

Confronting the Ruach Tatu'im

By Rabbi William Schnoebelen

Few people enjoy stepping out and confronting another person when they are wrong. It requires moving against the flow of our culture. However, that is what talmidim of Yah'shua are called to do. Natzarim Israel has always been a "counter-cultural movement:"

"These, who have been turning the Olam Hazeah [this world] upside down have come here also!"
- Acts 17:6ⁱ

We are called to be *apart* from the culture to a degree (**2 Cor. 6:17**). For years, Western culture has been moving in the direction of tolerance as the highest virtue (Islam being the notable exception!). This includes tolerance of different ethnic groups, of sexual orientation, etc. This is very much in keeping with the Graeco-Roman roots of Western civilization. Both the Greek and Roman ancient societies had a very much "live and let live" attitude towards such things.ⁱⁱ

Part of the problem is US culture. The United States is in a unique position in that it has spawned probably more aberrant theological movements than any other nation of such a relatively brief history. Whether you call them "cults" or "alternative religions," we have had a bumper crop of them. Beginning with the Rosicrucians and the Shakers in the colonial period, there have been Mormons, Campbellites, Jehovah's Witnesses, Adventists and many others too numerous to mention. To be sure, our freedom of religion has made this possible. But the fruit of that freedom (which is NOT really Torah-basedⁱⁱⁱ) is that cults spring up in this land like crabgrass in the lawn of spirituality.

Today, the only thing most people in western culture are intolerant of is Torah values. Much of this seeps, by osmosis, into the lives of Believers unless they are very careful.

Because of this phenomenon, many Believers are uncomfortable with confronting cults, heresies and/or false teachers. They feel it is "unloving." They have allowed the WORLD to turn *them* upside down. We cannot allow these worldly values to influence the way that we deal with error in the Natzarim movement. If we do, we will be like the salt which lost its savor (**Mt. 5:13**) and we will no longer make the world thirsty for Mossiach! If the world looks at us and sees us acting as goofy as every other "religious" group, why would they ever join us?

Before we proceed, we need to briefly define some terms which are often bandied about so we know what we are discussing. Part of the problem in dialog with fake religionists is that they have grown skilled at using the same terminology as do orthodox Believers, but they define the terms differently.

A *heresy* comes from the Greek word found in the Brit Chadeshah, HAIREESIS (see **Acts 24:14**, its only appearance) – Strong's #139. It literally means to make a choice which causes disunity. Connotatively, it refers to a sect. Both *sect* (a Latin root word) and *heresy* carry with them the idea of something which causes *division*. This is important to understand!

The underlying thought is that the Body of Natzarim Believers is ONE.

Adon echad, emunah achat, tevilah achat (One L-rd, one faith, one baptism) – Eph. 4:5

That oneness is intended to be a mirror here on earth of the Oneness of the Creator (**Devarim 6:4**). A **heresy** is anything which violates that oneness, either by teaching something different than the Body or by doing something *different* (i.e., wrong worship or sinful behavior).

This is why Yehuda (Jude) wrote in his brief letter:

*“...it suddenly became necessary to write you an urgent appeal to fight for the Emunah [faith] which was **once for all time** handed over and transmitted to the Kadoshim [set-apart ones or saints].” – verse 3 (emphasis added)*

Even in apostolic times, there was an evident necessity to exhort Believers to combat those who were teaching something DIFFERENT than Torah and the writings and traditions of the Sholiachim (apostles)! This spiritual and intellectual “combat” is known as **apologetics**! This term does not mean to apologize as we use the term today, but comes from the Greek word in Philippians 1:7, APOLOGIA (Strong’s #627) which means to defend. There Rav Shaul says he is defending and confirming the Besarot (gospel), even in his prison chains.

Apologetics is a significant part of the ministry in which this author has been engaged. So far, there has not been a systematized attempt within the Natzarim movement to put together a methodology of apologetics,^{iv} partially because the movement is relatively young.

So far, error has been dealt with in the movement in much the same way as a celebrated Supreme Court justice discussed pornography. He said he “*knew it when he saw it.*” We – as followers of Torah and Yah’shua – should know error when we see it!

However, here are a few basic guidelines drawn from the Christian academic world (shudder - please bear with me!) about heresy. There are mercifully a few simple guidelines:

Heresy is:

- 1) Anything which denies the oneness or uniqueness of Yahweh! (**Devarim 6:4**)
- 2) Anything which denies that Yah’shua is Yahweh come in the flesh! (**Yoh. 1:1-14**)
- 3) Anything which diminishes or contradicts Torah (both “testaments”)! (**2 Tim. 3:16, Tehillim 12:6-7**).
- 4) Anything which adds to or takes away from the Besarot (gospel) of Yah’shua – a “different” gospel! (**Gal. 1:8**)

Any teaching or practice which does *any* of these things is a heresy.

Now, a **cult** is essentially a religious group which has grown up around a heretical teacher. It has achieved some sort of “routinized” status (to use a term from sociology of religion).^v Joseph Smith and the Mormons would be a well-known example of this.

A *quality* of heresy is that it tends to get more and more bizarre as time goes on. In the case of Smith and the Mormons, his original teaching was just a bit strange. This is why one can read the Book of Mormon and find a lot of “evangelical” and revivalist teaching in it.^{vi} Paradoxically, the Book of Mormon actually rails AGAINST some of the very practices which Joseph Smith later introduced into Mormonism, like polygamy and secret temple rites. A discussion of this is beyond the scope of this article.

However, the point is that by the end of his life, before his murder in 1844 in Carthage, Illinois, Smith had *metastasized* into from a slightly off-center revivalist preacher into a full-blown Gnostic heretic with crypto-Masonic rituals, strange Egyptian teachings and 27 wives (that we KNOW of). Error spreads like cancer. This is why it must be *stopped* and right quick!

If you would allow the author a personal observation here about the current controversy within the Natzarim movement over polygamy; the error is following the same trajectory as did Smith 170 years ago, except it is *worse*! Smith began with a few quaint ideas revivalism and American Indians and ended up a polygamist Gnostic. MK began his heterodox (strange doctrine) career as a polygamist and has ended up preaching lesbianism, etc. This is the *nature* of heresy! Without true Teshuva (repentance), it can only continue to get worse.

This is because when one strays from the Derech of Emet (truth), the gloves of the “dark side”: (*Sitra Achra*) come off. Elohim will protect His child for awhile, but as he or she strays deeper into sinful beliefs or actions, darkness and sin will seep in more and more. This is partly because often the unpleasant consequences of sin (which are manifold) often ultimately help lead the sinner back to Teshuva. But in the meantime, spiritual rot is the order of the day! That is why we must strongly confront the Ruach ha Tatu'im (spirit of error – **1 Yoh. 4:6**). Its antidote is, of course, the Ruach ha Emet (Spirit of Truth)!

While not in the Torah, the proverb, “One bad apple spoils the whole barrel,” is very true. It elucidates an important spiritual principle. Evil is *profoundly contagious*. That is why we are counseled to separate from it (**2 Cor. 6:14-18, 2 Thess. 3:6**). This, in turn, leads us to the necessity of those who appointed leaders in the congregation taking steps to point out error.

Young believers cannot be expected to know all of the nuances of Torah. That is why they sit under sound Midrash from a duly trained rabbi or teacher.

Both Yah'shua and Rav Shaul use the metaphor of the wolf and the sheep:

Beware of the neviei ha sheker (false prophets) who come to you in malbush (clothing) of kevasim (sheep) but within are ravenous ze'evim (wolves). By their perot (fruit) you will have da'as (knowledge) of them... - Matt. 7:15-16

I have da'as that after my departure, savage ze'evim (wolves) will come in among you, not sparing the eder (flock). – Acts 20:29

Subsequently in the same passage, Rav Shaul, he tells the Natzarim leadership he is addressing that they must shomer (guard or watch) over their flocks.

Wolves are *predators*. They always go after the weakest and the littlest in the flock, or else those who are out on the fringe, away from the safety of numbers. This is an excellent metaphor, because this is *exactly* how the Ruach ha Tatu'im draws people into sinful teaching or practices.

Therefore, it would seem necessary that the Natzarim leadership lovingly address heresy or sinful behavior both to bring the sinners to Teshuva and to protect the flock with which Elohim has entrusted them. Otherwise, they would be neglecting the mandate given them by Rav Shaul that they protect the flock *which Yahweh has purchased with His own blood!* (**Acts 20:28**)

So in conclusion, the questions are these:

1. Is it wrong to confront error within our movement?
2. If it is a Scriptural duty to speak out against error, how do we do it?
3. Who should do it?
4. Is it necessary to “name names” or just speak in generalities?

Dealing with the **first question**, it should be evident from an even cursory look at Torah and the Brit Chadashah that the entire counsel of Scripture supports the necessity of confronting either sinful behavior or doctrinal error.

The most obvious example from Torah would be the rebellion of Korah and his colleagues in **Bamidbar (Numbers) 16**. Korah was rebelling against the authority of Mosheh and claiming for himself and his kin the priesthood authority of Aharon which Elohim had given him. Mosheh knew that this error could not be allowed to continue or it would tear apart the fledgling nation of Israel! The conclusion of the matter is well known. Mosheh asked Yahweh to demonstrate who had the right to offer incense before the Mishkan (tabernacle). The earth opened up and swallowed the rebels alive!

It is perhaps good that we no longer have that sort of option to straighten out doctrinal error, or the landscape of the US would be littered with divinely generated sink-holes! Of course, there are also many other occasions in the Tenakh false prophets and teachers were confronted, often by name. A good example is Yermiyahu's confrontation with the false prophet, Hananiyah ben Azur in **Yer. 28**.

A further critical passage in all this is found in Yechezkel (Ezekiel):

Ben Adam, I have made thee a tzofeh (watchman) unto the Bais Yisroel; therefore hear the word at My mouth, and give them a warning from me. When I say unto the rasha [wicked one], Thou shalt surely die and thou givest him not a warning, nor speakest to warn the rasha from his Derech harasha'ah [way of evil], to save his life; the same rasha shall die in his avon [iniquity]; but I will hold accountable thine yad [hand] for his dahm [blood]. – Yech. 3:17-18)

The passage goes on to say that if the watchman (one could just as easily say pastor or rabbi) warns the sinner and the sinner ignores him and keeps on sinning, then the sinner will be condemned. But the watchman will have spared his own life. This is a passage which should make all teachers or rabbis very sober and serious about the mantle of authority they have AND

about their responsibility to not only warn sinners of their need to do Teshuva, but also to warn their flocks of dangerous teachers nearby – “grievous wolves” who will not spare the flock.

To do anything less, to ignore the danger of the teachings, would be to violate the calling of their office and – ultimately – make them accountable for the sins of those led astray by the sinful teachings or behaviors of false teachers.

In the light of all this, I do not think that any sane person would say that it is not only permitted, but **VITAL** to confront evil, whether doctrinal (theological teachings) or personal (committing or advocating sinful behavior – something which MK certainly seems to be doing [**Rom.1:32**]). To do otherwise is to court both falling away of weaker brethren and also public scandal hitting the congregation!

In terms of the **second** question, I believe we cannot go wrong by following Scripture. Normally **Mattisyahu [Matthew] 18:15-18** would apply: go to the brother in private, then if he does not hear you take it to another brother and go together to him. If he refuses to do Teshuva, then take it to the assembly. If he refuses to listen to the Body, then let him be as a tax collector or a heathen! This is ideal.

Sometimes, if a teaching is so public or egregious OR if the erring party will not meet, many students of Scripture believe that it is permitted to go past step 1 to step 2 or even 3. Public scandal (the root of which word is to cause a “stumbling block”) DOES need public rebuke. We see this with Rav Shaul’s (more or less) public dressing down of Kepha mentioned in Gal. 2:11ff. A teaching or behavior which can make weaker Believers or younger Believers stumble must be confronted *without delay!*

The other element which I believe is critical is that the rebuke or correction (whether public or private) must be done in **love (Eph. 4:15)** and with an attitude of restoration. Often, in “churchianity,” we see “slash and burn” exposure of celebrity preachers and their sins which all too often mimics the methods of secular muck-raking tabloids. There seems to be little effort to do more than bring the offending party down in flames. It has been said that the church is the only army that shoots its own wounded. To the contrary, the primary Scriptural motivation behind correcting error is to restore the brother or sister to Torah halachah (way of behavior).

Anything which seeks to expose and destroy without offering a hand of healing to the truly repentant individual falls short of Scriptural correction. Of course, if the offending party hardens his or her heart, then you need to move to the final step and treat them as a tax collector or a heathen!

As to *WHO* should do it (**third** question), this is a bit complex. If the sin is a private matter, then normally the injured party should go and talk with the offender. But if it is a public teaching of error or scandalous behavior, then it needs to be done by someone in authority. In ancient Natzarim Israel there was a *Bet Din* (literally, House of Judgment) which was set up with a head who would make final deliberation.

The problem is, in today's fragmented ecclesiastical climate, there are so many small groups and "Lone Rangers" that if a respected rabbi rebukes someone, they often just ignore it and keep on going – or else they find another group to join which will accept their pet sin or doctrinal eccentricity.

However, that does not take away from the fact that rabbis need to be the ones to do public rebuke of sin, whatever it might be. This goes back to the binding and loosing mentioned in **Mt. 18**, which is a direct allusion to the rabbinical authority (and/or the Bet Din) to set halachah. If the offender ignores the censure, then he is in the position of the sinner in Yechezkel 3. His blood is on his own hands. At least he has been warned and confronted.

The **final** question is: should names be named? I think there are enough examples all through Torah and *especially* in the Brit Chadashah where people who were causing scandal or error were called out by name. Sometimes, it is not enough to speak in vague generalities.

Our Rebbi, Yah'shua, called King Herod a "fox" (not a very polite term, we gather!) in **Luke 13:32**. He also blistered the Pharisees to their faces in **Mt. 23**, calling them all manner of nasty names. Both Rav Shaul and Yochanan the Beloved both named "names" (Alexander the coppersmith, Hymenaeus and Diotrefes are examples). These apostles left no doubt that these guys were stinkers!

This sort of specificity is needed, because otherwise how are readers or listeners to know exactly what the issue is and whom is causing the trouble. Yah'shua and the authors of the Brit Chadashah did not "pussy-foot around" evil. They called it out and confronted it.

Of course, if the person does not repent and just keeps sinning or spewing out strange or dangerous teachings, then the teachers in authority in the congregation need to keep warning folks. It is not a fun job. In fact, it is often heart-breaking. But we need to care more for Torah halachah than we do for the niceties of the "politically correct paradise" in which we live.

We need to remember Rav Shaul's words: "*Let all things be done b'seder [in order] and without bushah (shame).*" – 1 Cor. 14:40.

ⁱ All Scripture quotations are taken from THE ORTHODOX JEWISH BIBLE, AFI International Publishers, New York, 2003.

ⁱⁱ One of the primary reasons the early Natzarim believers were persecuted by the Romans was that they refused to worship the emperor and "just go along" with the prevailing culture.

ⁱⁱⁱ As much as it might rankle our 21st century American sensibilities, all religions were not treated alike in ancient Israel. To be sure, goyim were in the land, but they did not have the kind of "equal protection under the law" that today's witches and Muslims enjoy in the US. In fact, witchcraft was a capital crime!

^{iv} Perhaps this needs to be done, though this writer is not necessarily volunteering!

^v In sociology, routinization occurs when a cult-type group (which is outside of mainstream religion) survives the death of its founder and establishes some sort of orderly "succession" of leadership.

^{vi} The Book of Mormon is actually very much a reflection of its day. It copied the strong revivalist preaching which was going on in the eastern US in the early 19th century.