

## GLORY, MERCY and the WOMB

God's manifest presence builds to an unprecedented crescendo of revelation to the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai, in spite of human weakness and unfaithfulness (see Exodus 31-34). In the midst of this weighty interchange between Moses and the Almighty, Moses entreats, **"Show me your glory"** (Exodus 33:18). "Show me the fullness of who you are."

God responds by calling Moses up the mountain again. Then, while Moses remains hidden in the cleft of the rock, the Lord descends from heaven and passes by, climactically proclaiming the name of the Lord, proclaiming the fullness of His nature... **"YHVH, YHVH merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty..."** (Exodus 34:6).

The opening word with which the Master of the Universe describes Himself is worthy of special attention. *Rachum* can be translated as merciful or compassionate. It has the same root letters as the word for womb (*rechem*). God proclaims who He is, and the first thing out of His mouth is "I am like a mother having mercy and compassion on the baby in her womb!" We could paraphrase the word and hear God calling Himself the "wombed one." That's how the grammatical form sounds in Hebrew.

This is central to God's identity. God is characterized by *the same loving compassion that nurtures the tiny, invisible, developing baby, though the baby has no achievements, no good deeds in its present state, no*

earned honor. At conception a baby exists purely as potential, and the baby's potential has no chance of being realized except for a prolonged period of receiving total provision, care and protection. As adults, can we still allow ourselves the luxury of this level of dependence on Him? This level of neediness?

Even those of us who had amazing parents, probably did not get the full download of this with our mother's milk. The embryos that we once were, existed **in total dependence** in our mothers' wombs and even after exiting the womb. *Can we overstate such dependence? Can we outgrow it? Most relevantly, can we recover it, together with a continual awareness of God's care for us?*

As we internalize who God is, we will begin to understand: "I am loved unconditionally, even if I stumble." "I am loved without measure" means

"I am not under pressure to prove that I am better than anyone else." It means, "I don't have to exaggerate to gain respect. I don't have to put others down to feel good about myself." This begets healthy self-confidence born of deeply knowing that I am loved, as opposed to desperately striving to prove that I am likable.

As an overflow of receiving God's mercy toward us, we can become those who show mercy to our "fellow neighbor" human beings, who are often living out of their "wounded-ness," out of their "womb-lessness," out of their feeling of being abandoned in a harsh, cold world (Luke 10:37). We can allow ourselves to be moved with compassion toward them (Matthew 9:36).

**"But the people of Zion said, 'The LORD has abandoned us! He has forgotten us. 'Can a woman forget her nursing baby, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Even if mothers should forget, I will never forget you'"** Isaiah 49:14-15.

**DAVID SHISHKOFF**



# NESHER-EAGLE

**“...but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:31 NIV).**

## What is the Neshet Project?

The project’s goals are to minister rest for the soul and body, bring spiritual renewal, and provide discipleship and fellowship to Israeli young adults who recently completed their compulsory service in the Israeli Defense Forces. The project gives opportunities for the young people to serve local congregations while helping prepare the next generation of congregational servant leaders. We want to see these young people grow, serve and get excited about what the Lord is doing in their lives.

The project is run by Return to Zion Congregation in Haifa. It was born in 2015 and is open to qualifying young adults from all congregations in the Land.

## The 2017 Experience

Ten young Israelis, from different congregations, participated in this summer’s program.

All the goals of the Eagle Project were successfully attained. Local Norwegian believers opened their hearts to us—blessing and embracing the young adults. The love that the believers poured on us cannot be described in words. Through their love we were able to experience the fulfillment of prophecies of unity between Israel and the nations, who together as one, serve their Master and learn together at His feet.

This year’s project was three weeks long. We began in the city of Bergen, Norway where we were hosted in the homes of families during Shabbat and shared each of our personal testimonies and journeys—some of them not so easy. Through these stories a door of healing was opened for others. The families surrounded us in love and prayer, and hearts were changed.

During the second part of the project we were hosted by young adults of “Influx.” Together we worshiped the King. Together we prayed and hiked. Out in nature, we saw the awesome views and inspiring creation of the Creator.

At the end of our time in Bergen, we sailed north for 17 hours, giving us time to think while gliding past the beautiful

Norwegian coastline. We met other Israelis on the ship and shared with them. At the end of the journey we came to the beautiful fjord Geiranger, and there we were generously hosted by the regional Christian rehab center. We cooked an Israeli meal for them and celebrated Erev Shabbat together. After this we served several congregations, churches and house meetings, as well as sharing testimonies in the street. We hiked over snow covered mountains, rowed in a Viking boat, explored caves and more. The trip concluded with a wonderful 5 day youth conference full of praise, fellowship, teaching and testimonies from morning to night.

The young people who took part in the project returned home transformed. Many of them met the Lord in a close way, received personal revelation and put down deeper roots in their faith, as well as experiencing enjoyment and renewal in their soul and body.





# PROJECT 2017

## Where are we headed?

God is guiding us step by step as we continue to develop and improve the Eagle Project. This year we plan to:

- have a gathering in Israel every two months, reflecting the same combination of renewal, teaching and serving;
- join a short seminar in Latvia, where participants will represent the body of Messiah in Israel.

**“I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one” (I John 2:14).**

Young adults have special strength and energy from God. We must invest in them maximally in order for the body of messiah to be strong and skillfully wield the sword of His Word.

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# Fanning the Flame...or Just Getting By?

**O**n a recent summer evening in the foothills below Jerusalem I stood under the chuppah wedding canopy with an Israeli princess bride and her prince charming. The chuppah is just about my favorite place to be in the universe. Why?

Because there we experience the holy presence of God manifested in the coming together of two lives. It is the power of union in love. God chose to make this combination the vehicle for the creation of new life! This should not escape our notice.

So, what does this have to do with our relationship with God?

**“I know your works...you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent”** (Revelation 2:2-5).

This is a serious assessment, even a rebuke, from Yeshua. I often picture the Lord’s description of our loss of first-love as a spouse who is faithful, hard-working, consistent in all duties, yet the fire in his/her eyes for the loved one, has gone out.



Eitan and Connie



Newlywed couple for whom I officiated

## What is “First Love?”

What is “first love?” I well remember meeting Connie. It was totally amazing. This wonderful woman almost perfectly matched the vision I had for life. My attraction to her was irresistibly magnetic. Has it been like that every day since? No. We get bogged down in the duties of life and become irritated, impatient and unappreciative. We have to admit that at times, through our nearly 49 coupled years, we’ve been present but not together! If we do not fan the flame, we take our spouse for granted. But under the wedding canopy? Never.

The Book of books is incredibly focused on true marital love, often as a parallel to our relationship with God. The entire history of mankind begins with a wedding: Adam and Eve. The end of the Holy Scriptures is also a wedding—the marriage supper of the Lamb. The entire books of Song of Songs (2:4;16) and Hosea (2:19; 3:1,4a,5) seize this theme. God says that He is Israel’s husband (Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 31:31). Yeshua highlights the command to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength as the most important of all God’s commandments. In the New Covenant the Congregation of Messiah is His Bride (Ephesians 5:23; Revelation 21:2).

## OK. So What?

The Revelation passage about first-love is addressing an end-times deficit (Matthew 24:12 “...**the love of many will grow cold**”). Matthew 25 pinpoints the urgent need for our lamps to be full and burning when the Bridegroom comes. This is a NOW message. Our coming King is warning us that the natural tendency will be to passively “coast.” He’s exhorting us—not only to be vigilant, but to be passionate, giving first place to our love relationship with Him.

I want to suggest a couple of steps to fan our heart’s flame for the Lover of our soul and not just “get by.”

▪ **Take stock.** This honesty is crucial in our relationship with the Lord. **“Search me and know...”** (Psalm 139:23).

▪ **Fan the flame** by responding fully to His love initiative. *He loved us first.* Be creative in spending time with Yeshua. Converse with Him. Take walks together. Read His words as if listening to your beloved speaking words of love and affection to you, and you back to Him.

The outcome will be a delight for you and for the Bridegroom. And your life will impact many (Psalm 51:12,13).

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