



ONE TORAH FOR ALL

One Torah shall be to him that is home-born, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.
Exodus 12:49

Zerubbabel ben Emunah

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Attempting to Build a Torah Community

My Personal Experience

The fact that I am not completely disillusioned is a miracle in itself. My experience at attempting to build a community based upon Torah has met with disaster and failure at every attempt, some attempts more disastrous than others. However, this school of hard-knocks has opened my eyes to Scripture in ways that would not have been possible any other way. Only in this, has all the pain, anguish, and heartache yielded fruit for His kingdom. For this I am quite thankful to our heavenly Father!

It is not my desire to point fingers at anyone for any reason. I simply desire to put in writing my own personal experience in this matter without casting insults or degrading another in any way. If you are an individual who has shared my experiences in some way in this matter, you may see yourself reflected in this testimony. As long as you say nothing to anyone, they will never know those particular words are about you. My intention is to be as kind to you as possible while also being as honest as possible. Please know that I willingly shoulder a majority of any blame to be doled out, but not all of it, by any means. I say “a majority” simply because these things happened in my home and on my property. That reason alone makes me more culpable than anyone else. I would also like to extend to each person my very sincere apology for the hurt and pain that you felt, as well.

For the sake of my own sanity as well as my own marriage relationship, I have no plans to ever attempt this again. Lest you think ill of my dear wife, and think that she is in any way manipulating me into this position, you would be wrong to think such a thing. What my dear wife and I experienced through all this was rather horrific at times. She ended up in a nervous breakdown at one point and was admitted to the mental ward in the local hospital. Thankfully, she has fully recovered.

Sadly, I was somewhat dense in this matter, and we made several more attempts after she recovered. At one point, she nearly relapsed into another nervous breakdown. I am happy to report today that I have my act together much more so than in those days, and she is happy

and healthy. If there was ever anyone to whom I owed an apology, it is my wife. I have put her through more than any woman should have to go through in an attempt to build a Torah community. I will not do so again! It is my duty to protect her. This I willingly and lovingly shall do without apology to anyone.

Another by-product of repeatedly attempting to build a Torah community is the cost of children who moved away from Torah. I grieve in my spirit continuously for each and every one of these children. If there was one thing I could undo concerning all that happened in these past attempts, it would be to have these children back in His fold. I doubt that any of them will ever read this, but if you do, please know that I am sorry for the hurt that I personally caused you and I ask for you to forgive me!

Along this path, I have met a few people with whom I still have a good relationship. I am quite thankful for those individuals. Perhaps in time, other relationships can be restored. There are a few, of which I seriously doubt that can ever happen. Not because I doubt the sufficiency of YHWH's grace, but rather, because I know those individuals and it is highly unlikely that such persons will be able to humble themselves enough to make things right with me, particularly when said individuals hold me solely responsible, and are unwilling to share any of the responsibility for what happened. I know that my own conscience is clear because I have reached out to those particular individuals and have done what I could do to make things right. And frankly, at this point, even if they do come to me and do what is right in YHWH's eyes to make amends, things can never be like they were once; that is just simply not possible. Please understand, I have forgiven each and every person. However, just because I have forgiven a person does not mean such a person needs to be a part of my life again. Considering some of the repeated actions of some individuals, it is doubtful if those actions shall cease. Therefore, I do not need to be near such a person when those actions manifest themselves again. To do so would be foolish on my part and certainly not healthy.

I have always been a man of vision. I see what could be, as clearly (perhaps, at times, more clearly) as I do what is right in front of me. This ability has allowed me to build things with my hands throughout my life. This is quite easy and fulfilling for me to do this. Consequently, when I began applying this ability to the desire to live in community with other followers of Mashiach, the potential I could see was something great, and increased the desire within me to work towards such a noble cause. This vision has not diminished.

I tend to be a rather simple, honest man, in that, if a person tells me something, I simply tend to believe what he says. Problems develop when I project my honesty upon others when they do not deserve it. This is one of the major problems I experienced in attempting to build a Torah community; many of the motives of people were not like mine. The reasons why various people came to live at our farm were as many as there were individuals. One came because he had nowhere else to go. This is a very poor reason to come to a community. As you can imagine, this didn't work out so well for them or us.

Towards the end, as I began to see many of these things, I put down in writing what those of us in community expected from our visitors, as well as from those who were considering coming to live on our farm. My thinking was that it would help weed out those who were not serious about keeping Torah, as well as save my own family some personal grief. The last attempt, I actually used these documents, but it was all for naught. I was still locked into the mode of thinking that people are basically honest. This last attempt nearly cost me my marriage. Through it, I realized that it would not be possible for me to accomplish the vision I had because of the nature of mankind.

I do believe that Torah society will be accomplished in this world sometime in the future before Mashiach Yeshua returns. The scale upon which Torah society shall be accomplished will have to be on a national scale, rather than simply a local community. This is one of the errors I have come to see in my own efforts.

I might insert at this point, that this is not easy for me to write all this down, because I am basically telling on myself. I am showing how stupid and blind I was in these many attempts. However, if I can save even one person some of the grief I have experienced, then it will have been worth it. I always did my best to hear and obey His Voice. During each of these times over the years, if someone would have asked me if this was His will, I would have unequivocally said "yes." However, looking back upon all this now, I am not so sure. My attempts to work to do His will have been honest. However, they have not been overly fruitful. This fact alone does not make these attempts outside of His will. It may have been His will for me to experience each one of these failures in order to teach me all He has taught me. While I am thankful for the understanding which He has given me through all this, it lessens not the pain and hurt I have experienced or still have in my heart.

My first attempt at putting together a community was the one which has taken me the longest to understand. Because this is true, I was not able to avert many of the tragedies of the subsequent attempts at building a community. In the first attempt there were dynamics of which I was not aware, which facilitated its failure. This attempt at putting together a community was the catalyst which brought about the demise of my previous marriage. This attempt at building a community was not the cause, but only revealed something long hidden from me. One of the people involved in this attempt, had a long standing intimate relationship with my ex-wife, which this attempt would bring to the surface for me to see.

If I could have properly understood all these things concerning this first failed attempt, I may never have had to go through all the subsequent pain and anguish in the later attempts. Having said that, please let me emphasize, it is YHWH who is in control of my life. I placed my life in His loving hands long ago. My life is still in His hands. I understand what He shows me in His time, not my own time. Thus, I have come to see it was necessary for me to experience all these things. YHWH could have easily opened my eyes much sooner than He did to certain truths and spare me, but He did not. He knows I am willing to walk any path He needs me to walk. The only conclusion I can come to, then, at least at this point in my life, is that it was His will that I experience all these things in order to form and shape my heart and life to be more like Him.

There was one attempt which was particularly devastating to me, personally. I actually considered turning my back on Mashiach Yeshua during that time; I was so deeply hurt. I realized that I could not do that, because I had nowhere else to go. I say this to indicate to you, the reader, just how badly I was damaged in that crisis. Perhaps I should give a little more detail concerning that time.

I could say that my wife and I decided to join a messianic organization, to work with them, and to become an integral part of that work. But that wouldn't be a very accurate picture. What really happened was that I joined it, and then Batya was coerced by the leader of that group into joining. If there was ever a red flag that I should not have ignored, that is one of them! Of course, you know the old saying about hindsight! Honestly, I must say that Batya never did feel a part of that group, and rightfully so.

In looking back upon it, Batya and I were manipulated and bullied into doing things that were not right and not according to Scripture while associated with that particular group. Oh sure, on the surface it looked legitimate, but it wasn't. In fact, there were two different groups (both cults) which attempted to get me to join them in an attempt on their part to have the appearance of being more legitimate than what they actually were. Both were familiar with my work, and could see my heart in building His kingdom. If they could succeed in getting me to sign on, then it would strengthen their cover. They were wolves, and I was to be their sheep's clothing. One succeeded in getting me to join, one did not.

To the group I joined, my wife and I eventually signed over our farm and all our possessions. Let me make this as clear as I possibly can make it: any group with which you have to do this in order to be a part of it, is a cult and it is not doing legitimate work for His kingdom! Don't just walk away from these people, run! They will only cause you grief in the long run. In fact, my personal recommendation would be that a person not only separates himself from such a group, but that he never, ever, reads or studies any of their material, either. Why, you may ask? Such material is tainted with one goal in mind, to suck the reader into their way of thinking, and thus the group would then be able to exert a certain amount of control over the individual. Sure, there is truth in what they say and write, but the cost of getting that truth out is simply not worth it! And running the risk of being sucked into false ideas is very great. Such groups subtly change every idea of Scripture and teach it in such a way as to subvert one's mind into thinking things which are not according to Scripture; all the while, Scripture is being manipulated in order to manipulate the people who read their material.

While we were a part of this organization, a subtle change began to take place in my thinking. I did not see it at first. I began to write studies in such a way as to please the leader of the group. What this entailed, was putting in certain ideas or not saying certain things, in order for him to be pleased. The leader accomplished this by editing everything I wrote and pointing out how to say things. He did this in order to get me to think, write, and talk like him. He was grooming my thinking and actions and I did not recognize it; at least at first.

Once I came to see what was happening, I knew I was in trouble—deep trouble. I began moving out from under his control and placing myself back under the exclusive control of the Spirit of YHWH. I knew this would bring a confrontation, eventually.

Not too long after I began moving back towards YHWH, the leader leveled unfounded accusations against me. This came out of the blue one day for no apparent reason that I could see. I showed this email to my wife and we discussed it at length. We decided together that we would do what was right in the eyes of YHWH, and simply trust in Him to get us through what we knew was about to become a very tumultuous time for us.

I wrote back and asked for specifics about the accusations he had made against me. His response was that he had no specifics, just general feelings about the matter. Furthermore, specifics were not necessary since he was the leader and I needed to submit to his authority. I responded back to him, via email, and asked for three days to pray about the situation. I asked that he not contact me during those three days and that I would not contact him. His response was, again via email, to attempt to kick us out of our home. I later learned that after he sent us that email, he went immediately to his local courthouse and filed an eviction notice, which was served on us three or four days later.

When we signed over our property to this organization, which really only consisted of one man, we did so with honest integrity. That is, it was our intention to give him all of our property without any strings attached. This was stupid and foolish on my part. My wife was against it and the leader had to do a lot of fancy talking to convince her to do it. Anyway, YHWH had other plans, which we were not to discover until years later during the legal battle to remove us from our home. In fact, we would not even discover the truth of the whole situation until everything was said and done and completely settled.

After a settlement out of court was reached between us and the leader of this cult, I took the papers to the courthouse to file the necessary documents to get the property back in our name. It was in the office of deeds that we discovered the truth. Our property originally consisted of four separate tracts of land, purchased at different times. These smaller tracts were added to the larger tract upon which our home was located. One of the tracts of land had upon it, an old two room school house. When the deed was drawn up to sign over all of our land to this cult leader, the title company made a mistake and only put in the legal description of one tract of land, that piece of land which included the schoolhouse and two acres. While it was our intent to sign over all of it, YHWH was in total and complete control and only allowed that one piece to be signed over. He was protecting us even when we did not know we needed to be protected.

When I discovered this at the courthouse and then later told my wife, we had a real time of rejoicing. Even in our foolishness, YHWH was watching over us and providing for our needs before we even knew we had a need in that area. Even our attorney who represented us in this matter did not discover this. Only the office of deeds found it out. Praise YHWH!

Largely as a result of this experience, we are rather reluctant to let other people into our lives. It has made us very cautious towards others, particularly, those who write to me and “volunteer” to come and be a part of our lives. Occasionally, I receive an email in which a person desires to come and work for me on my farm at no cost to me. Having had this happen in the past, considering the “no cost” to me in the past has been extremely great; that is just not going to happen again! I cannot afford these “no cost” offers any longer. They have already cost me way too much.

One of the things that happened with the above mentioned group (person) when we signed over our farm to him, was that he later put debt upon it to buy a local print shop. When we signed over our farm, there was no debt upon it. Now all of a sudden there was a note for \$30,000, and he expected us to go and work in the print shop to produce all of his materials, as well as working outside orders for businesses. This was disastrous in every way.

When the breakup came, we ended up being saddled with the print shop and had to once again pay off a loan we were not responsible for obtaining. We had to do this in order not to lose our farm. Financially speaking, this was a very costly lesson! We ended up selling the print shop after a year for a significant loss. It took us a couple of years, but we once again got our farm debt free.

While my motives in doing this were noble, the person on the receiving end was anything but noble. In fact, we found out during the legal struggles that this person has a long history of doing this very thing, tricking other people out of their properties. This cult leader did everything he could to make it seem like he was legitimate, but he was anything but legitimate. Sadly, he is still in business today, still taking people’s money under false pretenses.

A few of the people we met while in this group are still friendly towards us. We are blessed by their friendship. Some of those people have not seen what kind of person this cult leader is. This is due mainly to not having the close relationship with him that we did.

At one point I was contemplating joining in with another group which turned out to be another cult. During this exploratory time there were several red flags, doubts which came up. I had already told my dear wife that we would do nothing unless she was completely comfortable with any move we decided upon. As I was out walking and praying one day, YHWH strongly impressed upon me, that as long as there were any doubts in my mind and heart about this matter, I could not move forward. If I ignored the doubts which He had put there, he would strip me of everything I had. Needless to say, He had my full attention.

To move onto the property of this cult meant one would sign over all of his possessions and all his possessions would become community property. If for any reason the person then later chose to leave or was asked to leave, all their possessions would have to be left behind as they now belonged to the “group,” which in reality, once again only consisted of one man.

I say this to the reader, to help you understand the importance of not ignoring those little nagging doubts. This is true of anything in our lives. Often times YHWH places those little nagging doubts in our lives in order to protect us. However, because the world in which we live is so very fast-paced, as well as having a constant background noise of so many things vying for our attention, all too often we ignore these little pricks in our mind and heart to our own undoing. I am speaking from the school of hard-knocks in this matter.

One attempt we made brought us in contact with people who had severely critical spirits. Sadly, I did not act as quickly as possible. It is good to give others the benefit of any doubts. However, there is also a time when action is warranted, to put an end to criticism and condemnation. I came to see during this time that many hurtful words are spoken under the guise of "YHWH told me to tell you...." Words such as these, or others in the same vein, are words used to disguise the true nature and intent of the critical and condemning spirit behind the words. This is another one of the red flags I learned to recognize, and more importantly, how to deal with it. It will often manifest itself publicly, but needs to be dealt with in private a.s.a.p.!

I do not feel the need at this time to write down a lot of the specifics of each of the attempts we have made. Having written down these general thoughts seems to be enough at this time. Once again, my purpose is to help those who would like to put together a Torah community or join one. Take your time and be extremely cautious.

If you wish to dialog via email about your own attempt to build a Torah community or if you are considering joining a Torah community, I would be blessed to discuss these matters with you. I can only draw upon my own experiences and my own understanding of Scripture. However, I will be as honest as possible with you and hopefully spare you some of the great hurt and heartache we have experienced.

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