Anchor in the Storm

By **Eitan Shishkoff**

We find ourselves in a time of isolation and ruptured routine. The world health crisis has affected every one of us. Consequently, *something at the core of my being is searching for solid ground.* Life's circumstances have changed radically, in a way that threatens my inner security. Without knowing the ultimate purpose of my life, I can begin drowning in the waves of Corona.

The Pandemic and the Soul

Mental health statistics provide a sobering picture of the situation. Calls to suicide hotlines are spiking. With the headline *"Pandemic of loneliness, anxiety: Crisis hotline says suicide calls have doubled," The Times of Israel,* on October 30, 2020, reported *"an unprecedented level of suicide calls — and many of them are from people who did not have previously diagnosed mental health issues before the pandemic started."*

The Covid-19 Alert website states that "Bereavement, isolation, loss of income and fear are triggering mental health conditions or exacerbating existing ones…(leading to) increased levels of alcohol and drug use, insomnia, and anxiety."

This brings us back to the question of life's purpose. Is life random? If my body is subject to the whims of a runaway virus, where can I find an anchor in this uncontrollable storm? Why am I here?

Returning to our Origin

At the outset of the Genesis account, we are given a simple yet profound answer.

"Then God said, *'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;* let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.*' So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.* Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it'" (Genesis 1:26-28, emphasis added).

Clearly, inventing us was not some afterthought. Slow down and absorb: The eternal Maker of Heaven and Earth—who has just finished spreading out the universe—is now describing human beings as carrying His image! Two words are used here in the Hebrew text. One is *tzelem*/צלם from which we get the modern Hebrew word for camera. We are not God. But just as a photograph reflects the image of its subject, we reflect the original content of the picture. The other word is *d'mute*/דמות, variously translated as likeness, resemblance, or pattern.

So, I am fashioned to reflect the nature of God. Wow. Sobering. Phenomenal. If I allow this fact to penetrate my mental/emotional framework, I emerge from the threats of depression, anxiety, fear, and confusion with new clarity.

Flourishing in His Image

What is the measure of my life? Of yours? It is that we are made in the image of God. The Apostle Peter says we are "partakers in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). ***My anchor in the storm*** *is that I am in a cooperative relationship with God, participating in His eternal enterprise.* This fact supersedes the unpredictable circumstances around me.

May the same Spirit, by which man was originally created, impart a fuller grasp of who we are, that we may not only survive, but flourish in these times.

Back to the Future

A look at 1920, 2020 and 2120

By **Guy Cohen**

Have you ever seen a movie about travelling backward or forward through time to visit the same place in which you currently live?

Now imagine you are standing here in Israel today, looking back one hundred years. What would you see? You would see British policemen and the British army, sovereign over this land. What would you tell the people living in the land in 1920 while the British were in power? How do you think they would react if you told them that by 1948 the Jewish people would have their own sovereign country after nearly 2000 years?

The first wave of modern immigration ("Aliyah") to Israel took place from 1882-1903. Twenty-five thousand people arrived from Romania, Poland, Russia and other parts of Eastern Europe, as well as from Yemen. Many were educated idealists who found themselves attempting to build new lives in an extremely inhospitable environment. Only five thousand remained from that first Aliyah! Eighty percent returned to their places of origin or moved to other countries.

Looking at this through physical eyes, would you say it was a success or a failure?

I consider it a success! They came as pioneers and they left their mark on the land. Their arrival opened doors for the second Aliyah. Fast forward to the present and we see a beautiful country with 9 million citizens. Israel is a modern state enjoying advanced science, medicine, and technology. Yet, despite accomplishments in the physical realm, we find ourselves a poor and barren place in the spiritual realm.

We, as Messianic believers, are pioneers of Israel's growth and development in the spiritual realm. In Ezekiel 37:14, the chapter on the dry bones, we see that God promises to bring the nation of Israel back to the land. Today we face many challenges in the Messianic body—including how to gather together as a congregation for weekly services, prayer meetings, home groups and the like. Due to Covid restrictions, everything is conducted online. The lack of human contact puts us in the dangerous position of becoming isolated and separated.

Beyond this there is the physical, spiritual, religious and governmental resistance to the Messianic Body in the land, which contributes to the challenge of the body not growing or, in some cases, diminishing. However, let us not despise the day of small beginnings (Zechariah 4:10). We are in a birthing process.

What do I see in Israel 100 years from now (if Yeshua has not yet returned)? I see countless Messianic communities throughout the land.

And now, what if we were to ask a believer from our Akko congregation, living one hundred years in the future, his or her perspective regarding 2020? What would they say to us?

I believe in spite of the trials, the small number of believers in the land and all that is being done to stop our growth; the "visitor" from the future would say, ***"Do not be dismayed. Continue to stand and be faithful in what God has called you to do; good fruit will come of it."***

Dear friends from the nations, we could not stand and do the work here in the land without your support through prayer and intercession. Thank you. You are our midwife, our birthing coach.

Ark of God

By **Leon Mazin**

"Shalom! I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well." (3 John 2 NIV)

The Torah portion of Noah tells of a righteous man who looked to God, while the whole world looked to their own personal interests and drowned in sins.

And the message to the Hebrews says: **"By faith Noah, being warned by God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith"** (Hebrews 11:7).

Today is filled with anxiety and uncertainty. There is still very little clarity regarding Covid-19, and the numbers of those infected and dying continue to rise. The Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict is heating up and could lead to the confrontation and participation of many larger countries! Seemingly local conflict can sometimes ignite larger destruction as in World War I. Political leaders seem to think more of their own personal agendas than of the countries they serve.

But the righteous, the believers of our generation, can, through prayer and testimony, either change the situation or lead others into "the Ark of God." Don't miss the opportunity to be a part of God's plan!

A few short news items and prayer requests from Shavei Tzion.

1. Six years ago, we started a program that serves soldiers who have finished their compulsory army service. It continues to function, but due to the lockdown, we have moved to reaching out via Zoom. We have been holding meetings to encourage, pray, develop friendships and study the Word of God. Over the past six months, we have never stopped. This program is for these young men and women because we want to continue to support them as they mature in their faith.

2. Through Zoom and YouTube, we continue meeting with the congregational home groups for adults and holding children's meetings, as well! Our audience is growing and there are new opportunities to proclaim the Word. My personal weekly home group today includes more than 100 people. Face-to-face gatherings are still forbidden, but on Zoom, it's OK!

3. The humanitarian aid project, Olim (New Immigrants), and Soup Kitchen Ministry have had only about a week off during this chaos. We have been reaching out non-stop during these past six months and have helped hundreds of families during both quarantine/lock-downs. We ask you to "hold up our arms" in prayer. And we invite your contributions in this time of our great need.

With respect and love,
Leon and Nina Mazin

Return to Zion Congregation

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The Call for Grace

By **Avi Tekle**

***"Do not be overly righteous nor overly wise*— why confound yourself?**
Do not be overly wicked and do not be a fool— why die before your time?
It is good to grasp the one and not withdraw your hand from the other.
For the one who fears God will *escape both extremes.*"
(Ecclesiastes 7:16-18 TLV, emphasis added)

Another epidemic that accompanied the Coronavirus is the epidemic of loneliness and weakened mental health. As social creatures, we were created with the need to connect with others. At times we are rescued by people, and at times we need to be rescued from people. In any case, we all need interactions with family and friends to maintain a spiritually healthy life.

Our dealings with people can trigger *intimacy or estrangement.* When we interact, we discover two things about ourselves: who we are and who we are not. When we find common ground with others, we rejoice; and contrarily when we realize our differences, unpleasant conflicts can arise.

Are we called to walk only with those who look and think like us?

The differences we have with one another are the meeting points for God's grace. It's only through grace that we, in our sins, were connected with heaven, and it is only by grace that we can survive our differences.

Living in diverse harmony has always been my passion. Growing up in tribal Africa, my parents instilled a great sense of pride in our diverse but united identity. My mom and dad came from different tribes, spoke different languages and were raised in different cultures. In fact, I was born when a civil war broke out between their two tribes. On the day I was born, the name given to me by my community and family was "Father of Peace." Growing up as a mischievous middle child, the calling to father peace was far from my mind, but I always aspired to find the beauty in diverse unity. On the grand scale, the whole world is one community.

A prime enemy of this God-given grace in our lives is extremism. From the above verse, we see that extremism blinds us from seeing ourselves and forces us to focus on blaming others. Hence our extreme thoughts and attitudes become a cause for conflict and unrest. Extremism is not passion. *The fire of passion is in love, while the force of extremism is in self-righteousness.* Yes, we are called to live passionately, but not in extremism.

In the story of the woman who was surrounded by extreme men ready to stone her for adultery, *Yeshua came into the picture and He had a different message*—the message of grace. Grace opens our eyes to look at ourselves and remain humble regarding the unknown. Yeshua gracefully reminded that zealous mob that they, too, needed grace. The tumultuous days we live in call for an extra measure of grace to endure and live in unity.

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