

## **The Next Generation - Passing the Baton**

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My presentation will include both a response to some of the key points of Tuvya Zaretsky's paper, as well as additional insights of my own on how we can rise to meet the challenge of engaging the next and future generations in being involved in the work and vision of LCJE.

### **What is the "Baton"?**

What is this "baton" that we are passing? In a limited sense, and from a parochial view, this would include some of our methods and structure, as these relate to the heritage of Jewish missions and the 'cause' of Jewish evangelism. But at a more fundamental level, many of our forms and methods will eventually pass away or be altered by future generations until the Lord returns, but the word of our testimony will remain. And it is this testimony, this witness, that we must deliver intact in its truest and purest form to the next generation. We are all witnesses not only of our own personal salvation stories and how we have been touched by the 'cause', or better, the *call* of Jewish evangelism upon each of us individually, but also as witnesses of the collective call upon our lives that we mutually share. This both forms and *informs* our reason and purpose for having the LCJE in its service-role as a network and as a framework for our mutual encouragement and the 'enlargement' of our joint callings (to borrow a phrase and an idea from Alex Jacob!).

### **Forming The Testimony of Our Present-day LCJE Generation**

What is this testimony that we must labor on now so that we can deliver it intact to the next generation? It is certainly a work-in-progress. I agree with Tuvya that much of it must be built on relationships. The next generation is hungering for those relationships - both among themselves and with us - and we must take the time to build them. This is the investment that is called for. Taking the time to make this investment or even perceiving that it is necessary is actually an important part of our witness and testimony, and that is how it will be received by those who are waiting for it. We will make mistakes in this process along the way. But that is OK. As a popular U.S. public awareness campaign for adoption says: "you don't have to be perfect to be a perfect parent. There are thousands of teens in foster care who don't need perfection. They just need *you...*" For scores or hundreds of young people, both Jewish and Gentile, who share our passion and commitment to Jewish evangelism but who are not quite sure why they need LCJE, they just need *us* to start with! - meaning blocks of our quality time and attentive ears to their needs and concerns.

### **Reconciliation in Our Own Ranks and Being Real 'Fathers' and 'Mothers' to the Next Generation**

In March of this year I attended a one-day, quickly-organized gathering of U.S.-based Messianic leaders, held in Dallas, Texas, at Baruch HaShem Messianic Synagogue. The meeting, put together by Marty Waldman and his staff, included a number of young people who have grown up in the Messianic movement who are beginning to take various leadership roles themselves. Marty's goal for the gathering was open-ended and centered around not just a discussion of reconciliation between various ministries and individuals but rather specific confession and an expressed desire for healing in relationships, beginning with himself. There were many passionate and moving statements made by many of the participants at this gathering - and I hope these types of meetings will continue in the future - but for our purposes today I would like to focus on what a couple of the younger people present at this meeting said.

They spoke of their deep respect for the 'fathers' of the movement - and I include in this context both the Messianic movement itself and the cause of Jewish evangelism worldwide. Some of these 'fathers' they had in mind were present in the room; others have already passed into Glory. After sharing their love and esteem, however, they also shared their frustrations and disappointment over broken relationships and attitudes that they cannot understand and want no part of. Growing up in a blessed Messianic home, they nevertheless expressed how frustrating and unhelpful it was when they asked why - in a relatively small community - they could not associate with certain other like-minded believers or groups, they were told, 'well, we do not work with *them*.' But why that was the case was either never fully explained or was very unsatisfactorily explained by their parents or by the authority figures in their communities or internal groups. Later, as they matured and began to make their own contacts and relationships with their peers in those *other* groups - but now as adults, they realized that they had no desire to carry forward the slights, resentments and hurts of their parents' generation. Instead, they built their own relationships with individuals in those *other* groups, and they longed for their parents' generation and for those whom they look up to so much to also take the same steps while they still can. Marty Waldman himself expressed this deep concern that he and others of his generation - mostly *our* generation - say words of healing, forgiveness and reconciliation while we still have the opportunity to do so. This is a key part of passing on our testimony intact to the next generation.

### **LCJE's Role**

I think that LCJE can and is helping facilitate that process. LCJE is 'tailor-made' to help fill that role. To the extent that we utilize the opportunities that LCJE affords us, walls come down, misunderstandings are resolved, and small crooked ways are made straight as we spend quality time in various settings with each other, and *this* process itself is a key part of our testimony - one that transcends structures or agendas. We need to build on that strength and track record as we seek to find the best ways to 'pass the baton'. As we take delight in each other, while continuing to let iron sharpen iron, we help prepare ourselves for that Day when we all sit down together in the great banquet Feast of the Lamb.

This is our goal. But in any event, to the extent we fall short, as Tuvya notes in his paper, this generation of young Messianic Millennials "want no part of congregational or organizational disagreements that have previously occurred in their parents' generation."

### **Overcoming Indifference**

Sometimes when I seek to recruit a young person to LCJE - such as occurred at the last Borough Park Symposium in New York - that person or persons will listen politely as I explain to them who we are and what we are trying to do. I invite them to come to an LCJE meeting sometime and share more about their ministry or goals and meet others with similar goals and dreams for Jewish evangelism. They will usually say something along the lines of 'Yes, I've heard of LCJE', but a reading of their face says 'why would I want to join LCJE?' I will ask them about their ministry and hopes and dreams and give them my card, but I usually don't hear anything back. Part of the issue at times may be that I just need to pursue them, but it is also true that sometimes there is a real indifference. Perhaps there is a perception among some of these young people that LCJE is for that *older* generation but not for them - or so they may think - because they have already established their own internal support networks through social media and similar means. If this is indeed the perception - and I am not sure it is, but I share it with you as a concern, I am dedicated to doing my part to try to change it, and that is something that I think we all need to be sensitive to.

There may be many factors behind this apparent indifference or hesitation. Some of these factors have to do with ourselves, some of them may have to do with the next generation of younger leaders themselves and their own perceptions of what they need and what 'works' for them, so to speak. Some of these factors may simply have to do with the times and the extremely rapid changes in how people in general now work, socialize and communicate. We need to try to put our collective fingers on all of these factors and together seek ways to overcome them while also not fretting over them too much in the process.

### **Passing on 'The Jewel'**

If we can do that, then I think we will have found the most edifying way to 'pass the baton' and the word of our testimony to the next generation. LCJE is a great jewel and treasure, and, as we delight in what we have and build on those strengths and communicate that delight to our various spheres of influence, we will attract those of the next generation who share our same or similar hopes, dreams and goals for Jewish evangelism around the world. Let us be devoted to the treasure that God has put into our hand, and He shall bring about its increase in His time.