

## Misinformed!(A Story about the Apostle Paul, by ha-emeq)

As the boy and his father stood at the edge of the field admiring the team of oxen pulling straight rows through the fertile soil, the boy asked, “Why does the farmer have that sharp stick, pressing it into the back side of the oxen?”

His abba replied, “Son, there is a great lesson to be learned in this. For that pointed stick is called a *goad*. It is the way the farmer directs his animals into a straight path. If he did not use the goad on them when they start to go off course, they would be impossible to lead.”

“Oh, that must hurt the oxen, abba.”

“Well son, it hurts enough — enough that the animal gets the message that he is going off. If he does not respond to the gentle prod of his master, then the farmer will increase the pressure, making the prodding stronger. He will continue making it stronger until the animal finally obeys. If he continues to resist, it can really hurt.”

Then the abba turned to his son with a stern warning, “But son, if the oxen are really rebellious to the farmer, they will sometimes kick back with their strong hooves — that is called *kicking against the goad*. It is very bad for them to do that. This means that they are stubborn oxen. The goad is for their good, to lead them in the right path. If they kick against it, they are very foolish indeed. If they continue in that stubborn way, the farmer will not tolerate it for long. That ox will no longer be useful to him, and it will end up being only food on the farmer’s table.

“Son, the lesson you must learn is this: Our God has given us all a conscience. It is like the goad of the farmer. It leads us in the right path. It is the provision of Gen 3:22, that we could really know what is good and what is evil. If we go off, we will feel the pain of the goad, which is our conscience. If we immediately turn from our wrong ways, it will be fine. If we continue in our wrong ways, the goad will get stronger, even to the point it is almost unbearable. Then we make a choice — do we kick against the goad or do we submit to the will of the *Great Farmer* who is trying to lead us rightly. The goad is really the oxen’s friend, even though it hurts.

“It is important that you understand this, son, as I can see that you will be a boy of great energy and zeal. Like a strong ox you can be very valuable to the *Great Farmer*. But you must remember that it is He, not yourself, who knows the exact course. If you pay attention to the goad it will lead you right.

“Do you understand, son?”

The young boy thought deeply about his abba’s words and responded, “Yes, abba, I think I understand a little bit... Well, maybe when I grow up I will understand more.”

That he would...

The son’s name is *Shaul*.

The term “a Hebrew of Hebrews” means a Hebrew-speaking citizen of Israel. In those days many people of Israel were speaking Greek, the language of their conquerors. Speaking Greek was something that was not tolerated in Shaul’s family in Tarsus. Even though Tarsus was now a Greek city, his abba made it clear to Shaul who he was. He was of Israel, the tribe of Benjamin, circumcised on the eighth day as their forefather Abraham, instructed in the law and the prophets. His abba often spoke to Shaul, teaching him to be a wise son.

As Shaul grew, his family could see that he had the heart of a real *zealot* for their God. He was not satisfied to just play around like the other children. He was serious and interested in the things of God.

Knowing a lot about the right way things should be, Shaul could become impatient and even indignant at times with people, being too swift to bring judgment, forgetting that the Almighty would judge at the proper time. They could see the potential in their son to be a great man if he could learn wisdom to equal his zeal, mixing it with the proper self-doubt. So, they decided to send him to apprentice in Jerusalem, to be trained at the feet of a great rabbi named *Gamaliel*, who had become famous for his wisdom.

In Jerusalem, Shaul grew into an honorable youth who took the words of his teacher to heart, always trying to remember the lesson of the “goads” his father had taught him. He felt strongly about a lot of things. He felt he should take action, but then he would remember the “Great Farmer” as the gentle pain of the goad would reach his heart. This must be his friend and guiding light for life.

Returning home to his family in Tarsus, Shaul grew into a strong young man. After talking a lot with his abba, Shaul decided to become a Pharisee, the men who were the most dedicated to the God of Israel. So when he reached the proper age, his parents sent him back to Jerusalem to study under the elders of the Pharisees and serve their God.

So, at about the age of 24, Shaul again found himself in the great city of Jerusalem, in awe of the Holy City, and feeling very honored to be counted among the Pharisees as an apprentice. His heart swelled in anticipation for what lay before him in his life and his self-confidence grew as he put on the garments of a Pharisee, enjoying the approving looks he received as he walked through the streets.

The Pharisees gathered daily to study and discuss the scriptures. They were very serious and devoted, and Shaul admired them all greatly. He sat among them and listened intently to their words. But one subject was preeminent in the daily discussions of the spiritual problems of their nation. That was dealing with the error that was trying to creep into the faith of their people, because it really was a very difficult day they lived in. Many of their own people were predicting the coming of the Messiah. And that is where all the confusion came in, which caused the Pharisees so much trouble. The prophets did seem to be predicting the appearing of the Messiah in these times, yet a kind of emotional reaction had happened among the people, causing all sorts of strange groups to spring up.

But today they were more fiery than most days, as they had been stirred up by some people who had been coming to the temple daily and speaking. Several of the leading Pharisees turned their attention to Shaul and very seriously warned him: "These are very difficult times for our people! Many are looking for an easy way out, an escape. So many strange men are raising themselves up, starting weird cults, and gaining followings for themselves. I am sure Gamaliel, your teacher as a youth, warned you about these things, didn't he?"

"Yes," said Shaul respectfully, "when I was quite young I remember being taught about the danger of false messiahs who would come to deceive people. But I heard later from my abba that my rabbi, Gamaliel, spoke these words in a famous speech he made a few years ago after an uprising of a strange group. He said, *'Be careful how you deal with these people. What I suggest, therefore, is that you leave these men alone and let them go. If this enterprise, this movement of theirs, is of human origin it will break up of its own accord; but if it does in fact come from God you will be unable to destroy them. Take care not to find yourselves fighting against God.'*" Gamaliel was a humble man and always left a little room for self-doubt.

The Pharisees frowned upon the young apprentice, "Yes, but that wisdom does not always apply in **every** case.

Remember how Eliyah, the prophet, had to deal with the prophets of Baal. Sometimes we have to be our God's defenders — be zealous and take action, before one of these weird cults leads the whole world astray!" said the impassioned Pharisees. "And certainly Gamaliel agrees with the prophets and the zealots of old! It was their holy service to God to eliminate these people with their strange gods and messiahs."

Shaul sat in admiration of the Pharisees' passion for the God of Israel. "That passion is the hope for our people!" thought Shaul. "I want to be just like them... and more!" (Gal 1:13-14).

The Pharisees went on to tell him about one of those strange groups that was always sending their men up to the temple area to talk to people about one of the false messiahs. They advised Shaul to always stay away from their deceptive words and not even let them reach his young ears. They warned him of the foolishness of trying to debate with them and change them because their minds were already closed with their dark deceptions. Shaul took their warnings to heart and considered all they taught him.

So, the next morning when he came to sit with the Pharisees in the temple court, he was well prepared for what would happen. A leader among the Pharisees bent over and whispered in Shaul's ear as they all noticed a young man approaching their group, "There is one of them. He's from the group that worships that Galilean named Yahshua. He may look innocent to you, but do not be deceived by that. He is trained in deception. It is better for you to step to the back now and let us older men deal with this heretic! Just learn from our example of how we deal with people like this! We were able to wisely rid ourselves of their leader several years ago, but somehow his followers are so deceived that they just continue spreading his heresies long after he is gone."

Stepping respectfully to the rear of the crowd, Shaul watched as a great debate ensued. He could not hear everything as there were many loud voices. Every now and then young Shaul got a glimpse of the man in the center of the crowd. He quickly checked himself as he found himself straining a little bit to try to hear the words of that man. He feared that it must be that strong seductive power of deception that the older Pharisees warned him of. He straightened up and determined to never give in to that.

He caught a glimpse of the young man at one point as he stood in the midst of the Pharisees. Looking up toward the sky, he had said with a loud voice, "Look! I can see heaven thrown open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Somehow this was more than the leaders could take. Shaul thought they must no longer have any hope at all for this poor man who was so utterly deceived. The elders grabbed him and dragged him outside the city gates. The older men began coming one by one to the rear of the crowd, and handing their coats to young Shaul. They looked extremely sober and angry. His heart started to pound as he felt the fervor of the crowd increase. He heard the sound of rocks hitting their mark and realized that the leaders had found it necessary to execute judgment on this heretic for his blasphemy. Though it frightened Shaul a little, he assured himself that this was the righteous judgment of God, and the Pharisees were doing their "holy service" to Him (Jn 16:2).

When he heard the young man in the center of the crowd cry out in a loud voice, "Master Yahshua, receive my spirit. Do not hold this sin against them," the words rumbled like a bolt of lightning through his mind and heart. And then he felt it, deeply and firmly — the sharp end of a pointed stick prodding him. Great confusion filled his young mind as he fought back and forth. He told himself that this bad feeling was just his emotions, and surely he must just put those feelings aside and "be a man." He reminded himself over and over that this was his "holy service" and he should not feel bad about it. He commanded his soul not to be affected by those few loud words he heard from that heretic, which *seemed* so full of love and genuine kindness: "Do not hold this sin against them."

The Pharisees finished their deed and came for their coats. Seeing the young man obviously shaken, and actually slightly shaken themselves by all that had happened, they called a gathering and thoroughly discussed all that had happened. They assured Shaul that although things like this are not pleasant, it is "for God" that they do it.

Deep in his heart young Shaul felt it again — the nudging of the pointed goad. It hurt. Again he quickly silenced it, receiving the assurances of his highly-esteemed leaders. He spoke up, "I want to be zealous for God. I want to do His Holy Service. We must rid our people of all these deceiving heresies for God's sake, for the sake of His Holy Name."

The leaders praised his zeal and fervent desire for the cause of their God. Their encouragement helped Shaul to overcome his "moment of weakness," and assured him that it was true that such heresies can really shake a person's faith. He determined to help his leaders be free of such deceivers. The Pharisees promoted the young zealot, Shaul to become the "driving force" in this holy service for their God. Little did Shaul know that he was being *mis-informed*. The information he was receiving about this "dangerous cult" was far from the truth

In the community in Jerusalem it was quite a different scene as everyone worked together in unity. The children were being taught. The ladies were cooking and cleaning and being hospitable to all who came by. The men worked on their jobs with thankful hearts. All were extremely grateful for the amazing salvation they had received. The brothers and sisters had sent out their best young evangelists that morning as usual to go to speak with people. Stephen had been the greatest of their helpers in the community. He had the heart of a servant, yet such zeal for the Master that they could not selfishly keep him at home just because they needed him so desperately. They sent him out knowing that he would end up at the temple court where he would be able to speak in the "open forum" that was allowed there. Stephen was always encouraged after he went walking in the city, but really he was equally encouraged after the taking care of the compost all day as well. He had vision for the kingdom of our God to come.

So, when the older men came home that evening and announced at the evening minchah that Stephen would not

be coming home and why, the whole assembly gasped in responses ranging from despair to furious anger. “Why Stephen? We need him so desperately! Those Pharisees have killed an innocent man!” But the leaders encouraged the brothers and sisters to have the attitude of Messiah, and even of Stephen himself, as an observer had told them Stephen’s last words.

“Surely this will all work out somehow for the good... And remember that Stephen is with our Master, so why should we feel bad for him? Let’s pray for those who persecute us as our Master commanded. Remember His words: *They will put you to death and think they are doing God a holy service* (Jn 16:1-3). He prepared us for such things as this to happen to us.”

The community regained their courage that evening, but this was only the beginning of great tribulation for them...

And so began Shaul’s terrible rampage of the communities. The leaders of the community in Jerusalem sent many of the brothers and sisters out to other villages and towns to begin other communities where it would be safer for them and their families to live. This caused the Pharisees, and especially Shaul, to be even more furious in their persecutions. For now they could see that in trying to stop this cult it was spreading even further. Shaul could not stand this. He often lay in bed at night trying to sleep, thinking about his plans to save Israel from the heretics. But then it would come again... that deep, painful prodding of his heart, very strongly sometimes. He found himself kicking back at the goad, very hard. He would toss and turn on his bed, hating the confusion in his mind. Faces of those he had imprisoned came into his mind — their kind looks, their submission even at his meanest commands, yet their tenacious hold on their beliefs. They were submissive, but not obedient. They continued to call upon that *name*, that name Shaul now wished he had never heard — Yahshua. But this night, as Shaul lay there looking up at the ceiling, trying to sleep, the words he had learned from his father as a youth came again to him, painfully like a sharp goad. They were the words of his great rabbi, *“But if it does in fact come from God, you will be unable to destroy them. Take care not to find yourselves fighting against God.”* Oh, that was so painful. The intensity of the goad had increased to the point of being unbearable... and Shaul kicked, and kicked all night.

In the morning he felt so bad. He could only regain his courage by the thought that he must be somehow influenced in his mind by that heresy and he must work even harder to stop it. He HATED the way he felt. But he managed to suppress his bad feelings and went to the gathering of the Pharisees as usual. He had a plan to submit to them. He announced that he wanted a special document of permission from the high priest, and he would go to all the villages and purge them of this cult, taking all the men and women who invoked the name of Yahshua in chains to Jerusalem to be tried. The plan greatly pleased the leaders.

The next week Shaul found himself on the way to Damascus, papers in hand, and with a delegation of men to help him execute his plan. They talked on the way as they rode on their horses. They decided what they would do... It was a long trip, but finally they saw the walls of Damascus in the far distance.

Suddenly the brightest light they had ever seen shown in the sky. It was brighter than a flash of lightning, and it shown all around them. It knocked Shaul right off his horse, and Shaul heard a voice saying in Hebrew, “Shaul, Shaul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you, kicking against the goad.”

“Oh, No!” thought Shaul, “That goad! I know what the voice means. It is the goad of my conscience. That was my conscience telling me I was doing wrong all this time! I surely did hate kicking against it!”

Then he said, “Who are you, Lord?”

And the Lord answered, “I am Yahshua, whom you are persecuting.”

“Oh, what did that mean?” Shaul’s mind raced to understand. This is actually the voice of the Messiah. Is He Yahshua? I have never seen the man. How could I have persecuted Him? Are His people really *Him*? Does He totally identify with His people like a man identifies with his own body?” Oh, the confusion that he felt — the utterly helpless, hopeless feelings of a man who has been so wrong and so *misinformed* flooded over his soul.

He said, “What am I to do, Lord?”

“Get up and stand on your feet, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told what you have been appointed

to do. For I have appeared to you for this reason: to appoint you as my servant and as witness of this vision in which you have seen me, and of others in which I shall appear to you. I shall rescue you from the people and from the nations to whom I send you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light, from the dominion of Satan to God, and receive, through faith in me, forgiveness of their sins and a share in the inheritance of the sanctified.”

Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing at all. Those who were with him had seen the light and heard the sound of the voice, but could not understand. They saw that Shaul was blind, and they had to lead him into Damascus by the hand. The men took him to the house of a man named Yehudah, on Straight Street, as Shaul instructed them.

For three days Shaul waited. He was without his sight and took neither food nor drink. Shaul only sat and thought about what had happened. Regret filled his soul. He knew he had been blind in his spirit, and now his eyes reflected his pitiful condition. He prayed, and prayed, crying out to God, and in the darkness of his blind eyes he saw a vision of a man, a man called “the grace of Yahweh” (Hananyah, or *Ananias* in Greek) coming through the door and laying his hands upon him to heal him... but he knew that the healing he needed was deeper than his physical sight.

There was a disciple in the community in Damascus called Hananyah. He had been working hard all day in the community with the other brothers and sisters. They had received a message that they should brace themselves for terrible persecution. Of course everyone was trusting our Father, but at the same time there was an anxious feeling in the air as they went about their work, just waiting for the tribulation to come upon them.

So, as Hananyah lay down to rest that night he turned his heart toward his Father in heaven, asking for grace... when all of a sudden he had a vision in which the Spirit of God said to him, “Hananyah!”

He replied, “Here I am, Master.”

“Get up and go to Straight Street and ask at the house of Yehudah for someone called Shaul, who comes from Tarsus. At this moment he is praying, and has seen a man called Hananyah coming in and laying hands on him to give him back his sight.”

But in response, Hananyah said, “Master, I have heard from many people about this man and all the harm he has been doing to your holy people in Jerusalem. He has come here with a warrant from the chief priests to arrest everybody who invokes your name.”

“Go, for this man is my chosen instrument to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel. I myself will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

Then Hananyah went. He obeyed the voice of our Master and entered the house on Straight Street. He asked Yehudah where Shaul was. Yehudah pointed to the back room, explaining that Shaul was in very pitiful shape and was suffering greatly, crying and saying over and over how sorry he is.

As he opened the door, Hananyah could see in the semi-darkness the figure of a man, with head down, hair hanging loose. At the sound of someone entering the humble figure turned toward the door, and from his blindness cried, “Is that you, Hananyah? Is that you?” He had been waiting, praying... “Hananyah, I am sorry, so sorry. I have seen Him, on the road to Damascus. He spoke to me... It was Yahshua. I was so wrong! I was *misinformed*. I am guilty! Oh, how can I be forgiven?”

As Hananyah looked upon this broken man, his heart swelled with compassion. He reached out his hands to comfort him, laying his hands on his quivering shoulders, he said, “Brother Shaul...” He saw this man no longer as the dreaded persecutor of the our Master’s people, but now as only a humble, guilty man in great need of forgiveness. “Brother Shaul, I have been sent by the Master Yahshua, who appeared to you on your way, so that you may recover your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Immediately, it was as though scales fell away from his eyes and he was able to look into the beautiful face of his brother, Hananyah. Shaul knew as he looked at Hananyah he could see Yahshua Himself – as our Master had made it clear to him that when he persecuted Hananyah, or anyone else in the Community, which is the Body of Messiah, he had been persecuting Him. Yahshua totally identifies with His people.

Then Hananyah said, “The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Upright One and hear his own voice speaking, because you are to be his witness before all humanity, testifying to what you have

seen and heard. And now why delay? Hurry and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name.” Shaul clung to Hananyah, and the unbelievable news that he could be forgiven filled his soul. He walked through the dark streets with Hananyah.

“First we can stop here at the community and tell the brothers and sisters and we will all go together to the water.” Leaving Shaul in the dark street outside, Hananyah entered the main house of the community. Shaul wept and wept as he thought how, had it not been for the mercy of our Father, he would have been entering this very community to imprison the people who must now accept and forgive him. As he watched their curious faces slowly fill the street around him, Shaul could only cry out, “I am sorry, I am sorry. I was wrong. I was misinformed! I need Yahshua. He is the Son of God. He is the Messiah!” Ashamed to even look up into the faces of those around him, Shaul hung his head.

But his heart soon swelled to unknown heights as he then heard one by one and then resoundingly together, “Amen! Let’s baptize this man for the forgiveness of his sins!”

It was true. The brothers and sisters there found forgiveness in their hearts for this man. That is because forgiveness was in the heart of our Master, since He looked down that day as his beloved servant Stephen was being stoned, and saw a young man who was grossly misinformed, and was “kicking against the goad” but hated it! He knew the hearts of all those men, so as he was standing at the right hand of God, looking down, it was from His heart that Stephen said, “Father, do not hold this sin against them.” For at least Shaul did not really know what he was doing. He truly was *misinformed*.

Back at the community after the baptism they had a great “lost coin” celebration, and after taking some food Shaul regained his strength.

After he had spent only a few days with the disciples in Damascus, he asked the brothers if he could go out to and proclaim the truth in the synagogues, for they had been expecting him to come with the papers to exterminate the community. They sent him out.

As he walked into the synagogue he was warmly greeted by all the people. “We have been waiting for you. What has delayed your arrival? Are you here with the papers to destroy that cult who follow that false Messiah, Yahshua?”

Shaul stood in the midst of them and boldly proclaimed, “Men of Israel, I have something very important to tell you. Yahshua is the Son of God!”

All the people were amazed at the words of Shaul....

And so began the life of a man who was greatly used by our Father. He went on to do many, many great things to build up the kingdom. But he had learned some deep lessons from all he experienced. He learned how our Master felt about his people, as His very own body, that he totally identified with. He learned that a misinformed man can bring great injustice to the innocent. And above all he learned the lesson his father had tried to teach him so, so long ago, that you should never “kick against the goad!”