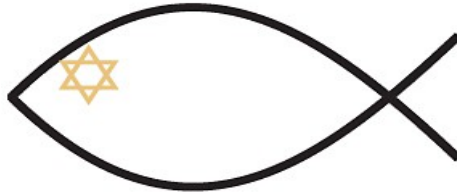


"Think not that I come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill." Matthew 5:17

Jewish Heritage Revival

One Heritage United by Messiah



"And When he puts forth his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice"
John 10:4

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Dynamics of a Cult

Progression of the term cult, used to identify groups that deviate from the norm is a rather recent occurrence.

We in Messianic Judaism sometimes get labeled "a cult" by some in the christian community because it is believed we have deviated from the message of Messiah which is construed as grace. Such designations include:

- We are putting people back under the law.
- We are legalistic
- We are conveying "works based"

Unfortunately, this perception is seldom investigated yet continuously transmitted. The one's who make such statements don't investigate for themselves what we are about.

This perception is based on a common teaching that associates Judaism as a "works based religion". The view is that Torah is legalism, based on the vastly incorrect understanding of Sha'ul's writings. That in and of itself is a topic for another day. Needless to say, the view is well established within many mainstream denominations.

If we are being labeled as a cult, I believe it is important for everyone to know not only the meaning of the term, as it is being used, but also the characteristics of a cult, as conveyed by the International Cultic Studies Association.

As I had mentioned, the term cult is fairly recent.

The term 'cult' was originally used to describe a group of people who worshiped a deity.

The term was first used in the early 17th century denoting homage paid to a deity and borrowed via the French 'culte' from Latin 'cultus' "worship", from the adjective 'cultus' "inhabited, cultivated, worshiped", derived from the verb 'colere' "care, cultivate."

Worshiping a deity...a supreme being, a god or goddess. Other than Adonai the God of Israel and His promised Messiah, Yeshua who are one, it would be known as a term that is found throughout scripture...

Idolatry

Certainly not a new term and one that is covered extensively throughout the Tenach and Brith Hadosah.

Unfortunately, it isn't that simple because the concept of the term cult has taken on a much more specific meaning and

relates primarily to divisions within the body of Messiah.

In the 1930s cults became the object of sociological study in the context of the study of religious behavior. Cults have been criticized by mainstream Christians for their unorthodox beliefs.

Unorthodox beliefs, based on what?

The concept of "cult" was introduced into sociological classification in 1932 by American sociologist Howard P. Becker as an expansion of German theologian Ernst Troeltsch's church-sect typology.

Troeltsch's aim was to distinguish between three main types of religious behavior: churchly, sectarian and mystical. Becker created four categories out of Troeltsch's first two by splitting *church* into "ecclesia" and "deonomination", and *sect* into "sect" and "cult".

In the 1940s, the long held opposition by some established Christian denominations to non-Christian religions or/and supposedly heretical, or counterfeit, pseudo-Christian sects crystallized into a more organized "Christian counter-cult movement" in the United States. For those belonging to the movement, all religious groups claiming to be Christian, but deemed outside of Christian orthodoxy, were considered "cults".

In the 1970s the anti-cult movement arose, partly motivated by acts of violence and other crimes committed by members of some cults.

In current usage, the term 'cult' usually means "a deviant religious organization with novel beliefs and practices," but often without a clear or consistent definition.

Christian cults are new religious movements which have a Christian background but are considered to be theological deviant by members of other Christian churches.

We in Messianic Judaism certain don't fit into the classic definition of Christian orthodoxy, therefore because we are a square peg and the hole is round, ultimately leads to the label we sometimes receive.

In his influential book "The Kingdom of Cults" (first published in the United States in 1965) Christian scholar Walter Martin defines Christian cults as groups that follow the personal interpretation of an individual, rather than the understanding of the Bible as accepted by mainstream Christianity.

Accepted by the majority...

I could spend more time talking about what the majority believes and understands about the Bible and its teachings, that are ultimately incorrect, primarily because incorrect context is used to understand scripture. Also, methods of understanding scripture have been created to justify a position.

One such method is an allegorical viewpoint...

An allegory is a story in which the characters and events are symbols that stand for ideas about human life or for a political or historical situation.

Last week, I mentioned Marcion and his influences that has forever affected believers and how they understand scripture. There is another gentleman who was instrumental in implementing an allegorical approach to scriptures. His name is Origen. His work dates back to the beginning of the third century.

Origen often denied the p'shat, the plain or ordinary sense of the text and replaced it with an allegory that he made up.

Basically saying, if you don't like what you read, change it.

One of the most widely used allegories Origen created in scripture was how Israel is understood...

When Israel was used in the text and it comprised a promise or comment that was good, Origen indicated that the text was referring to the church.

Deu 33:1 This is the blessing that Moshe, the man of God, spoke over the people of Isra'el before his death:

Blessing = Isra'el = Church

If the text referenced Israel, and the promise or comment was negative, it still meant the Jews...the original context. Once changed, the new meanings became the real meaning. This too is experienced today.

Dan 9:11 Yes, all Isra'el flouted your Torah and turned away, unwilling to listen to your voice. Therefore the curse and oath written in the Torah of Moshe the servant of God was poured out on us, because we sinned against him.

Curse = Isra'el = Jewish people

Origen's allegorical system was difficult to challenge because the text no longer meant what was written. It was easy to change the meaning by simply stating "that isn't what it means". Once people began to believe this concept, it opened the door to a vast distortion of the p'shat of scripture. The plain meaning.

Please keep in mind that not all scripture is meant to be taken literally in that there is extensive use of idioms that are foundational within the Jewish culture. I am not talking about this, but rather the change in meaning to support a position that is contrary to the original intention of the scriptures. Origen's allegorical approach was entirely different and far more catastrophic, in that the impact of such a method still affects believers to this day, and they don't even realize it. They don't realize it because they don't know the history of the church after the book of Acts concludes.

So, getting back to our primary topic, how can we truly identify, if what you are supporting is a cult, I have provided from the International Cultic Studies Association their list of 15 characteristics that represent a cultic group. A cultic group will likely possess the majority of these characteristics.

Source – International Cultic Studies Association – 15 characteristics

- The group displays excessively zealous and unquestioning commitment to its leader and (whether he is alive or dead) regards his belief system, ideology, and practices as the Truth, as law.
- Questioning, doubt, and dissent are discouraged or even punished.
- Mind-altering practices (such as meditation, chanting, speaking in tongues, denunciation sessions, and debilitating work routines) are used in excess and serve to suppress doubts about the group and its leader(s).
- The leadership dictates, sometimes in great detail, how members should think, act, and feel (for example, members must get permission to date, change jobs, marry—or leaders prescribe what types of clothes to wear, where to live, whether or not to have children, how to discipline children, and so forth).
- The group is elitist, claiming a special, exalted status for itself, its leader(s) and members (for example, the leader is considered the Messiah, a special being, an avatar—or the group and/or the leader is on a special mission to save humanity).
- The group has a polarized us-versus-them mentality, which may cause conflict with the wider society.
- The leader is not accountable to any authorities (unlike, for example, teachers, military commanders or ministers, priests, monks, and rabbis of mainstream religious denominations).
- The group teaches or implies that its supposedly exalted ends justify whatever means it deems necessary. This may result in members' participating in behaviors or activities they would have considered reprehensible or unethical before joining the group (for example, lying to family or friends, or collecting money for bogus charities).
- The leadership induces feelings of shame and/or guilt in order to influence and/or control members. Often, this is done through peer pressure and subtle forms of persuasion.
- Subservience to the leader or group requires members to cut ties with family and friends, and radically alter the personal goals and activities they had before joining the group.
- The group is preoccupied with bringing in new members.
- The group is preoccupied with making money.
- Members are expected to devote inordinate amounts of time to the group and group-related activities.

- Members are encouraged or required to live and/or socialize only with other group members.
- The most loyal members (the “true believers”) feel there can be no life outside the context of the group. They believe there is no other way to be, and often fear reprisals to themselves or others if they leave (or even consider leaving) the group.

In using the terminology of today and the characteristics of the ICSA, the people who followed Messiah in the first century would have been labeled a cult.

They exuded some of the characteristics, with the primary one being that they deviated from the norm, specifically...

- The group displays excessively zealous and unquestioning commitment to its leader and (whether he is alive or dead) regards his belief system, ideology, and practices as the Truth, as law.

Within the body of Messiah there was a zeal for conveying the Good News of Messiah. The truth of His resurrection further solidified the validity of His message. Such zeal was supported by unmistakable truth.

- The leadership dictates, sometimes in great detail, how members should think, act, and feel (for example, members must get permission to date, change jobs, marry—or leaders prescribe what types of clothes to wear, where to live, whether or not to have children, how to discipline children, and so forth).

Yeshua's teachings instructed us in how we should be living in a right manner in relation to Torah, not against. It was His teachings that further substantiated its authenticity, while addressing the additions that were over and beyond the purpose of Torah.

- The group is preoccupied with bringing in new members.

Yeshua instructed His followers...

Mat 28:19 Therefore, go and make people from all nations into talmidim, immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the Ruach HaKodesh,

Mat 28:20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember! I will be with you always, yes, even until the end of the age."

- Members are expected to devote inordinate amounts of time to the group and group-related activities.

The information provided in scripture shows the dedication of believers.

However, in contrast to some of these traits that a cult exhibit we see that other traits do not apply...

- The leader is not accountable to any authorities (unlike, for example, teachers, military commanders or ministers, priests, monks, and rabbis of mainstream religious denominations).

Yeshua was accountable to the one whom had sent Him...

Mat 10:40 "Whoever receives you is receiving me, and whoever receives me is receiving the One who sent me.

Luk 10:16 "Whoever listens to you listens to me, also whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the One who sent me."

Joh 12:46 I have come as a light into the world, so that everyone who trusts in me might not remain in the dark.

Joh 12:47 If anyone hears what I am saying and does not observe it, I don't judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.

Joh 12:48 Those who reject me and don't accept what I say have a judge — the word which I have spoken will judge them on the Last Day.

Joh 12:49 For I have not spoken on my own initiative, but the Father who sent me has given me a command, namely, what to say and how to say it.

Joh 12:50 And I know that his command is eternal life. So what I say is simply what the Father has told me to say."

What was the norm of the day during the time of Yeshua and directly after His resurrection?

The norm was the structure of traditional Judaism.

Yeshua spoke against the norm, the status quo, challenging the religious leaders of the day.

However, there was a leader of the time, who had significant wisdom regarding this new movement that was occurring within Judaism. He addressed recent experience involving what would have been construed as cults, in relation to this new movement that was considered "against the norm"

We are reminded of Gamaliel's response in Acts 5:34

Act 5:34 But one of the members of the Sanhedrin rose to his feet, a Parush named Gamli'el, a teacher of the Torah highly respected by all the people. He ordered the men put outside for a little while

Act 5:35 and then addressed the court: "Men of Isra'el, take care what you do to these people.

Act 5:36 Some time ago, there was a rebellion under Todah, who claimed to be somebody special; and a number of men, maybe four hundred, rallied behind him. But upon his being put to death, his whole following was broken up and came to nothing.

Act 5:37 After this, Y'hudah HaG'lili led another uprising, back at the time of the enrollment for the Roman tax; and he got some people to defect to him. But he was killed, and all his followers were scattered.

Act 5:38 So in the present case, my advice to you is not to interfere with these people, but to leave them alone. For if this idea or this movement has a human origin, it will collapse.

Act 5:39 But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop them; you might even find yourselves fighting God!" They heeded his advice.

We are called as believers to be United in Messiah...

Eph 4:1 Therefore I, the prisoner united with the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

Eph 4:2 Always be humble, gentle and patient, bearing with one another in love,

Eph 4:3 and making every effort to preserve the unity the Spirit gives through the binding power of shalom.

With the body to be unified.

Unfortunately, we are far from a unified body.

The first dynamic is to be United with Messiah.

We can't even get that right.

There may not be unity in the body of Messiah, even within the Messianic community, but there is a growing desire to get there.

I had stated earlier...

In current usage, the term 'cult' usually means "a deviant religious organization with novel beliefs and practices," but often without a clear or consistent definition.

Our definition is anything but without clarity or consistent. We are actually very clear and have been very consistent regarding the overall vision of the congregation as conveyed in our statement...

As a congregation, we have a purpose, a vision and a mission.

Purpose:

Kehilah Portland is a Messianic Jewish Synagogue with the purpose to proclaim the redemptive power and purpose of God through His servant, our Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). This proclamation is to all people, with the express desire to connect them with the God of Israel through prayer, worship and community.

To equip people to serve, to grow to maturity and to inspire believers everywhere to recognize the irrevocable calling of God upon the Jewish people, encouraging the nations (Gentiles) to fulfill their biblical mandate to come alongside Israel as co-heirs to the covenants of promise.

Genesis 12:1 – 3; Isaiah 49:5 - 6, 49:22 – 23; Romans 11; Romans 16:25 – 27; Ephesians 2:11 – 22

Vision:

Kehilah Portland, (The Congregation at Portland) a Messianic Jewish Synagogue is a manifestation of God's present day regeneration and restoring work in the House of Israel.

Kehilah Portland is a faith community where Jewish people can embrace their Jewish identity and heritage as believers in King Messiah, Yeshua.

Kehilah Portland encourages non-Jewish believers in Messiah Yeshua, who desire to embrace the Jewish heritage of their faith and come along side Jewish believers to serve and express their faith in worshiping the God of Israel.

Mission:

Kehilah Portland is established with the purpose of restoring the people of Israel, in the state of Maine, to their God, and ultimately to their biblical calling. We will set forth to do this in the following manner:

- Be committed to and grow in a lifestyle of faith called Biblical Judaism
- Reveal first to the Jewish people of Maine, and also to the non-Jewish people of Maine the true identity and heritage of King Messiah Yeshua
- Support Israel and the Jewish people in opposing all acts of hatred (anti-semitism) brought against them.
- Call all people in the body of Messiah to the proper understanding of God's covenant promises to Israel and their restoration.

I say, at best all we are capable of is harmony. Using a term I dislike...agree to disagree. You may also call it separate roads or being compartmentalized.

Different denominations with different doctrine of how believers are to live. The only common denominator is Messiah.

True unity will happen only when the King returns and establishes His throne in Jerusalem.

So, when anyone says to you that you are part of a cult by attending our congregation, you have information that will enable you to defend your attending Kehilah Portland.