



LAUSANNE CONSULTATION  
ON JEWISH EVANGELISM  
**BULLETIN**



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# Menahem Benhayim (1924-2004): In Memoriam of a Creative Messianic Jew

(Words shared at a Memorial Service which took place at the Israeli Messianic Congregation, Jerusalem Assembly, 56 Prophets Street, July 12, 2004  
By Dr. Gershon Nerel, Moshav Yad Hashmona, Israel)

My acquaintance with Menahem lasted over thirty years. In fall 1974, almost a year after the Yom Kippur War, we undertook the challenge to work together towards reviving the "Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel" (MJAI). In those days Menahem had just returned from Lausanne, Switzerland, where he participated alongside Victor Smadja and Baruch (Ricky) Maoz in an international congress on world evangelization. With the enthusiasm of a teenager Menahem invested his whole energy in the attempts to establish a national body of Messianic Jews, a body which, in fact, had already roots in the land in the 1950s and during the British Mandate. However, these efforts to recreate a new alliance gave fruit only a decade and a half later, in 1989.

However, my real close relationship with Menahem developed only during the last eleven years, after I became his successor in the position of "Israel Secretary" for the "International Messianic Jewish Alliance". This began in 1993, after Menahem completed no less than 17 years of faithful service in this position, prior to his retirement. Menahem was a creative person. He



*Menahem Benhayim (right) in 1993, when he was succeeded as Israeli Secretary for the International Messianic Jewish Alliance by Gershon Nerel (left)*

was active in many spheres, and wholeheartedly identified with the various functions that he took upon himself. Here I wish to mention the major characteristics in his lifetime, as follows:

### **The Journalist:**

The capability of writing was Menahem's major "gift". He was a real penman and editor. It was particularly his journalistic writing that was his expertise. His writing well benefited from his natural insights as author, referee and examiner. For example, he initiated and directed the publication of two periodicals by and for Jewish believers in Yeshua: 1) "**B'shuv**" (*Restore or Return*) – of which the first issue appeared in Hanukka 1981, and lasted for about a

decade. 2) "**Zot Habrit**" (*This is the Covenant*) which appeared in winter 1990/1991 and became the organ of the MJAI.

Menahem contributed dozens of articles, mainly on Messianic Jewish topics, which are scattered in different magazines, mostly in **The Hebrew Christian** (later **The Messianic Jew**), organ of the International Messianic Jewish Alliance. Personally, I owe special thanks to Menahem for his linguistic assistance in correcting and polishing many of my own articles which were written originally in my "Hebraic English".

### **A "Soul" of a Philanthropist:**

Menahem was a real benefactor. He initiated and voluntarily conducted the

“Keren Meshihit Israelit” (Israeli Messianic Fund), a “Messianic purse” which assisted many needy believers in Israel through substantial grants and loans, avoiding commercial interest. The lion share of the fund raising was done by Menahem. Later he formed a small committee, together with David H. Stern and Yossi Hershku-Ben Zvi, to carry out the work of the fund. This fund was the basis of “**Hadadit**” (“*Mutual Aid*”), which is the current fund of MJAI for assisting local needy believers. Thus, for example, we do remember all the efforts Menahem invested to raise the funds for the kidney transplant and further medical treatment, including physical rehabilitation, of the late Ilan Zamir.

#### **The Organizer:**

Menahem was a skilful administrator. He could easily handle the heavy load of paper work. He well organized his worldwide correspondence, and insisted to respond to each and every letter - for many years without secretarial help. With a very strong sense of responsibility, he did the work of a clerk with a servant spirit. Many years he initiated and organized the national conferences of the MJAI, sending out the invitations, the reminders and then also successfully keeping the time tables. Thus, we remember how he initiated and took the burden to organize in 1992 the trip

of a delegation of Israeli believers to Egypt. Menahem even raised the funds to cover the expenses of this trip, yet this effort severely damaged his health and he needed hospitalization. Since then his health continued to deteriorate.

#### **“An Interdisciplinary Center of One Person”:**

Menahem labored and participated as member of various committees around the country. I joined him, and in some of these teams I still participate continuously until today. To mention just some of these committees: The supervising group of “**Dugit**”, a Messianic Gallery and center in Frishman Str. in Tel Aviv; the Executive Committee of the United Christian Council in Israel (UCCI), where Menahem also translated, summarized and disseminated clippings from Israeli newspapers with information about Messianic Jews and Christians in the land (today this work of “**Media Review**” is carried out by the Caspari Center in Jerusalem); the Advisory Board of the Bible Society in Israel (where Menahem raised his idea, which failed, to translate the Old Testament into Modern Hebrew); the Editorial Advisory Board of “**Mishkan**”, a semi-annual forum on the Gospel and the Jewish people (originally published by the UCCI and nowadays conducted by the Caspari Center); the Executive Board of the MJAI

and also the “Local Management Committee” of the Ebenezer Home for the elderly believers in Haifa.

#### **The Maker of Peace:**

I must admit that Menahem and I did not agree about everything. In some matters we differed in a polar way. Thus, for example, in Menahem’s eyes I was too “fundamentalist” in my understanding of Holy Scripture, as, for example, with my *literal* interpretation of the creation of the world in six days. On the other hand, in my eyes Menahem was too “liberal” in his exegesis of the Bible. We both knew well on what we disagreed. Yet notwithstanding, in spite of the conflict of opinion between us, we continued to work together, particularly because Menahem was a pursuer of peace. In fact, he was so much pursuing peace that sometimes, in my view, he leaned towards compromising too much. At the same time, however, he could also be harsh, especially when people requested money in dishonest ways. Then he became tough and impatient. But, when he was fully convinced that there was indeed a real case of financial need, he was willing to function as a *Schnorrer* (begging, soliciting alms), almost as a professionalist. So, he could write letters and make phone calls to the end of the world, in order to convince potential donors to send the needed money.

### **A Messianic Zionist:**

Menahem and I saw Biblical Zionism eye to eye. In his activities and writings he emphasized his national Jewish identity. Zionism based on biblical prophecy was of great importance to him. The modern movement of Messianic Jews, on the one hand, and Zionist nationalism of both secular and religious Jewry, on the other, were closely linked in his eyes. Together with Haya, his wife, Menahem was most proud to be the first American Messianic Jewish couple to make aliyah to Israel (1963), and went to live in the heavy heat of Eilat, "in the edge of the Negev and the entire world". So how symbolic that he died on America's Independence Day.

— Summer 2003 Menahem and Haya published their autobiography, from Haya's perspective. By the title of this book, *Bound for the Promised Land*, he expressed his deep love for Eretz Israel, the Land of Israel, being the focus of God's promises to His people Israel and to the rest of the nations. About "National Menahem" one can learn, for example, from an editorial he wrote in the first volume of "B'shuv":

"The central aim of this organ is to enable Messianic Jews to express their belief while one keeps in mind the unquestionable premise that nowadays God works among Israel that returns to her homeland, as well as

within the renewed Messianic community, just as He 'at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers' (Hebrews 1,1). This aim also gives expression to the belief that God completes anew in the body of Messiah the healthy Jewish component which in past times consisted an inseparable part of Messiah's body" (pp. 3-4).

### **Respecter of Roots and Israeli/Jewish Identity:**

Menahem respected those pioneers who labored in the land before him, both Messianics and others, and endeavored to learn from them. In our last conversation, when he already layed on his sick-bed in "Hadasah" hospital on Mt. Scopus in Jerusalem, he reminded the "veteran" believers whom he met during his lifetime. As talking in Hebrew became more difficult for him, he began to speak in English. In connection with Moshav Yad Hashmona, Menahem raised the name of Haim Haimoff (Bar David) and said: "The late old Haimoff was a man of no nonsense, he did not like to tell jokes or to organize events for fun, yet he laid solid foundations for younger generations". Menahem's appreciation for the historical roots and the identity building of both individuals and groups, like the Messianic movement, was enormous. He could easily point to the fruits that the roots, the trunk and the

branches of a "tree" have produced throughout the years. Furthermore, when Menahem, a man of integrity, wrote vignettes on the Messianic movement, he also never whitewashed the "sour fruits" within the narrative.

### **Simplicity and Meekness:**

Only a few months ago Menahem reached four scores. Although three decades separated between the two of us, in our talks he never elevated himself as the senior one. We always spoke in complete openness, as peers and friends. I loved his simplicity and humbleness, his direct approach in every matter and problem. At the same time, when needed, he could keep for himself confidential issues, as a real man of trust. And, in moments of truth, he had no difficulty at all to ask for forgiveness. Menahem never looked down on anyone, and never treated cruelly any person. His soft heart was full of compassion. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. 5: 7).

{Menahem was born in Brooklyn, New York City, on April 29, 1924, and died in Jerusalem on July 4, 2004. He was buried at "Har Hamenuhot", Mount of Quietudes, the Jerusalem cemetery, on the slope opposite to the ancient road to Emmaus}

# LCJE Veteran

By Menahem Benhayim at the Sixth International LCJE Conference, 1999

## Menahem Benhayim and LCJE

**With Menahem Benhayim's death LCJE has lost a good friend and support.**

Menahem was part of LCJE right from the beginning. At the Lausanne movement's consultation in Pattaya, Thailand, 1980, he had a hand in drawing up the report *Christian Witness to the Jewish People*. The meeting in Pattaya became the start of LCJE, which means that Menahem was one of the founding fathers. Over the years Menahem has several times made his voice heard in the *LCJE Bulletin*. He took part in most of the international conferences, often as a speaker. The last time was at the sixth international conference in New York, 1999. His contribution on that occasion is printed below.

We thank God for what Menahem Benhayim has meant to all of us – also in LCJE.

*Kai Kjær-Hansen*



*Menahem Benhayim at the sixth international LCJE conference at Hofstra University, New York, 1999 – as always together with his Haya.*

It was in June 1980 at Pattaya in Thailand at a conference sponsored by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization that the idea of a committee, beginning as a Task Force on Jewish Evangelism, was broached, and which later led to the formation of LCJE. The 1980 event was organized within the context of 17 consultations for group-targeted evangelism, of which one group was the Jewish people. The Jewish consultation comprised eighteen diverse workers in the field and produced an Occasional Paper No. 7 entitled "CHRISTIAN WITNESS TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE." The booklet, to which Sue Periman and I, among others, contributed ideas, was published and widely advertised and distributed by LCWE.

In 1983 or 1984 the Israeli religious press suddenly

carried a feature article to the effect that "a secret document for the destruction of the Jewish people" had been uncovered, and an Israeli Jewish apostate was involved in the secret plot. This was one local press evaluation of our carefully edited and hopefully sensitive Occasional Paper No. 7!

It was during this period that I received a phone call from the office of the sole Israeli TV channel operating at the time, asking that I consider appearing as a panelist on a popular TV talk-show called "Mifgashim" ("Encounters"). I was then serving as Israel Secretary for the International Messianic Jewish Alliance in Jerusalem. The program was moderated by Dan Margolit, a well-known journalist for the respected HA'ARETZ daily. They were planning an "encounter" between Jews and "notzrim", (the common

term for Christians, usually synonymous with "goyim"-gentiles). The TV director had already invited a U.S. Baptist synoptic scholar (Brad Young), a Lutheran director of the Swedish Theological Institute in Jerusalem (Dr. Lars Larssen) and the French-Israeli Dominican, head of the Philosophy Department at the Hebrew University, Professor Marcel Dubois. I would join the Christian team, which would face an orthodox rabbi who worked for the leading anti-mission, anti-Messianic "Yad L'Ahim" society, another orthodox Jew unknown to me, a more liberal orthodox rabbi, Professor Pinhas Pelli from Beersheva university, and a very secular Hebrew University Holocaust scholar, Dr. Yehuda Bauer, who would complete the Jewish team.

Frankly, it didn't sound too appealing and was reminiscent of the medieval debates between Christians and Jews when born-Jews on the Christian side collaborated with oppressive State-supported clergy in debates aimed at proving the superiority of Christianity to Judaism. I suggested a panel with at least two Messianic Jews, preferably one a native Israeli, and an additional evangelical Christian with whom we were much more closely linked. "No," they insisted; "only one messianic Jew could be on the panel, and on the Christian side; otherwise, there would be no messianic Jew on the program." So I agreed, and

was asked to meet with the moderator Dan Margolit, a secular Jew, at his newspaper office for a pre-screening interview.

When I arrived, he showed me a copy of the Lausanne Occasional paper, which he had read, and admitted that he couldn't quite understand what the fuss was about over "the secret document for the destruction of the Jewish people." He questioned me about my life in Israel, asked questions about our movement, how we were different from the "notzrim" since we all accepted the New Testament, and believed in Yeshua. I explained that not all "notzrim" are the same, and that Messianic Jews tend to have closer links to evangelicals than to the mainstream Christian churches most visible in Israel. He seconded my participation.

About two days before the scheduled taping session, I got an urgent phone call. Two of the orthodox rabbis had declared that they would never appear in public with an "apostate" Jew, and thereby give legitimacy to apostasy. The director was optimistic that they would find more moderate orthodox Jews to replace them. The following day, however, he received notice from the three Christian participants that they had also decided to pull out. My participation on the Christian side would clearly conjure up unhappy medieval associations. I suggested that an active

evangelical pastor like Ole Kvarme in the Christian group and a second messianic Jew could replace them. Both Ole Kvarme and several messianic Jews had privately told me they were willing to appear alongside me. The idea was discussed briefly, but the time was too short, and they decided to cancel the planned program.

I phoned the three Christian ex-participants, whom I knew personally, to ask why they had pulled out. They each explained very politely that they had no problem with me personally, but the program was shaping up too much like one of the medieval debates, jousting over the merits and demerits of the other faith in what they were sure would be a very negative atmosphere if a messianic Jew were present.

The upshot was not entirely negative. Another "HA'ARETZ" journalist, Lilly Galilee, got wind of the cancelation and decided to do her own story on messianic Jews in which Victor Smadja, Ramona O. and I, were given a fair hearing alongside a few comments by the opposition about the "psychopathology" of the messianic Jewish movement. Since then, a number of messianic Jews have appeared on Israeli TV in talk-show panels and for interviews; in fact, the "Yad Hashmona" messianic moshav near Jerusalem later had a full half-hour program on the newer second channel to present their picture of an Israeli messianic cooperative.



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