

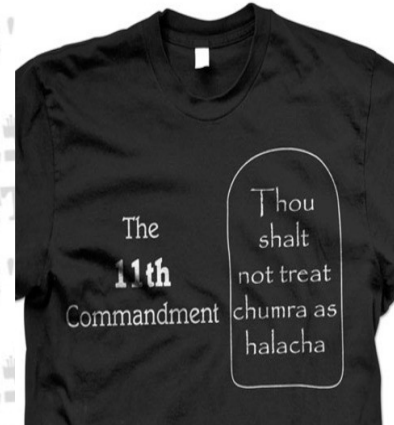
Yosef, the “Modern Orthodox” vs. the “Flawed” Fundamentalist

by HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

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The Biblical Yosef was a good and balanced man. Not for naught is he the proper role model for any true G-d fearing human being in a secular society, be that person Jew or Gentile. He was practical, realistic, righteous and religious all at the same time.

He never allowed religious superstition or fundamentalism to get in his way, in spite of the fact that he was considered to be a mighty sorcerer and wizard. Indeed, those who are familiar with the arcane arts and the occult know more than anyone else that superstition is a tool and a weapon to be used against those who have weak minds. If one can introduce fear into the mind of another then one can manipulate that other through the fear and make them do outrageous things that were it not for the fear they would never consider doing.



Yes, superstition and fear are a terrible psychological flaw; unfortunately, they lie at the core of the personality of the religious fundamentalist. This is why Torah prohibits the practices of specific occult rituals. By themselves they have no power, but the superstitious and fearful believer endows them with an imaginary power than in the mind is awesomely true. Therefore, such pursuits had to be prohibited. Their pursuit and practice create superstitions and such a superstitious mentality creates religious fundamentalism. Both are equally bad, both violate the very essence of Torah.

The human mind is a rather fragile thing. Most people never bother to train and strengthen their minds. For most people, the mind is the weakest part of the body. While many will go to the gym and spends hours on exercise and lots of money to maintain a good appearance, so relative few are willing to make even the smallest investment in their mental strength, or for that matter, their mental health. Many are just satisfied not to feel bad, and to accomplish this the majority turn to all types of behaviors to dull the realities of a weak mind.

People turn to drugs, alcohol, over-eating, sexual promiscuity and perversions, just to name a few of the pursuits that so many turn to in order to fill an empty void inside their very minds and hearts. Most interpret their inner emotional state of imbalance as having an emotional source. Therefore, they choose to address the emotional, rather than to recognize and deal with its actual source, the mind. Mind you, some turn to academic learning as a means to inner fulfillment. What is found in the end is a head full of information and facts, and a heart even more empty than before.

Real knowledge is not the memorizing of facts or words from a book. Real knowledge is the integration of information absorbed inside oneself that leads to a transformation of perception and thus character. Any knowledge that does not transform the root of one's soul is merely external information and facts; they are not fulfilling, nor are they meant to be.

The study of Torah was never meant to be an academic pursuit; on the contrary it was meant to be a transformational experience. Therefore, **anyone who has studied Torah and not been transformed by**

it to the very core of their being has never really studied Torah at all. All they have done is memorized facts and bits of data. They are no different from a computer, full of information and totally void of heart. This too is the way of the fundamentalist; the one whose heart is void of true awareness and enlightenment. Real Torah enters both mind and heart. If this journey is not complete, then the journey is for naught.

Nothing enters the heart and the emotions prior to it entering the mind and thought. One does not feel bad about a thing unless one initially thinks bad about a thing. Thought always precedes emotion. It never works the other way around. Therefore when the mind is weak and thought cannot be controlled one of the most prominent expressions of this weakness is an acute state of emotional unbalance.

Torah is supposed to be a transformational experience and not just a bunch of ritual observances that are believed to ward off evil. Torah is not voodoo. Mitzvot are not magical. While Torah and mitzvot indeed do have a protective attribute to them, such power lies not in the ritual performance, but rather in the thought and mind of the performer. Shakespeare (As you Like It, Act II, Scene VII) said it best when he stated "*All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts.*" Our lives are just an act watched and observed by Powers Above and we are graded by the sincerity of our performance.

Therefore, Torah and mitzvot cannot just be an act on our parts. Our acting on this stage of life has to be convincing, to Heaven, to others and even to ourselves. Therefore, we act the right way simply because it is the right thing to do. Yet, almost every good actor has to remember that however deep they get into their roles, they must never forget who they themselves are as individuals. It is very dangerous to confuse one's true identity with the role one plays on stage. Unfortunately, today this is a great social problem, wherein which many identify themselves by the role they play and forget entirely who they are inside themselves. This analogy best describes the fundamentalist.

Torah is not religion and honestly has nothing to do with religion. Torah is a way and a path to transform the human mind and to expand human consciousness. Mitzvot are a means to an end, that of becoming a fulfilled human being, created in the Image of G-d. Israel was chosen to be the role model for this transformation. Unfortunately, throughout the centuries, the nation has failed miserably in this mission. Nonetheless, the message of the mission has spread through the world and peoples from all nations and walks of life take it upon themselves to live the proper way. That which is proper is what is right; when that which is right is practiced it is righteousness. Therefore, all who are doing what is right are called the righteous. This category of human being transcends all differences of any kind. Righteousness is a human acquisition open to any and all.

Torah has called for Israel and for humanity to act with righteousness and for all to act humanely with one another. History has documented how many calling themselves religious have acted inhumanely and even depraved towards one another, all in the name of the G-d of the Bible. Christians, Muslims and Jews are all guilty of depravity in their quest for acting out as G-d's agents on Earth. And this is where the problem lies.

Everyone reads something about G-d, believes something about G-d and then draw conclusions that everyone else who has not drawn their same conclusions about G-d are obviously wrong and acting against G-d. Fundamentalist logic holds, that anyone acting against G-d is evil and therefore must be destroyed. So, the fundamentalist mentality which believes that it alone knows the Divine truth and represents that Divine truth believes that it must act to remove from existence all that contradicts it. Therefore, acting as self-proclaimed Divine agents on Earth, such fundamentalists, convinced by their holy books that their authority to act is true, act in the most depraved and inhumane of ways spreading havoc, destruction pain and suffering all the while convinced that they are doing the work of G-d. The twisted minds of these narrow thinkers deny the obvious and perpetuate evil all the while convinced that it is good.

People who practice Judaism are as susceptible to this type of twisted thinking as are members of any other religion. Fundamentalism is a psychological attitude of surface value understandings of metaphorical and mystical teachings. The reason why the Torah path has survived for thousands of years without any location of centrality or any formal authority structure or leader is because of its fluid nature and ability to adapt and shift to meet the needs of the people wherever they be and under whatever circumstances they face.

Torah is universal and can therefore be applied universally everywhere. The fundamentalist however cannot see this fluidity and instead clings to a rigidity that places Torah in contradiction and confrontation with one's environment. Torah fundamentalists who have done just this are now seen everywhere throughout the Jewish world. Their example is embraced by many who have no access to know that there is another more accurate path of Torah observance. The poor example of the Torah fundamentalist is recognized by those who do not embrace it as the abhorrent thing that it has become.

Yosef was the role model for what some today refer to as the “modern Orthodox” Torah observant Jews. This term “modern Orthodox” seems to connote all types of meanings either pro or con depending upon one's relationship to the fundamentalist mentality. Being modern is not something wrong, bad or against Torah. Only a fundamentalist, locked in a fantasy world of make-believe would consider that modern by definition means bad. After all, even the fundamentalist wears his/her modern clothing (suits, hats or wigs and fashion garments); use cell phones, drive cars and embrace all other modern norms of life.

What the fundamentalist embraces as his/her “badge of honor” is their supposed lack of secular education and their denial of embrace of elements of secular culture. Such “badges of honor” used to describe the fundamentalist fool only themselves, because all those who view the fundamentalist sees through their charades and recognize them often as hypocrites. The fundamentalist is as modern as his so-called modern orthodox peer, he just refuses the identification because he/she wishes to embrace another more restrictive lifestyle, that in their minds is more religious, but in reality is not.

Orthodox Judaism is itself a new term. For today there are many different types of Judaism There is even secular Judaism and even atheist Judaism Indeed, anyone can pick and chose anything they wish and call it a form of Judaism. Even Jewish converts to Christianity call their blended form of mixed religion a form of Judaism. Ultimately, the term Judaism today has multiple meanings, none of which have anything to do with what Judaism originally was, this being the religion and way of the Torah.

Today while we have many different Judaisms, we still have only one Torah. Although we have only one Torah, we still have many ways in which Torah can be observed properly and correctly in accordance to Torah's own edicts. Being that the Torah is a definitive text with a well documented accompanying body of authoritative literature, it is rather easy to ascertain what is and is not within the context of appropriate Torah practice.

One cannot make up a form of Torah, like one can make up a form of Judaism. Therefore, those today who faithfully walk the path of Torah by following its laws and the paths that come forth from them (the ways of our Sages), these along can be called Torah faithful Jews, or as many today would call them Orthodox Jews.

Fundamentalism is one form of Orthodoxy, true, but it certainly is not the only form, or for that matter, the best form. Indeed, fundamentalist orthodoxy is by definition one of the least accurate forms of Torah in that it only allows a very narrow viewpoint of Torah leaving out all opposing Torah practices and paths. Needless to say, as evident over thousands of years of Torah practice, this is not the Torah way.

We see from Yosef that he would today be called a modern orthodox man. He lived in the Egyptian culture and successfully navigated it. His contribution and influence on his society was welcomed and cherished by all. He maintained his integrity, his commitment to his values and the Torah practiced by his family, even in the presence of a completely foreign culture. Yosef might have looked like an Egyptian on the outside but he was pure Israel on the inside. It is the insides that count and define the person, not their mode of dress or cultural accoutrements.

Today, many fundamentalists are radically "Jewish" on the outside and equally radically secular on the inside. They often deny their internal moral and spiritual bankruptcy by pointing to their external form proclaiming that it alone defines the Torah way. Yet, for thousands of years, prophets and Sages alike have decried such hypocrisy and condemned this attitude in no uncertain terms. It is not how a person appears on the outside it is how they act which clearly reflects their insides.

Torah is meant to be a transformation of being and character. It certainly worked to transform Yosef from being a bratty young boy into a powerful and responsible adult man. His outer secular form meant nothing to him, because his true insides were Torah through and through. He was no fundamentalist seeking the accoutrements of culture and ethnicity to prove himself religious. He needed no such delusions.

Yosef was a man of character who with Torah as his guide could look out upon the world, even upon the great culture of ancient Egyptian, learn it, know it well and still not be negatively influenced by it. Instead of being influenced by it, Yosef could in turn influence it to make it better and closer to the truths of Torah. No fundamentalist has the courage and psychological resolve to accomplish this. Indeed, they do not know their brother Yosef.

In Kabbalah, the narrow-mindedness of the Torah fundamentalists clearly identifies them with the consciousness of the BEN, the Olam HaNikudim, the "fallen kings who reigned in Edom prior to their being a King in Israel." Yosef represents Yesod, the Mitaken, the MAH HADASH. The only hope of redemption for the religious fundamentalist therefore is the same hope that the BEN receives from the MAH. BEN learns to submit to MAH and to follow its lead. This is its tikkun (rectification). This is how to unite the Holy Name Yod Hey with Vav Hey in a perfect union.

I conclude here in Kabbalistic terms to help reinforce this psychological lesson, in hope that maybe some of the fundamentalist camp may awaken to their true state and do something about it while there is still time to change.