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## In Defense of our Rabbis, A Response to Slander

*By Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok*

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We suffer from a terrible problem. Apparently, a day cannot go by when we do not have fellow Jews attacking other Jews. Whether in newspaper articles or interviews in the media, on radio or television, whether in Israel or anywhere else in the world, we see the worst type of behavior expressed by our own people towards our own people. This is deplorable by any definition. Nowhere does this become more apparent when it comes to discussing the lives and words of our present day Rabbinic leaders.

When it comes to attacking religious leaders, some feel that it is almost a meritorious thing to speak about them in a shameful manner. There seems to be almost a disgust emanating from the expressed opinions of certain individuals against our Rabbis. Certain individuals when they claim they are condemning the religious hypocrisy of religious leaders are in actuality themselves guilty of the worst kind of hypocrisy. Granted, not everything done by every religious leader is worthy of our praise. Yet, this does not give anyone license to launch an attack against an individual religious leader, regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with his statements.

Attacking a fellow Jew in a disparaging manner is unacceptable conduct on behalf of every one. We all have the right to disagree with both the public statements and the private views of our religious leaders. Disagreement is not the point. The point is how we express our disagreement. We can disagree with the expressed ideas, concepts and views of our religious leaders. We can even disagree with them sharply. However, there is a limit. There is a right way and a wrong way to speak out and to act.

When one launches a personal attack on another, insulting their integrity and character, whereas at the same time not addressing the specific issue that led to the attack, such is the behavior of the worst elements in our society. Such personal attacks cloud issues, creates all type of bad feelings, and causes there to be much strife and outright hatred amongst us who should be acting together as brothers. There is an old saying, "a nation divided against itself cannot stand;" and "united we stand, divided we fall."

When Jews attack fellow Jews and slander their character, all the more so when this is done towards our religious leadership, this is a recipe for disaster. Such individuals engaged in this behavior should be ashamed of themselves for spreading strife, anger and creating hatred. This is not what Judaism is about. This is not what Jews do.



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Judaism is about living a code of higher morality. Those who wish to launch personal attacks against our Rabbis should remember this. For before one can criticize another, that one had better be certain that he himself is not guilty of the hypocrisy he wishes to condemn in another.

If one wishes to enter the arena of debate and question and even argue with our Rabbis about their personal and Rabbinic opinions on a matter, this is a welcome and good thing. However, the arena of debate is a place of civility. It is a place of honor and respect. We can agree to disagree; we can argue and even fight, as long as it is all done within the context of professionalism, with basic human decency and respect.

Torah prides itself in having expansive room for many different opinions, divergent practices and varying ways and paths, all within the context of what is right and kosher. Torah also prides itself in being a code of honor above and beyond the fray of the dog-eat-dog jungle we unfortunately live in. When one speaks disparagingly about our Rabbis, any Rabbi, for any reason, however apparently legitimate the reason, such a one disgraces himself and falls to a level totally unbecoming of a Jew, and of a human being.

This is a lesson we all need to learn. Do not call yourself religious all the while you act irreligiously. Do not call yourself a critic of religion or of the religious all the while that you yourself are a hypocrite. First, become truly religious yourself, in word and in deed. When you act religiously, then you are religious. You are not acting religious when you make personal attacks. Your attack makes you as guilty, if not more so, than the one you are attacking.

Let us learn how to behave and how to respect our religious leaders. Maybe we disagree with many things that they say, but we can never disagree with how the Torah dictates we should express our disagreement. Let us rise above the fray and act as we should – as decent, honorable Jews and human beings, with integrity of Torah being our guide.