

## Our Vision for Change at B'nai Avraham

Many of us greatly admire the accomplishments of social change movements like the environmental movement, the movement for economic justice, the civil rights movement, and the disability movement, to name just a few.

And yet, we believe that these movements have tended to deny a very important dimension of human life—the spiritual dimension. And this deficit has limited the potential impact that all these movements could have. Only a spiritual vision will allow us to create a real alternative to our society's ethos of selfishness, materialism, and cynicism.

We seek to create that alternative. We are a community of Yisrael, called together by Elohim through the Messiah, and the vision of healing and transforming our world. We include in this call both the outer transformation needed to achieve justice, and shalom, and the inner healing needed to foster loving relationships, a generous attitude toward the world and toward others unimpeded by the distortions of our egos. We are guided in our work by our belief in the principle of unity (*Echad*).

For us, this principle has spiritual roots in the Torah commandment to remember that we were all slaves in Egypt; we believe that we are all injured by oppression directed at any group or individual.

Unity means that we affirm our responsibility towards each other within our families, our nation, and within our spiritual community—and also beyond the narrow boundaries of ethnicity, faith, and geography. We affirm the obligation to actively oppose injustice and refuse to take part in it. We hope to have the courage-- in the tradition of the prophets, Yahshua, and the early Nazarene communities to speak the truth in love to all men.

At the same time, we will challenge the lack of a spiritual dimension in the agendas of social change movements. That gap has allowed the conservatives to present themselves as the force that cares about spiritual issues. And the liberal's failure to address spirituality has led many to believe their desire for a larger framework of meaning and purpose must be separated from their involvement with social transformation.

Social change activity gets focused on a narrow political agenda that lacks the depth that can inspire sustained commitment or nourishing involvement. Imagine an international group of people who would see themselves as allies to each other in advancing this way of thinking, people who are unashamedly Messianic Era minded and willing to fight for the Torah's highest ideals, yet unashamedly humble in knowing that we do not know all that we need to know to accomplish the healing that needs to be done.

Imagine that this group would help each other in our individual as well as group activities, affirming what is good (*tov*) and brainstorming with us about how to create a movement that gives equal priority to our inner lives and to social justice, that takes loving and caring as serious goals for social healing, and that rejects the utilitarian and materialistic assumptions of the contemporary world and actively fosters awe and wonder in its participants. Imagine that you could be part of creating that.

You can—by helping us create the Nazarene Community. The Nazarene Community starts from this fundamental recognition: The root of injustice, chaos, suffering, hatred, and emotional numbness is not to be found in economic and political parties or movements, but in our alienation from one another, in our inability to experience and recognize ourselves and each other as set-apart, in our inability to respond to the call of the universe which bids us to deeper levels of consciousness and love, and in our inability to overcome our own egos and see ourselves as part of the Unity of Elohim.

We need a spiritual consciousness along with a social consciousness if we are to heal and transform the world. Some of us belong to traditional religious communities; and some of us are just beginning to work out our relationship to Elohim. But all of us understand that we need a movement that can address spiritual needs of the world.

It is our contention that social change and inner change go hand in hand. We are building a movement in which we can talk about love and caring for each other--and this is the only way we can overcome the old left/right dichotomies and dead policy debates that fill academic journals, magazines, the insipid television confrontations between shouting talking heads, and the rhetoric of politicians. For too long these slogans and divisions have paralyzed mankind and made most of us feel like withdrawing into a purely personal life.

To bring about this change we must talk at a far deeper level than merely repeating or reframing the traditional demands for equal rights. While we support those demands and thus welcome any advances that provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, health care, child care, and other basic rights, we also believe that these will only be won on a global level when the social change movements are able to address the spiritual consequences of the triumph of corporate globalization: a society-wide depression and repression of what we can variously call the life-force, or Ruach.

This spiritual depression and emotional repression are the near-universal responses to the globalization of a self-congratulatory individualism, obsessive materialism, and consumption—all provided as compensation for the meaninglessness of our present-day culture. The one-dimensional technocratic consciousness, speed-up of work, perception that we have "no time" to do what we really believe in, and our inability to recognize others in terms that go beyond what they can do for us to advance our own agendas as rational maximizers of self-interest—all these combine to create human beings who, if they don't explode in violence or self-destructive alcohol and drug abuse, find themselves in varying degrees of disconnection to their inner selves, their feelings, and their capacities to be loving towards others and responding to the universe with joy.

In contrast to this, we encourage an engagement with the Divine, a spirituality which affirms pleasure and joy and the recognition that "there is enough," a replacement of postmodernist self-alienation with a renewal of Being based on awe, wonder and radical amazement at the mystery of the universe and the mystery of every human being on the planet as a manifestation of the image of Elohim. Our economic, social and political institutions need to be replaced and rethought not only because they are unjust and unrighteous, but because they foster a consciousness that keeps us from connecting to the deepest Truths of the Universe and make it harder for us to recognize each other as fully free, fully conscious, self-creating, loving beings. We reach out for a spiritual dimension that is a replacement and a deepening, of our understanding of social action, but not as a replacement for but a deepening of our understanding of true science. Our spirituality does not reject the value of rational thought nor does it suspend scientific enquiry.

Why is it that people who live in the advanced industrial societies of North America, Europe and Japan, the richest societies that history has ever known, believe we "can't afford" to share what we have with the rest of the world so as to eliminate poverty, hunger and homelessness? It is partly because we have a deep emptiness inside and we have come to believe that only material goods can fill the hole. We buy things to buy happiness, to compensate ourselves for the alienated work, the disconnection from each other, and the estrangement from our own inner selves that constitute the quality of our daily lives. In our spiritually impoverished world, acquiring ever more things provides an illusion of fulfillment—and a replacement for the deep connection with each other and to the spiritual realities of the universe for which we both hunger and simultaneously deny to ourselves.

In addition, almost every child in our culture gets strong messages to focus attention on that which can be useful, and away from the spiritual dimension which has no "practical application." Indeed, this message has been so deeply ingrained in many of us that we instinctively shy away from the spiritual realm as though it were as useless. We fear that were we to acknowledge to ourselves or others that we actually wish for connection with that which cannot be used or made practical, cannot be subject to pragmatic observation or turned into a commodity or something that will make us more attractive or salable on the job or relationship marketplace, we would subject us to ridicule and humiliation.

Fearful that we will experience that pain, we build strong external walls to keep us out of touch with this deep yearning for connection to each other and to Elohim. Instead of drawing on our own inner resources, we too often find ourselves looking to the media-dominated mass culture for fulfillment and reassurance that our scaled-down sense of possibility is "what everybody else is doing" and hence "the only possible path for us too."

The media is one of the many institutions that speeds up time—protecting us from the quiet moments in which we might doubt the whole way our lives our being lived.

Instead of finding our own pace, we find ourselves rushing about; seeking machines and gadgets that make things go faster, becoming accustomed to media and technology which speed the pace while shallowing the intellectual and emotional level of our daily consciousness. We learn to forget the past and focus only on the new while devaluing the old, which leads to decreasing literacy and an increasing difficulty in following a complex discussion, sustaining a long-term relationship, or committing to social goals that can't be accomplished immediately.

Sadly, our social institutions only reinforce this materialist view. Our institutions provide us with the illusion of permanency (pretending we won't die) and the illusion that the "real world" is the world of power and wealth. Compound this with the assumption that we should be tough and ignore our feelings, and we are left with a "common sense" that dismisses the relevance of our inner lives. We are told that spirituality should be left in the home, relegated to the Shabbat, kept separate from the pragmatic decisions that should shape the world.

In this Community, we refuse this kind of "realism." We will unashamedly use and learn from the language and practices of spiritual communities. The spiritual life can give us a level of mindfulness, focus, and calm so that we can re-center ourselves and discover what we truly value in this life.

One reason we are proud to have the Nazarene Community draw upon the spiritual wisdom of Torah is because we think that the spiritual practice of Shabbat, a twenty-four hour meditation focused on turning our energies from "getting things done" to a "celebration of All that Is," can empower us in the struggle to heal our planet. This is one example of the kinds of spiritual practices that we encourage among our members and for the world.

So too, the Biblical idea of a Sabbatical Year for all and the Biblical idea of Jubilee with its call for a redistribution of land and wealth back to a basic equality once every fifty years provide us with inspiration for how to learn from the wisdom of Torah.

Our goal is to build a community of people who share a common intellectual/spiritual perspective. We connect with all who hope for a real *TIKKUN* (the Hebrew word for healing, repair and transformation) and the coming of the Moshiach to the earth again.

Particularly when people start hoping for a loving reality, we often get so scared—because we have been so deeply shaped by the pathogenic belief that we don't really deserve to be loved. That's when we find people in organizations hurting each other in the name of love, being brutal and lacking compassion, creating endless fights over theoretical differences, or clinging to ego at the cost of finding real unity with others. We will not hesitate to ask people to leave our organization who would prefer to fight with each other than to lovingly support each other.

We expect that in the Nazarene Community we will find ourselves learning from our dialogue with each other, having intense conversations, listening to each other's presentations but also, and equally importantly, each other's life experiences and struggles. Our community will only be sustainable if it provides many opportunities to laugh with each other, to meditate or pray together, to sing and dance together, and to experience each other as sources of surprise, joy and transcendence. So, our expectation is that this commitment will be joyous.

If you are interested in joining us, please look over the fundamental principle printed below. Is it a principle you share?

### **A SPIRITUAL MOVEMENT**

The world we want to see cannot be created solely by economic and political changes. As we indicated above, the sources of our worldwide economic and political problems are not solely external in nature, but reflect also distortions in how we experience ourselves and each other so work on changing our own inner selves and our ideas about the world is THE important aspect of changing the world.

We need to engage in activity that aims at fostering a new consciousness and the development of an inner life that is not merely private and individual in nature, but is rather both social and spiritual in nature—an inner life that is also an interconnected life with other human beings and with the Unity of Elohim.

In short, the change must have a spiritual dimension.

Among the central building blocks of such a spiritual dimension:

- the development of a personal spiritual practice such as meditation and prayer (*Devekut*)
- the practice of generosity and sharing what we have with others (*Tzadakah*)
- compassion toward others and toward oneself, including the open-hearted acceptance of one's own and other's flaws (*Chesed*)
- developing the habit of affirming the being of others even when we may disagree with some of their beliefs or practices (*Compassion*)
- careful attention to one's speech so as to not say hurtful things towards others (*Lashon Tov*)
- joyfulness and the affirmation of pleasure (*Simchah*)
- treasuring our bodies through conscious eating (*Kashrut*)
- the practice of forgiveness and repentance (*Teshuvah*)
- giving to give and not to get ( Receive to give )

We are particularly sensitive to the ways that movements in the past have used their own ideals as clubs with which to beat up themselves and those who are not part of the "in" group, so we want to insist that our movement have a compassionate attitude toward its own members as well as toward those who do not agree with us, while simultaneously rejecting a mindless moral relativism which makes everything acceptable. Building this balance between compassion and striving for inner transformation requires real wisdom (*Chokmah*), and so our movement rejects the anti-leadership tendencies and embraces the notion of spiritual leadership based on inner depth, compassionate understanding, and practical wisdom.