

The heart of Judaism

By Marjorie W. Eberlé-Gotlib

In an article I wrote in 1966 (entitled “To be or not to be”) I wrote that we were no longer “in”. Messianic Jews were no longer popular. For a long time we had been 'the' subject of dissertations, pocketbooks, lectures, seminars, themes for conferences etc. But by 1966 that had come to an end.

Nevertheless, the basic reason that so many individuals and groups in the Christian world were interested in us remain. Messianic Jews were seen as being able to provide a sure word of hope in the midst of the growing confusion around us in this secularized age. Possibly, it was said, we could provide the stability that people are looking for. And for that reason, it seems that we are now “in” again.

Now, I can assure you that being “in” is a very relative thing. As soon as we say or do anything that resembles traditional Christianity, we are “out” again. For that they don't need us. After all, words like 'grace' and 'sin' are no longer fashionable, and as soon as we use them we too are dismissed. No, we are expected to give birth to a new theology.

In Holland there has been a total failure to adequately study the issues that determine our lives and could give us some direction. And yet people expect from us a new theology. Well, there simply isn't one. But as soon as I say this, I wonder if we even need one. Would God fail to provide us with all we need to be able to praise and serve Him in the right way? What does God want from us? Why did He shape us to become Jews who recognized the Messiah in Yeshua of Nazareth? So that we can be just another Jewish sect?

More and more, people inside and outside our foundation ask us to reflect more seriously on our Jewish roots. This objective was a value that I learned very early from my Jewish teachers who also had come to know Yeshua as their Messiah. In contrast with most Messianic Jews, I didn't have to be cured of any particular Church tradition. Therefore I was freer to simply accept the Good News for what it is. I was saved from the temptation of thinking that as a Jewess I had to comply with the Rabbinical Jewish law.

In Matthew 5:17 Yeshua makes it clear that He did not come to abolish the Law or Prophets but to fulfill them! In chapter 5 there is a series of summaries of the Laws, each starting with: “You have heard ...”, followed by a law. In the next sentence, Yeshua makes that law even more onerous. For example, verse 27: “You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery, **But I tell you** that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.’”. Or verse 43: “You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' **But I tell you:** Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” The last verse is: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

When reading these last words of Yeshua literally, you could be filled with despair. At least, that is what happened to me. How can we reconcile the words '**Good News**' or '**gospel**' with the commandment to be as perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect? Just think about that – that is impossible?!

At the same time, in Matthew 11:30 Yeshua says that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. Is He so ignorant of our life right here on earth that He doesn't understand we can't be perfect like our heavenly Father is? Of course He understands, and of course we haven't read this verse correctly if

we think that He has imposed this impossible requirement on us. Yeshua started by saying (in Matthew 5:17) that we should not be mistaken. He says: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets **for us!**

Therefore, He warns us, not one iota or dot will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. That's why nobody should be taught to discard even the smallest commandment. Yeshua says we have to fulfill all commandments in the Law - including the smallest- and He goes on to quote Deuteronomy 27:26 where Moses says: "Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out." So if we leave out even an iota or a dot of the law, we are cursed.

Can we really avoid God's curse by carrying out the 613 rules made by Rabbi's? I sin a lot every day. It's a dilemma. Is this what is meant by His yoke being easy and His burden light?

Why does Yeshua impose such a heavy burden on us? He does that explicitly, in order to show us just how incapable we are of fulfilling the Law. He wants us to see that there is a deep chasm between us and God, a chasm that in the Bible is called **sin**. Despite our best intentions, we have a wrong relationship with God. That's why God sent His Son who – by trusting in the promises of His Father – through faith won the victory on the cross.

Yeshua Himself had announced that the Law would be fulfilled before the Kingdom of Heaven could come. We can read about the moment when the Law was fulfilled by Yeshua in John 19:30, where His death is described and He said: "It is finished." With that, he bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

At that moment, Yeshua fulfilled the Law, including the last iota and dot of even the smallest commandment. **That's why the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom - because no separation was necessary any more between the Most Holy Place and the believer.** The separation was broken down by the faith of Yeshua.

Satan, God's opponent, the one who separated us from God, was dethroned. His power over death was broken down and the evidence of His defeat was the resurrection of Yeshua. His faith and trust in His Father despite the cross is imputed to us when we believe in the same God who raised Yeshua from the dead. Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins, and was raised to life for our justification, as it is said in Romans 4:25.

Unfortunately, it seems this message of grace is not enough for many of us; 98% of all believers are unable to live successfully by faith alone. Very early, people began to look for visible and concrete ways to praise God; faith by itself is so bare. That's why, for example, the idea of "works of thankfulness" started to grow in certain Protestant circles in the last century; this is a so-called 'quid pro quo' approach, which already existed centuries before Paul wrote his letter to the Romans. This is in fact a form of trying to earn salvation by observing the law, which in some Christian circles is no different from the orthodox Jews' observance of the 613 rabbinical laws. But this is the poison of God's opponent. Now his power over death has been broken, he is trying to exercise power over our lives. Dressed like an angel of the light, he is trying to undermine God's message of grace by getting us to comply with rules and regulations, and thus taking us even further from the heart of Judaism. Satan has succeeded in this strategy since the day Yeshua was crucified on Golgotha.

The first community in Jerusalem – existing exclusively of Messianic Jews – was already guilty of this way of life (read Paul's Letter to the Galatians). They developed rules of conduct based on the rabbinical food laws. Paul asked them who had deceived them – had not Yeshua the Messiah been crucified for them? But this warning was of no use.

The Roman Catholic Church made works of faith a vital part of its religion. The Reformation, which occurred as a reaction to those works, has in the meantime retraced its own footsteps by saying we need to comply with works of thankfulness if we are to be acceptable before God. The devil has taken possession of our innate need to comply with the law, and he is ever more successful in it. The churches are becoming empty, because the endless sermons about loving our fellow man are at the end of the day no different from the ideals of the myriad of ethical movements such as Humanist Association, Green Peace, etc. All of them urge us to do good works, both in our daily lives as well as services of worship.

Whether we are Jews or non-Jews, since the time of Adam we have had a broken relationship with God. All the good works in the world will never heal that relationship. Let us therefore search for the heart of our existence as God meant it to be. This is the same for Jews as for Christians. Let us put aside all temptations, whether they are Jewish or non-Jewish attempts to fulfill the law, and let us concentrate on that one thing that alone is necessary to justify us in God's eyes. For the Bible tells us that anyone who expects to be justified by works is cursed: For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM." (Gal. 3:10)

So it's clear that no-one can be justified by keeping the law.

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." (Gal. 3:11). No laws made by Rabbis or churches can make us perfect, only the faith of Yeshua on the cross can make us perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

I will show you a part of Talmud to confirm this. It's written by Rabbi Simlai who lived in the second part of the third century AD. He was a famous expert of the Aggada of Talmud. It is included in the Mishna in the part of Neziekien, chapter 5 titled Makkot 23b. Here we can read:

"Rabbi Simlai, when preaching, said: Six hundred and thirteen precepts were communicated to Moses - three hundred and sixty five negative precepts, corresponding to the number of solar days [in the year], and two hundred and forty eight positive precepts, corresponding to the number of limbs in a person's body."

David reduced this amount to 11, as it is written in Psalm 15:

"O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart. He does not slander with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend; In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, But who honors those who fear the LORD; He swears to his own hurt and does not change; He does not put out his money at interest, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken."

Isaiah reduces this to 6, as it is written in Isaiah 33:15, 1:

"He who walks righteously and speaks with sincerity, He who rejects unjust gain and shakes his hands so that they hold no bribe; He who stops his ears from hearing about bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil; He will dwell on the heights, his refuge will be the impregnable rock; His bread will be given him, His water will be sure."

Micah reduced it to 3: He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Later, Habakkuk reduced it all to one word (Hab. 2:4) : "Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith."

According to the Talmud, the Tenach and the Gospel, the heart of Judaism is this: **the righteous will live by faith**". On this one word hang all the Law and the prophets and indeed, Yeshua was right when He said: "My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

May this Good News carry you on your path of life.

The author had been President of Hadderech foundation for almost 50 years. She represented the organization in "The International Hebrew Christian Alliance" where she was part of the "Theological Committee". In addition, she has given many speeches in Holland, and was Hadderech's representative at the ICI, the Inter-denominational Contact group for Israel.