerusalem Post (September 2)**, "In an apparent infringement on personal privacy legislation and in defiance of laws preventing incitement, an anonymous group has taken to distributing flyers 'naming and shaming' Messianic Jews (Christians) living in the Jerusalem-area town of Mevaseret Zion. The personal details of some 10 people, including photographs and home addresses, are displayed on the flyer, which was delivered to hundreds of households in the town of 30,000 residents. 'This reminds me of actions taken by the Ku Klux Klan in the US,' commented one of those listed on the flyer, a Jerusalem-based lawyer who made aliya in 1992. 'It is anonymous persecution of others just because they do not agree with our beliefs.' According to the lawyer, who asked not to be named, it is not clear who is behind the distribution of such material. . . . 'Israel encourages freedom of religion,' he said, adding that most Mevaseret Zion residents have spoken out against the flyers and showed their support for the Messianic Jewish community. . . . Arie Shaman, the head of Mevaseret Zion's municipal council, told The Jerusalem Post on Thursday that while he had not seen the flyer, he was aware of some families protesting the presence of Messianic Jews in the town. . . . 'We provide municipal services to all our residents regardless of their beliefs,' said Shaman, claiming that the distribution of such a flyer breaks privacy laws. 'If we find that to be true, then this could be a case for the police,' he said. 'We will need to look into it.' A police spokesman could not comment Thursday on whether an investigation would be opened."

Prayer Requests

- The continuation and expansion of the ministry to singles
- Preparations for upcoming Shabbat School seminars in Beer-Sheva and Netanya
- Planning leadership training programs for the coming year
- New strategic partnerships in the Land
- Visas for volunteers and workers



If you would like to know more about the Caspari Center and its activities, write to caspari@caspari.com or visit our website, www.caspari.com. You can support our work by prayer, volunteering, or financial gifts to help with individual projects or the general work of the center.



A Happy and Sweet Year 5772

