

Ordination to Shamash of Steven R. Caldwell

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Delivered to Ohev Yisrael, January 10, 2009

The doctrine of laying on of hands is referred to as a foundation, in Hebrews 6:1-3:

“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Messiah, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of immersions, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.”

Today, the elders of Ohev Yisrael will be laying hands on Steve Caldwell as he is ordained a *shamash* (which is the same as a deacon), and we will also lay hands on his wife Etta, not to ordain her, but to impart to her, as she assumes an important role in serving as Steve’s helpmate in this new ministry role.

Laying on of hands is an ancient Jewish practice that is recorded in many places in the *Tanakh*, but if you ask a rabbi about it today, you are likely to get a blank stare and a question in response like: “What’s that?” The reason for the disconnect in modern Jewish practice is that laying on of hands was part of pre-Temple and Temple Judaism, but it ceased after the Temple was destroyed, when much of Judaism no longer looked for the power of God in their leaders and in their every-day lives. There have been exceptions, of course, and there have been occasional resurgences of appreciating the power and authority of God being transferrable from person to person, but by and large it has been forgotten. The reason laying on of hands has become almost universally adopted in Messianic Judaism, is that what we are practicing is an older form of Judaism – in a sense, Temple Judaism without a standing Temple. We even participate in certain sacrifices of Temple Judaism, through our Messiah Yeshua, whom we understand is God’s sacrificial lamb that He Himself provided.

So to get a historical Jewish perspective for today’s ceremony, let’s look back to the time when the Aaronic priests ministered atonement to Israelites by laying their hands on the head of a penitent’s sacrifice; in Leviticus 1:1-4 we read:

“Now the LORD called to Moses, and spoke to him from the tabernacle of meeting, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of the livestock -- of the herd and of the flock. If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD. Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.’”

Also, on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, the High Priests transferred their own sins to a bull, and the sins of Israel to a goat, by laying their hands on the head of the goat. We read how this was done in Leviticus 16:20-22:

"And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place, the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat. Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness."

We see that the goats in the ordinary sacrifices and the *Yom Kippur* sacrifices were set apart by God through the laying on of hands. But most occurrences of the laying on of hands that occurred in the early Scriptures of Judaism were not to set apart goats, but to set apart men, or to confer blessings as we shall see:

Numbers 8:10: *"So you shall bring the Levites before the LORD, and the children of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites;"*

Numbers 27:16-23: *"Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd. And the LORD said to Moses: "Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the LORD for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him -- all the congregation." So Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses."*

And following up in Deuteronomy 34:9 we read:

"Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses."

So first we see the Israelites acting in their capacity as members of a priestly nation, laying hands on the Levites, seemingly as a transference of their priesthood to the Levites, and then we see Moses laying hands on Joshua, setting him apart for service, and transferring some of his authority to him to lead the nation of Israel. These were examples of how the laying on of hands was used to confer what we today call ordinations.

Then there were cases where hands were laid for the conferring blessings. We are familiar with how Jacob blessed Joseph through Ephraim and Manasseh by laying his hands on them:

Genesis 48:13-20 *"And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near him. Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, who was the*

younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn. And he blessed Joseph, and said: "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has fed me all my life long to this day, the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; Let my name be named upon them, And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head." But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations." So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will bless, saying, 'May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!' " And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh."

Notice how central the laying on of the right hand was here, that Joseph tried to correct his father, but Jacob made it plain that the right hand of blessing belonged to Ephraim. So this was not just symbolic – there was the power of blessing in the hands.

We don't see laying on of hands for healing until we get to the Scriptures of the *B'rit Chadasha* where there are many examples. This is probably because, in the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit became available to all men who would receive Him:

Matthew 9:27-29: *“When Yeshua departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Yeshua said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let it be to you."”*

Mark 6:4-5: *“But Yeshua said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house." Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them.”*

Luke 4:40: *“When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them.”*

Luke 13:10-13: *“Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. But when Yeshua saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity." And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.”*

Now those are examples of Yeshua healing by the laying on of His hands, but that ability was given to His disciples, as we see in Mark 16:17-18:

"And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

And here is an example of Paul healing by the laying on of hands – Acts 28:8-9:

"And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed."

So far, we have shown that laying on of hands is an ancient Jewish way to minister atonement, to ordain to position of authority, to set individuals apart for special tasks, and for imparting blessings, and in the *b'rit chadasha*, we see laying on of hands for healing; but let's go on. Another reason for the laying on of hands was for the impartation of spiritual gifts and for what has come to be known as the baptism (or immersion) of the Holy Spirit:

Acts 9:17-18: *"And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Yeshua, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was immersed."*

Acts 19:4-6: *"Then Paul said, "John indeed immersed with a mikvah of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Messiah Yeshua." When they heard this, they were immersed in the name of the Lord Yeshua. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied."*

1 Timothy 4:14: *"Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership."*

2 Timothy 1:6: *"Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands."*

Finally, similar to when Moses laid hands on Joshua, the laying on of hands is also used to set people apart for special tasks, as we see in Acts 6:3-6:

"As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus."

Well, that gives us a good idea of the biblical and Jewish background of laying on of hands, so let's bring this up to date regarding what we are doing here today, which is to lay hands on our brother Steve to ordain him as a *shamash*, and on Etta, to anoint her for whatever personal and helping ministry God should send her way.

Again, we turn to Scripture for our example; we read in Acts 6:1-8:

“Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’ And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.”

So *shamashim* were ordained by the apostles by the laying on of hands, as the elders of Ohev intend to do with our brother Steve today. And 1 Timothy 5:22 cautions us: “Do not lay hands on anyone hastily,” and we haven’t, for we have put Steve’s nomination before the congregation, and among the comments we have received, no one can state anything negative or compromising about Steve’s character or faith. We have also measured Steve’s readiness against the requirements established for deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 which reads as follows:

“Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Messiah Yeshua.”

So with this teaching fresh in our minds, let the elders and their wives, and the *shamashim* and their wives, and Steve and Etta, come forward at this time.

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As I pondered how to perform this ordination, the thought occurred to me to seek a culturally Jewish way to go about it since, as most of you well know, Messianic Judaism often breaks new ground as we bring the New Covenant into Jewish practice. So I did what I sometimes do when I need a Jewish source – I visited the Jewish Bookstore in Wheaton, Maryland, and posed the question to the store’s owner, Yeshua Yulis: “What does your synagogue do when it wants to install a high official? And it was as I expected; he replied that there was no such ceremony. But then he said: “Wait a minute,” and he took out a *Sukkot machzor*, leafed through it, and said: “Here. The investiture of the *Chassan Torah* on *Simchas Torah* is close to what you are looking for.” Now Mr. Yulis knows I am Messianic, and I was impressed at his willingness to assist me,

and gratified in my ability to call to his attention something that we are doing that is lacking in his tradition. I am sure this has gotten him thinking about the ancient Jewish practice of ceremonial ordination that has all but disappeared in modern synagogues.

When I returned home I looked at what Mr. Yulis had suggested, and had a good feeling about it; perhaps this talk I had with Mr. Yulis had been a divine appointment. So, with the appropriate modification of the *machzor's* investiture, we will proceed.

<The ordination to *shamash* of Stephen Caldwell was conducted as follows>

Meir'shut ha-eil hagadol hagibor v'hanorah,

With permission of the great, mighty, and awesome God; with the authority of the *Torah*, the *Kitvey B'rit Chadasha*, and the *Ru'ach Kodesh*, and in the name of *Mashiach* Yeshua –

I open my mouth with song and hymn to thank and praise Him who dwells amid light, Who has kept us alive and sustained us through His pure reverence and has brought us to this occasion to rejoice with gladness.

Therefore, may it be the will of the Omnipotent that he bestow life, kindness, and honor on STEVEN, SON OF CARL, who has been chosen to become an ordained *shamash* of Ohev Yisrael Messianic Jewish congregation.

We pray that *HaShem* will strengthen him, bless him, and make him great in the study of His Word; that He will grant him merit and life, *Ruach Kodesh* gifts, and assign him in the council of the *Torah's* light; that He will grant him virtue and distinction, teach him holy knowledge, let him escape danger, raise him, nurture him, delight him, support him, and make him righteous among the people for whom the world was created. Draw him near, show him mercy, and protect him against every distress and trouble; strengthen, assist, and support him, and preserve him from being broken-spirited.

So now, we the elders of Ohev Yisrael, with hands laid on, do hereby ordain you, Steven, a *shamash* in our midst.

So, in the name of our Messiah *Yeshua Bet Lechem Yisrael*, arise, arise, arise, STEVEN, SON OF CARL, *shamash* of Ohev Yisrael! And in Yeshua's name and the empowerment of the *Ruach Kodesh*, in your new office render honor to our great and awesome God, and may you be granted by our awesome God, to see all of your children and grandchildren be strong in the faith, occupied with the *Torah*, and performing His commandments. May your countenance give illumination with righteousness as through a clear lens, and as Isaiah prophesied regarding *Mashiach*, that you will be filled with a spirit of counsel and strength.

So arise, arise, arise, STEVEN, SON OF CARL, and join your brother *shamashim* in their ministry and holy works.