

## Excellence Is Better Than Success

BY MOISHE ROSEN, FOUNDER

*In recent months, we have been looking at our list of Jews for Jesus Core Values, examining them one by one. These values are fundamental to the identity, actions and commitments of our ministry. This month's core value is: "striving for excellence in all that we do." As I was reflecting on how to present this value to you, I remembered an article Moishe Rosen wrote years ago. His words deeply affected me at that time, and as I re-read the article, they still mean a great deal to me. I hope they will touch you as well. —David Brickner, executive director*

**H**e was a wise young man—a coal miner who became a lawyer by studying at night school. First he learned shorthand. Then he found work in a law office. Later, when his shorthand improved, he became a court reporter. He attended law school at night and passed his bar exams. Then he received a call from God for missionary service. He even knew the place—Burma.

She was the most popular girl in her class, but never took any of her suitors seriously. She too, had received a call from God. After high school she enrolled at a newly-founded missionary college in preparation for answering that call.

Each of them might well have been named "Most Likely to Succeed" by society's standards, but they both had other standards in mind. They wanted to serve God above anything else. They met at that missionary college. It was inevitable that they should decide to marry. Together they prayed and looked forward to their missionary service. They were married the day after graduation.

Before their appointment to Burma came through, there was a small complication. He weighed 8 pounds, 4 ounces and was 20 inches long. When finally the appointment was made, her need to recuperate from an extremely difficult labor prompted them to postpone their acceptance for a year. But the next year brought a flu epidemic. It nearly

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to change  
one's  
character.*



took his life and did claim the life of their little son. The overwhelming medical bills caused another delay. To get out of debt, he became very much involved in his law practice.

The third year brought another baby. The new father, now a successful lawyer, was in the midst of a contested probate where a godly widow had left a huge sum of money to missions. Her ungodly children were using all kinds of legal maneuvers to keep that mission from receiving the funds. He felt he could not leave for Burma until the case was settled. He rationalized that he was fulfilling his call by serving as an attorney for God's work, and that the delay in going to Burma must have been

God's will. That case took four years to resolve.

Once again he applied as a missionary, but this time only half-heartedly. He now had three small children, and with relief he accepted the mission board's notification: they could not use him in the field. Burma had been closed to missionaries.

His law practice continued to flourish. His monthly donations supported several missionaries. He served on the board of directors for several missions, and through his generosity several churches were started. I attended their 45th wedding anniversary celebration and heard that very attractive older couple declare their happiness and sense of fulfillment and their love for the Lord and one another.

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They were never to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. She passed on and he became frail in health.

At that time I was a young missionary and greatly discouraged in my ministry, thinking that I might better serve the Lord in some other way. I considered “tentmaking” as Paul had done. The idea had always appealed to me. Because there is an onus on being a missionary to the Jews, it would be so much easier if I could continue to witness but say that I was a shoe salesman or a teacher—**anything** respectable—anything but a missionary to the Jews, which was not at all “respectable”!

I shared my burden with the elderly lawyer because I knew and respected him greatly. That was when he told me a shocking secret—one he had kept from even his closest associates. He confided it to me because I needed to hear it, and I have never forgotten it.

He said, “I’ve had a happy life, but not a joyous one. I’ve made and given away a fortune. I have the love and respect of many, but **I did not fulfill my destiny**. It’s easy to excuse myself by saying that circumstances dictated another call, but only in the last year of my wife’s life could we admit to one another that we had chosen to do the second best. I am not unhappy, but I am not fulfilled.”

Then he added something that helped me overcome my discouragement. He said, “I recognize that you are a man of destiny. You have a call from God. Don’t do anything less than what He has called you to do.”

He died shortly after that. He was a man who taught me many things. He was certainly a godly man. I can testify to that. He was happy and successful, but by his own admission, he had not fulfilled his destiny.

Some time back, I read *Christian Excellence: Alternative to Success* by Dr. Jon Johnston, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California. Discussing our success-oriented evangelical society, Dr. Johnston made a distinction between success

and excellence. He described his own efforts to be a super-person, and how he had continually failed and concealed his failings. Then he had read a highly recommended secular book, *In Search of Excellence*. The book dealt with companies that did things right and made it big. As he read that book, Dr. Johnston realized that it was not describing excellence, but success.



He pointed out the differences. He said that success is cheap. Success might mean enjoying the acclaim of the crowd, having the keys to the executive bathroom and driving a Mercedes, but success does not necessarily last. Excellence, on the other hand, does. Excellence does not gain the applause of the crowd. Excellence does not produce popularity. Excellence demands more than success. Striving toward excellence requires striving to change one’s character.

After reading that, I wondered if Dr. Johnston was not just playing word games. Wasn’t excellence implied in success? If a person did an excellent job, then didn’t he or she succeed? If a person received recognition for being successful, wasn’t that success due to excellence? In our society that seems to be the case. Excellence, success and recognition seem to go hand-in-hand.

Then I realized what Dr. Johnston was saying, and it was an important lesson to me: in the Christian sense, excellence in serving the Lord is quite different. Christian excellence is motivated by a desire to please the Lord and to fulfill His purposes. Such endeavor is an act of worship, not to be applauded by human hands. Christian excellence entails offering one’s best to God. It cannot be snatched away by lack of human praise or augmented by human recognition or earthly reward. It seeks only the Master’s affirmation: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

I know from personal experience that Christian excellence can exist without “success” and without applause or fanfare. If you want to see excellence and godliness, come and sit at our Jews for Jesus mail table and read some of the mail we

**WE EXIST TO MAKE THE MESSIAHSHIP OF JESUS  
AN UNAVOIDABLE ISSUE TO OUR JEWISH PEOPLE WORLDWIDE.**

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E-MAIL: [jfj@jews-for-jesus.org](mailto:jfj@jews-for-jesus.org); HOME PAGE: [www.jews-for-jesus.org](http://www.jews-for-jesus.org); ALSO WORKING IN: AUSTRALIA, CANADA, FRANCE, GERMANY, ISRAEL, RUSSIA,  
SOUTH AFRICA, UKRAINE and THE UNITED KINGDOM; EDITOR: RUTH ROSEN; ART DIRECTION: PAIGE SAUNDERS; DESIGN: DANIELA KOGER

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receive from friends and supporters. Sometimes the spelling isn't correct; sometimes the handwriting is scrawled and shaky and almost illegible. But I look at those pages and see the reflections of godly people. I see hearts of love and praise to God. I see overcoming strength and victory in the midst of illness; trust in the midst of poverty. That is Christian excellence.

Excellence is better than success. It entails pleasing God—fulfilling one's destiny as His child—godliness. Godliness does not lead us to strive for success, but to strive for excellence—to strive to accomplish God's purposes, thus fulfilling our highest calling as His redeemed ones. How we love to quote Romans 8:28: “. . . all things work together for good. . . .” But we must be careful to remember the rest of the verse: “. . . to those who are the called according to His purpose.” And if you read the rest of that passage, you find that God calls us to be conformed

to the image of His Son. We are not all called to be professional missionaries. We are not all called to be preachers. But we are all called to fill and fulfill a definite role within the Body of Christ. As those who have received the Spirit of Christ, we know what God asks of us, and we know when we settle for doing—for giving Him—something less.

That godly lawyer knew. He told me, “You are a man of destiny. You have a call.” He didn't want me to settle for anything less. He exhorted me as one who had not fulfilled his own destiny. I, in turn, want to say to all blood-bought believers in Christ: **You too have a destiny because you have a call**, as does every believer in Christ. Your call is to do your part in accomplishing the purposes of our Heavenly Father. Once you realize this, you have the potential of excelling in the fulfillment of your destiny. And fulfilling your destiny will bring unmatched and lasting joy.

# Praise Report

Thanks to those of you who have been praying for our new work in Australia. One of our primary prayer requests was for volunteers to come alongside.

We now have two Co-Laborers in Messiah (CLIMs) in Oceania. One is next door in New Zealand near Auckland, and the other is in Sydney. Welcome to Perry Trotter and Samantha Burton who have completed their volunteer training! Others are preparing to take the training next time. We still need to pray for more regular volunteers throughout Australia, but we are praising God for the help He has already raised up. Thanks again for praying.



PASSOVER IN A PARALLEL UNIVERSE...



MOSES IN MONTANA

# Training

## New Missionaries

Our missionary training center in New York City has definitely taken on an international flavor! Our last group of trainees consisted of one American (Gary), one South African (Natalie) and two Israelis (Kate and Moshe). Please pray for them; this month they begin the next phase of their training which we call “seasoning.”

Meanwhile, the group that is following on their heels is just as international. We have two Americans (Susie Mendelson and Brenda Forman—though we are training Brenda at the request of another mission), one Macedonian (Asher Avramovski) and two South Africans (Michael Sischey and Nici Meyer). We will be introducing you to them in coming editions of the newsletter.

## From the Editor: Oops

In our February newsletter, we printed a Yiddish saying on the front page: “Man drives but God holds the reins.”

And while our God certainly reigns (and He even rains down blessings), in this case we were talking about reins—I guess you can tell that we at Jews for Jesus don't have a whole lot of experience with horses!



# Choose Life

## Choose Life

A pastor friend of mine once wrote a sermon titled, "Just Because You're Breathing, Doesn't Mean You're Alive." In other words, sin yields death, and real life doesn't happen until people know Jesus.

Scott T. was one of the walking dead. His understanding of sin, like that of many Jewish people, was rooted in the traditional idea that deeds, whether good or bad, determine who is righteous and who is a sinner.

Problems with drugs led to incarceration and Scott realized that he was guilty of sin, because he knew his deeds were evil. At one point he even prayed, in the hope that Jesus would give him strength to overcome his addiction. But he didn't really understand the condition of his heart, or who Jesus was—and he knew nothing of the resurrection power in Christ. After his second felony incarceration he was released from jail, only to succumb to his old habit.

During his time in a rehabilitation facility Scott met a Christian nurse named Liz. She kept in contact with him when he left the facility, praying with him and encouraging him to seek a real relationship with God. Through her urging, Scott ended up calling our Jews for Jesus office. The first time I met with him, it was simply to discover the nature of his interest. After that he came to a Jews for Jesus Bible study. Then one rainy, windy Thursday evening in December, we met at a local restaurant. We sat in a back booth



and discussed the nature of sin. Scott already had an idea that Jesus came to die on the cross for him from having attended a church revival service. But he had never thought of sin as the condition of *his* heart. He had not understood that the resurrection power of Christ could change that condition and give *him* a new life—until that night.

Scott realized that he was incapable of overcoming his addiction or his sin by his own strength. He called on Jesus Christ, confessing Him as Lord, and believing in his heart that He had been raised from the grave. Scott chose life in December 1997, and was raised to new life in Christ.

Not all of Scott's choices have been good since coming to faith. He disappeared for five months in 1998, back into the world of drugs. When he learned that his father was dying, he rededicated his life to the Lord and has been clean ever since. Scott led his father, Jacob, to Christ two days before he died, just this past December. I've been in regular contact with Scott and he continues trusting the Lord daily.

I ask your prayers for Scott as he looks for the grace to continue living each day as the new creation the Lord intended.

—Tuvya Zaretsky, chief of station  
Los Angeles

## Resurrection Reflections

There is a kind of reverse—or maybe I should say *perverse*—resurrection whereby we sometimes "bring back" that which is better left dead and buried: decaying desires, rotten self-righteousness (or its evil twin, self-loathing), resentments, all kinds of thoughts or attitudes that we once put to death. For whatever momentary satisfaction it may bring us, in times of weakness we indulge in thoughts that summon these old specters back to life. We greet them like old friends, embrace them, and when the pleasure of the reunion wears off and we step back to look at these old "friends," we find ourselves feeling somewhat hollow, if not horrified for having held them.

Have you ever felt overpowered by your own spiritual weaknesses? In fact, many of us ascribe a tremendous amount of strength to our weaknesses, as though they were heavy, unbreakable chains that hold us in place. Do you see the irony? Yes, our weaknesses are real and we all have limitations, but weakness by definition is *not* powerful. In fact, one drop of blood can smash all of our chains. We don't get that blood from beating ourselves up, either!

Jesus, the Lamb of God, shed His blood to free us from our sins.

Just as the blood of the Passover Lamb delivered the children of Israel from death and caused Pharaoh to relinquish his hold on them, the blood of Jesus delivers us from death and slavery to sin. True, we can bring some of our old sins back into our lives, re-live bad habits, bad attitudes and suffer consequences for them. *But we can never give them the power they once had over us.* Jesus broke that power at Calvary, and the proof is the empty tomb. Because He triumphed over death, nothing that is dirty or decayed or loathsome can ever control even a day of our destiny. We only imagine our weaknesses to be so terribly strong because our vision of God's power is so terribly weak.

God has promised that power to you and me. Yes, the dead in Christ will one day be raised, even as Jesus, the firstfruits of the dead, was raised. But in the meantime, His resurrection power can breathe life into those things we may feel are gone forever. His Holy Spirit can continually renew us by bringing back to life hope, love, joy, purity, a part in His plans—all the things the devil would have us believe our weakness has destroyed.

Why believe the lie when we can trust the Resurrected Lamb? He is risen indeed, and His Resurrection power is available to us every single day. Hallelujah!









—Ruth Rosen, editor

Resurrection Reflections



# Prayer Prompters

## Please pray for:

-  our Jews for Jesus staff to continue striving for excellence (p. 1-3)
-  Kate and Moshe as they become part of our outreach team in Israel
-  current trainees Nici Meyer, Michael Sischev, Susie Mendelson and Brenda Forman in New York City (p. 3)
-  salvation for Steven in New York; for Lilia's father, Mark and sister, Snezhana in the former Soviet Union; and for Garry in Australia (p. 8)
-  grace and strength for new Jewish believers Stuart in Washington, D.C.; Flora Belle and Geraldine in San Francisco; Judith in Paris (p. 8)
-  God's resurrection power in Scott's life; that he will continue to live as a new creation (p. 4)
-  Garrett Smith, who will be leading this next summer's witnessing campaign in New York; for wisdom as he seeks God's best in preparing and strategizing for this outreach
-  many of the Christians who are just beginning to receive our newsletter as the result of our Christ in the Passover tours—to catch a vision for our ministry; that they will begin praying, giving and witnessing to the end that Jewish people might be saved

# Salvation, Weather or Not!



“Michigan? Are you sure you want me to go there?” That was my response when I learned the location for my “spring” speaking tour a couple of years ago. My concern was whether or not the state of Michigan realized that it was supposed to be spring already!

I finished my first “Christ in the Passover” presentation of the season and drove back to my host’s home in freezing rain. Sleet, I think they call it (I was raised in California; we don’t get much weather to speak of). My host’s home had no electricity for five days, just like 300,000 other homes in the area. The next day it snowed.

A few days after the snow, I headed up to a tiny town about an hour outside of Detroit. By tiny I mean the pastor warned me to remain alert as I drove through the town because I would miss it if I blinked. Before the service, the pastor informed me that a Jewish woman had been attending their church sporadically, and that members had made a special effort to ensure that she would attend the Jews for Jesus presentation that evening.

After the service, a young woman named Amy introduced herself to me, and asked for more information. This was the woman the pastor had spoken of, and she explained that she had been both deeply moved and disturbed by my presentation. She sincerely wanted to know how a Jew could believe in Jesus, so I gave her some reading material and we set a time to meet on Palm Sunday.

The day arrived and I dashed to the local coffee shop to meet Amy in between church services. She had read all the materials I’d given her, including portions of the New Testament, and she had a long list of questions. We tackled her questions and looked at key prophecies concerning the Messiah. Amy confided that she had been drawn to Jesus for a long time, but feared that following Him would mean turning her back on her Jewish heritage. Meeting a Jewish person who believed in Jesus was just what she needed to help her trust Y’shua as her Messiah and Savior.

We prayed together in the front seat of my rental car, with a box of tissues readily available. Amy’s joy over the forgiveness of her sin was evident. I was thankful too, that Amy already had a loving Christian family ready to welcome her. That night, she called several people from the church, including the pastor, and told them of her decision.

You know, between my down coat, the warmth of Christian love and the glow of seeing a baby believer born, it wasn’t so cold in Michigan after all!

—Annette Sofaer

*Annette had regular contact with Amy for about a year, and was encouraged to see her take root and grow in the faith. This year Annette, “passed over” spring tour to stay home with her seven-month-old baby girl while husband Josh (one of our LA missionaries) toured in Kentucky.*

# Striving for Excellence

This month's core value contains a word that precedes excellence, and that word is "strive."

*Striving* for excellence is not a caveat whereby we can justify a lack of excellence by saying, "Well, we were striving for it anyway!" While we recognize that sometimes we fall short of excellence, the word striving is not an excuse for such shortfalls. Rather, we included the word in our core values document because excellence is usually a result of struggle.

Most Old Testament uses of the word "strive" have negative connotations like fighting, quarreling, rebelling, etc. Yet we do have an example of righteous striving in the Hebrew Bible: "And the LORD said, 'My Spirit shall not **strive** with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years'" (Genesis 6:3).

In this case, according to Strong's Concordance, the word strive is derived from the Hebrew word (דָּן) pronounced *din*. This has the connotation of judging, contending or pleading. That judging, contending and pleading of the Spirit of God with humanity is based on His desire for us to reach the potential for which we were created. If God did not care, He would not strive with us.

Don't you find that there are times when the struggle to rise above mediocrity—the struggle to press beyond what is acceptable or even good—requires you to enter into some kind of conflict?

At times, striving for excellence will cause us to be misunderstood. Even within our own Jews for Jesus organization there can be misunderstanding; some may feel they are continually being criticized each time someone points to a more excellent way. From without, our striving for excellence has at times been viewed as a matter of pride or unreasonable expectations. It behooves us to guard our hearts and to work at making sure that these things are not true of us, but we have to continue striving for excellence even if it means being misunderstood now and then. We should not beat ourselves up for our failures, but we cannot allow ourselves to be satisfied with less—we would not be Jews for Jesus if we did.

We have several biblical examples of godly striving in the New Testament. Here are three Scriptures that use three different Greek words for striving, each with its own nuance:

The word ἀγωνίζομαι, pronounced *agonidzomai* conveys the sense of struggle one would have when competing for a prize, contending with an opponent, as well as fighting or fervently endeavoring to accomplish something. For example: "To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily" (Colossians 1:27-29).

The second word ἀνταγωνίζομαι, pronounced *antagonidzomai* is more specifically to struggle against: "For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin" (Hebrews 12:3,4).

The third word is συναγωνίζομαι, and is pronounced *sunagonidzomai*. It means to struggle in company with; to be a partner: "Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me. . . . that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen" (Romans 15:30,32).

Whether or not you have studied Greek, if you'll pronounce those words aloud, you will discover that parts of them sound familiar. To strive for excellence sometimes does involve agonizing, and even antagonizing. (We hope that the antagonizing is, as in the Hebrews passage, against sin and the powers of darkness!)

Dear friends, please pray that striving for excellence will always be a Jews for Jesus core value. And as you stand with us in prayer, perhaps contributing in other ways as well, we thank you for "*sunagonidzomai-ing*" with us. Your partnership enables us to keep striving for excellence!



1.



2.

Photos: #1 and #2 show missionary Garrett Smith and outreach worker Vlad Leibovsky striving to communicate the gospel to those they meet on city streets; #3 shows Khen Duong, who heads our production department, working hard to produce ISSUES, our evangelistic publication for Jewish seekers; #4 shows Joe Bell of the Liberated Wailing Wall striving to write those postcards that let friends like you know how much we appreciate your support!



3.



4.

# Bits from the



From **New York City**, missionary trainee Gary Leese reports, “Moshe and I were visiting a local church and after the service, we found an anonymous note on our windshield. Someone was asking us to visit a Jewish man who had tried to commit suicide. We visited Steven in the hospital later that evening. He considers himself agnostic, yet when I asked him how he thought I happened to be visiting him from an anonymous note, he acknowledged that God was somehow involved. It is a step in the right direction, praise God! Please pray for Steven as I continue to share the love God has through our Messiah, Y’shua.”

“‘Lap Fruit’ is when others plant the seed, God waters it and the fruit just falls into our lap,” says branch leader Peter Rice from **Washington, D.C.** “Lap fruit” also demonstrates teamwork. In this case, a Christian gave a Jewish friend named Stuart a testimony tape by Lon Solomon, a Jewish believer and pastor (and member of Jews for Jesus board of directors). Lon’s story struck a resonant chord with Stuart each time he listened to it. When Stuart’s friend invited him to an evangelistic crusade, Stuart not only attended, but was recruited at the last minute to be an usher! After the crusade, he knew he had to find out more. “I had to know if Jesus was really the Messiah for Jews like me, or just a god for Gentiles,” he said.

Stuart called the church that Lon Solomon pastors, which “happens” to be Peter Rice’s home church. They passed the contact along to Peter. Peter answered Stuart’s questions, and had the privilege of leading him to faith in Christ. Stuart is now bringing his wife to our D.C. Bible study, hoping that she too will accept the good news of Jesus.

Diane Cohen is our part-time missionary, full-time ray of sunshine in **San Francisco**. Two elderly Jewish women whom she has been witnessing to for quite some time, Flora Belle and Geraldine, both recently prayed to accept Jesus as their Savior! By the way, Diane’s husband, Hyam is “retiring” from our Purple Pomegranate Productions. He and Diane will be moving down to Florida this June to enjoy the warmer weather and help out with our Ft. Lauderdale branch.

Outreach worker Edward Granovsky reports from **Moscow**, “I met with Rosa Vladimirovna Veisman twice during the last week of her life, knowing that her time

was short. She listened attentively and prayed to receive Y’shua the day before she died. Praise Y’shua for His redemptive power even in the last moments of life.”

From **Odessa**, outreach worker Lilia Rakhlina reports, “My mother recently visited and brought good news from home. My father, who is Jewish but always considered himself an atheist, is now attending Bible studies; he’s even started praying on his knees. It’s a miracle! Please pray for salvation for my father, Mark Abramovich Rakhlin and for my Orthodox sister, Snezhana. May the Lord continue to draw my family to Himself!”

From **Paris**, trainee Kate Fryer reports, “Etienne Levy (our Paris outreach worker) and I visited Judith—actually I mostly observed and prayed while Etienne talked her through the gospel. Judith has been listening to Christian radio stations for two years, and her heart was very tender toward Jesus. Near the end of the Bible study, Etienne asked if she would like to pray to receive Jesus by faith for the forgiveness of her sins. She said yes and we all prayed together! The following Sunday, Judith attended church and said that the transformation in her life is ‘like a miracle.’ The service really spoke to her. Please pray for her continued growth in the faith.”

From **Australia**, branch leader Bob Mendelsohn reports, “*The Australia Jewish News* reported that an American-based counter missionary organization was going to open shop in Australia, due in no small part to the exposure Jews for Jesus received three months earlier on an ABC television program called ‘Compass.’ (The producers of the show wanted a program on ‘opposing missions’ and had found us in the phone book! A number of Jewish people had watched the show after being ‘warned’ about it in the local Jewish newspaper.)

“As a result of that article, a Russian Jew named Garry, called us wanting to know more about our beliefs. Garry has lived in Sydney for nearly twenty years and has thought often about Jesus, so he was happy to hear that there are Jews for Jesus in his city. I visited Garry, found him to be very open to the gospel and we will be meeting again soon. The old adage by Jews for Jesus founder Moishe Rosen proves true once again: ‘Every knock is a boost!’”