

The Journey

What Does it Mean to be a Follower of Yeshua

"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world, you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

From the beginning of His ministry on earth, Yeshua warned that following Him and remaining with Him would be difficult.

"Enter at the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who are going through it, because small is the gate and narrow is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."—Matthew 7:13-14

"Then He said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory and in His Father's, and of the holy angels. —Luke 9:23-26

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Written by Victoria Radin

While many believers feel that Yeshua's call to His followers was unique to Christianity, there were many leaders who called for the same degree of commitment in Judaism. Rabbi Israel Salanter (Lipkin), for instance, was the father of the Musar movement. Musar is the medieval Jewish, moralistic and ethical literature that is drawn from the teachings of the Tenakh (Old Testament). Musar means discipline, chastening, correction, and calls for ongoing self-examination.

The essence of the Musar movement is summed up in one of Salanter's teachings that is based upon a real-life encounter he had with a shoemaker. While walking home late one night, his shoe suddenly tore. He happened upon a shoemaker that was still open despite the late hour. The Rabbi asked him if it was too late to get his shoe repaired and the shoemaker responded, "As long as the candle is burning, it is still possible to repair."

Salanter preached what he had learned from the shoemaker that night, "As long as the candle is burning, i.e. as long as one is still alive, it is still possible to repair one's soul and to mend mistakes (and our world)." His stories and teachings stress the inter-personal laws of the Torah. The Rabbi believed that performing the outward rituals of Judaism without developing one's relationships with others and oneself was only a shadow of what God intended.

Rabbi Salanter related the following narrative to demonstrate the benefit of practicing Musar in one's life:

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“When I was a young man, I wanted to change the world. But I found it was difficult to change the world, so I tried to change my country. When I found I couldn’t change my country, I began to focus on my town. However, I discovered that I couldn’t change the town, and so as I grew older, I tried to change my family. Now, as an old man I realize the only one I can change is myself, but I’ve come to recognize that if long ago I had started with myself, then I could have made an impact on my family. And my family and I could have made an impact on our town. And that, in turn, could have changed the country and we could all, indeed, have changed the world.”

Musar was Yeshua’s idea from the beginning of His plan to restore mankind, with one major difference; Yeshua’s way does not depend upon the follower’s own ability to change himself through scriptural disciplines. Christianity, rather, is first and foremost about becoming a follower of Yeshua, the Living Word of God, but then, it’s the quest a follower undertakes to become *like* Yeshua; it’s about *the Holy Spirit* fixing and changing YOU so that you can and will have an impact on those around you, your family, your friends, your community, your nation, and the world; it’s about being fully transformed b
y God

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” –Galatians 2:20

Just like Salanter’s Musar students, when you decide to follow Yeshua, you begin a journey during which you will create and maintain new habits and entertain new ways of thinking; and as a result, you will be liberated from your “old man”, “old self”, “old way of life” (Romans 6:6) to

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live a life filled with meaning and purpose. Choosing to become a Christian is like crossing the Rubicon; there's no turning back.

Jesus said: "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." –Luke 9:62

The 'changed' individual regards happiness as the condition of a soul that is liberated from a judgmental attitude, unforgiveness, negative or foul speech, selfishness, being self-focused and ungrateful to a condition wherein there is acceptance and forgiveness of oneself and others; there is kindness, mercy, generosity and a striving to seek the best for all people.

Pastor Jim Cymbala of the Brooklyn Tabernacle rightly proclaims, "You can have all the teaching, guidebooks and study guides — they all have their place — but unless God does a work inside of you by His Spirit, you're just going to *act* more moral. Only the Holy Spirit brings conviction of sin. Only He makes Christ real. Only He produces the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

"For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."—Philippians 2:1

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It is a Christian's constant struggle to become like Yeshua.

"...always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord [Yeshua], that the life of [Yeshua] also may be manifested in our body." –2 Corinthians 4:8-10

The Message Bible catches the gist of this struggle in relating it to Yeshua himself.

"Think of yourselves the way [Yeshua] thought of Himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave and became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life..."
–Philippians 2:5-8

Becoming a Christian does not guarantee wealth and status or a long tribulation-free life; it does, instead, promise that if we allow Him to live through us, we will enter His rest and eventually, eternal life:

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“...Jesus said to them, 'and I tell you that those who leave home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and for the gospel, will receive much more in this present age. They will receive a hundred times more...and persecutions as well; and in the age to come they will receive eternal life.’” –Mark 10:29-30

“For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.”
–Hebrews 4:10

The Lord does not try to deceive His followers but rather warns of the persecution they will face after deciding to follow Him:

“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in [Yeshua] will be persecuted.” –2 Timothy 3:12

“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” –Matthew 5:10

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“You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.” –Matthew 10:22

“Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.” –John 15:20

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” –1 Peter 4:12-13

Unlike in the practice of Musar, believers in Yeshua can be assured that God's presence, His Holy Spirit, goes with those who choose to take the journey, guaranteeing victory from the beginning:

God said, “My presence will go with you. I'll see [your] journey to the end.” –Exodus 33:14

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What does your 'journey' look like? Are you persecuted for your faith? Is your righteousness an offense to those who are lost? Are you hated because you follow Yeshua? Are you facing "fiery trials" for your faith? Do you deny worldly pleasures to further the gospel? If none of these apply to you, you should remember why you are here. The Message Bible puts it plainly:

"You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage." –Matthew 5:13

The apostle Paul reminds Christians to examine themselves regularly, such as is done in the practice of Musar.

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus [Yeshua] is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?" –2 Corinthian 13:5

Kumi Ohr (Arise & Shine!)