

# Where We Are and Where We're Going

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Delivered to Ohev Yisrael by October 28, 2006

We are all familiar with the term “the first hundred days” as it applies to newly inaugurated presidents of our country. It is historically a time when political opponents put aside their pre-election rhetoric in order to give the new president time to become established; it is also a time when he is observed with great interest – everyone trying to get a glimpse of where he is likely to lead the country.

Well, last I looked I was not the president of the United States, but I see myself as having concluded a similar kind of “first hundred days” at Ohev. And in the same manner that the president reports to the country in his State of the Union Address, so I believe it is time for me to address you, my fellow congregants, in a short “State of Ohev” address so that you will understand what I discern to be God’s will for the congregation, and how I propose to lead it there.

A short time ago, the elders determined that Ohev needed a second service to accommodate those Ohev members and guests who prefer a more traditional Jewish approach to worship; this led to our establishing the Friday night service and the specialized *chavurah* that meets at the Moores’ home. We began to refer to those who gravitated to that service as Ohev’s “Traditional Expression,” and those who did not as the “Contemporary Expression.” That idea and what we sought to accomplish was correct, but I have come to believe that the terms “traditional” and “contemporary” were not correct because the terms gave a false impression, to a few, that there would be one place within Ohev where all or most of the traditions of the synagogue would be observed, and another place within Ohev – the Saturday morning service in particular – where there would be relatively few Jewish traditions. This kind of bifurcation was thought to be inevitable by some, but I have come to learn that neither of these interpretations represents the mainstream desire of Ohev, and that the membership of Ohev is not as polarized regarding Jewish tradition as I had initially thought. I have come to this revised understanding through having had numerous private conversations with many of you.

What I have learned to be the truth is that most Ohevites are neither traditional nor contemporary, but rather “more” traditional or “more” contemporary; the word “more” is very important in acknowledging that whichever way our members lean, most do, in fact, have an appreciation for the other way, and are willing to participate in the other way so long as there remains the minimum amount of either tradition or contemporary expression that each perceives he or she needs.

I have also learned that most “Ohevites” who lean toward less tradition are, nevertheless, here because they want to experience and be part of a “Jewish” Messianic Judaism – not just a place where Jews and Gentiles worship together, but rather a place that is decidedly Jewish. So, therefore, many inherently non-traditional people have appreciated the traditional aspects of the Saturday morning service.

Similarly, I have observed that those who lean toward more tradition, when they were given almost unfettered liberty to construct the Friday night service to be TOTALLY traditional, did not do so; rather what they constructed was MORE traditional than on Saturday morning. For example, they utilize many prayers from the Jewish prayer book, and conform to certain customs such as lighting Shabbat candles, and welcoming the Sabbath as though it were a blessing that passes through, rather than just a period of time on the biblical calendar. On the other hand, the service is liberally seeded with New Covenant readings; that is not traditional. They have a period of musical praise and worship similar to what we all enjoy on Saturday morning – not traditional either. There is a time set aside where prophetic Words are invited to be spoken – dramatically untraditional. Scott has scrutinized the liturgy for New Covenant inconsistencies, has eliminated some, and has adjusted some to cause what remains to reveal Yeshua as well as other New Covenant realities – again not traditional. Finally, Scott’s messages, though often wrapped in a Jewish context, are invariably Yeshua-centered. Though the liturgically uninitiated may not at first perceive it, the service is thoroughly New Covenant in its theology, and is welcoming of the power of the Holy Spirit. I say to Scott and to others who assist him, “Well done!”

Now let me explain some things you no doubt have noticed about some traditional additions to our Saturday morning service. We have replaced *MaTovu* with *Bar’chu* because *Bar’chu* is the traditional Jewish call to prayer. We have introduced *V’shamru* because it is the Scripture that commands us to keep the Sabbath, and we have added an abbreviated *Amidah* as a vehicle for intercessory prayer – something that was absent from the service previously. The *Sh’ma* and the Torah Service have remained virtually unchanged except that we now call some of the Torah participants by their names, using the Hebrew custom of linking one’s name with one’s fathers’ first name; this is a loving reminder that our tradition of being called to read from the Torah is passed on from one generation to the next.

“Why have tradition?” you may ask! “I have enjoyed and received fulfillment from Ohev’s services for years when it was not nearly this formal!” The answer is simply this – believe it or not, our Saturday morning service is untraditional when compared to most synagogue services. However, what we have now is the minimum that what all American Jews would recognize as a Jewish service, and they will not be able to deny that fact even though they know we worship Yeshua.

What I have just explained is our outreach reason for the nature of our service, and it is an important reason. But there is also an “Ohev family” reason, which is that the Saturday morning service is our main Shabbat service and must therefore seek to serve all of our members – those who are traditional in their Messianic Jewish practice, as well as those who are less so. Because the Friday evening service is not a principal Shabbat service, Saturday morning is the time when all Ohev members gather together to worship as a single unified congregation, and the service must therefore be adequate for all. It is inescapable that some of us will find it painfully lacking in liturgical tradition, while others of us will find similar pain in the amount of liturgy and tradition that is there. If it is any comfort, know that our Shabbat morning service, as it is now constructed, contains the same basic elements as does Ahavat Yeshua in Washington, as Rosh Pina in Baltimore, as Son of David in Rockville, as Emanuel’s Messianic Jewish Congregation in

Clarksville, as our sister congregation Tikvat Israel in Richmond, and as many, many other Messianic Jewish congregations all over the country.

One area in which Ohev excels beyond many congregations is our music ministry led by Bruce Bakaysa, and ministered by our excellent musicians. If there is anything I would still adjust in the Saturday morning service, it would be to add an additional time for praise and worship, but we are trying to keep the service to 2 ¼ hours, so we will have to see if that can be done. But Bruce and his music team are a great asset in leading us to the heights of worship, so if we cannot expand our praise and worship on Shabbat mornings, I will be looking toward providing some special services where we can turn him and his team loose to do what God has gifted them to do so well. I also want to commend Bruce for his skill in pulpit preaching, and for his being able to take over leadership of the entire service when I am away (and by the way, Doug Stearman can do that as well).

Children's education: Our children's education program under Cindy Stearman and assisted by Laurie Pearson and so many others is second to none, and is widely recognized and appreciated as we all saw just a little while ago. No changes are contemplated there beyond our recently having added a monthly "Torah Talk" where the youngest children can experience the Torah service and respond to *parasha*-related questions on their level..

One minister in our midst who rarely receives the recognition he deserves is our mild mannered "Clark Kentsky" Bob Blicksilver, the head *gabe* of the Torah Team, and the overseer of our children's Hebrew program. I also can't say enough about those who serve on our Torah team – especially those who are skilled in reading Hebrew directly from the scrolls. I don't know if you realize it, but most Messianic Jewish congregations would consider themselves thoroughly blessed to have even one person who could do that, but because of Bob's efforts and Melanie Sollenberger's Bar and Bat Mitzvah training, at Ohev we can rotate among several Torah readers. And, by the way, you have no doubt noticed that, for the past few months, Doug Stearman has been alternating with Bob in leading the Torah service. Doesn't he do a great job?

We have re-established Chavurah groups, and I believe they are all functioning well; it is probably time though, for me to take a look and evaluate what each group is doing, and give help where I can. In fact, just last week, Maralynn prepared a list for me of all Ohev functions and those who lead them, so that I can call each leader and get monthly updates on everything going on. Those of you who are leading – look forward to such a call!

The last thing I want to explain is my reason for instituting our afternoon adult education program. Teaching, especially biblical teaching, is essential in all congregations, and different congregations handle it differently. For example, at Ahavat Yeshua, the main teaching is the weekly message, but that consumes about an hour of time each week and, consequently, Ahavat's services go considerably longer than Ohev's. My preference is not to try to give a course-length teaching during the service, but rather to give a short biblically-based exhortation on a subject that I, or whoever gives the message, believes God wants the congregation to hear. So the afternoon studies and courses are intended to be Ohev's main way to educate its members, using the teaching talents of the members themselves. I know that staying here until late in the

afternoon is difficult for some of you, but consider how many exciting things there are to learn, and what talent we have in our midst to teach them.

Although there are many other ministries at Ohev and many others of you making them work, I must draw to a close now by saying this: Nothing we do will be viewed by God as adequate if we do not start reaching out of Ohev with the good news of Yeshua. In addition to all the other things Bruce Bakaysa does in this congregation, he has recently taken on the awesome responsibility of leading a newly revived outreach effort to both the Jewish community and others as well. He needs your help – both your ideas and your time. Bruce’s function will be to organize outreach – not to do it all himself. So whether you are drawn to minister in the Jewish community, the secular community, or some other community – go to Bruce and say “Here I am; use me!”

May God continue to lead Ohev toward fulfilling His high and holy purposes, and may he say of each of us: “Well done good and faithful servant.”