

Rocking Boats, A Response to my Detractors

by Ariel B Tzadok

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*Don't rock the boat!
This is what I am often told.
Why can't you just
go along with the flow?
Why do you have
to be so "negative"?*

These are some of the questions hurled at me. But I admit that those who object to my telling the truth, the way I see it, are in a sizable minority. Nevertheless, I believe that it is wise, and important to address the issues that some of my detractors raise.

To start off, let me reiterate for the record, I am a Torah observant person. Although I received rabbinic ordination over thirty years ago, I do not base the validity of my opinions on the authority of an old document. If I have any validity in what I say, or write, then it is based on the legitimacy of the sum of my experiences.

In other words, the truths of what I say, and write will be testimony to themselves as to their correctness. I believe this firmly, and this is why I usually never bother to copiously quote from numerous academic sources in an attempt to prove my erudite intellect. I believe that common sense should always win out over long-winded, mind-twisting arguments. This is why I choose, and make every effort to be simple, and direct to the point with what I say, and write. For me, this makes living Torah a whole lot easier, enjoyable, and certainly more honest.

Some of my detractors condemn me for expressing opinions in Halakha (Jewish Law) that they find objectionable. They take offense that I disagree with them, and with their teachers. Nevertheless, I refuse to take these detractors into account when it comes to



making a decision, or expressing my opinion on a matter of Halakha. I base my decisions on what is right, what is correct, and what is proper. Political correctness be damned! If the boat needs to be rocked, then rock the boat, I will! I do not do this for fun; rather I do this in the spirit of honesty, and Torah integrity.

In this generation, the authentic teachings of the Torah have been covered over by multiple layers of religious opinions that interpret Judaism, and Jewish Law in violently extreme ways. To make matters even worse, these extremist, self-proclaimed authorities declare, (and wrongly so), that their personal views are binding, not only in areas discussing Judaism, but also in all other areas of life. These so-called authorities publicly broadcast that their views are the only one, and true acceptable interpretations of Torah for our generation.

Not only is this manipulative behavior wrong, and dishonest, it is also very cult-like, and abusive. I, on the other hand, choose not to condone abuse of Torah. Rather I speak out against such abuse. If, for some, this is interpreted as rocking the boat, then so be it. I would much rather rock the boat, in an attempt to heal a terrible situation, rather than leave matters be, and become a silent partner of acquiescence.

Halakha (Jewish Law) is not decided by popular opinion, or by unscrupulous, politically motivated religious leaders. Halakha is not to be bent to the will of cult-like “control freaks,” who seek to ruthlessly crush any opposition to their illegitimate claim to absolute power over what Torah, and Judaism has to say.

Halakha is not now, nor has it ever been monolithic, with a “one size fits all” attitude. Halakha has always been fluid, and subject to subjective circumstance. Halakha is designed to strengthen the individual practitioner in his/her personal transformation into a better, enlightened human being. When Halakha is instead used as a tool to enslave a person, in both mind and body, then this is not Halakha, rather this is a perversion.

Many segments of the extreme right wing Torah observant community are totally out of control, embracing dangerously insane beliefs. Some of their members turn to séances, and other types of delusional, mystical “mumbo-jumbo” to reinforce their perverted views of spiritual reality. Those who embrace these mentally deranged views have absolutely no idea of the psychological damages their baseless claims cause themselves, and others. Nevertheless, these ridiculous extremists take advantage of the uneducated, and the superstitious, first to bleed them for financial support, and then to subject them to paralyzing mind control.

Superstition and a lack of proper education is a dangerous mix. Any individual who lacks a well-rounded rational education, and at the same time pays attention to superstitious beliefs, becomes a target for all those with religious agendas, seeking to control, and manipulate the masses. This is why these religious extremists make every effort to block all forms of education that does not comply with their rigid, cult-like worldview.

This is why many of these seriously out-of-touch religious so-called leaders condemn the usage of smart-phones, and the Internet, as “the works of the devil.” These immature, emotional outbursts are rightly ignored, and rejected by anyone with common sense, and a proper Torah education. However, due to extremist influence, there is no shortage of those who lack common sense, and a well-rounded Torah education.

Those who lack a proper well-rounded Torah education, in the spirit of the Talmudic masters, (who studied all areas of knowledge without fear), are easy prey for these modern manipulators. These unscrupulous extremists vomit out lessons in the name of Torah, that are actually the opposite of all that the Torah holds to be sacred. These extremists attempt to reinforce their fanatical views with superstitious hype, based on spiritual threats claiming to come from the teachings of the Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism.

Yes, I rock boats! As a student, and teacher of Kabbalah for over thirty years, I have come to recognize what is, and what is not authentic Jewish mysticism. Today, there is widespread public proliferation of Kabbalah study in the hands of those who do not properly understand it.

Instead of teaching Kabbalah as the authentic system of psychological transformation that it is, foolish teachers instead preach superstition, fear, mythology, and outright wrong interpretations of spiritual reality.

These false teachers even go so far as to make all kinds of predictions about the tortuous punishments that await the souls of all those who are not in their extremist camp. Needless to say, all the foolish apocalyptic, and messianic predictions made by these charlatans have been proven completely wrong and false, over and over again.

Wolves in sheep's clothing, and fools wearing the cloaks of the wise; this best describes the majority of the extremist leaders today. And, I am told that I rock the boat! Yes, I do! And, I will do more than rock this sinking boat, I will tug at the sheep's clothing to expose the wolf underneath. I will strip away the cloak of the wise, to reveal the fool underneath it.

Torah teaches us to be responsible for one another. Each one of us must embrace this responsibility, and stand up for proper well-rounded education, and for the cessation of foolishness, and superstition.

Halakha (Jewish Law) must never have any component of superstition or fear as its base. Halakha is based on a rational, intelligent understanding of the world, and on the real needs of every individual. Halakha is not based upon superstitions, and other mystical “mumbo-jumbo.” Halakha is based upon the realistic, practical, and natural needs of people in this world. The Talmud, quoting the Bible, so eloquently makes the point: “Lo B'Shamayim He” (The Torah is not in Heaven).

Jewish mysticism should have no place in Halakha. The Rabbis, who over the last 800 years that have injected Kabbalah into Halakha, have no authority to impose their personal views upon the masses, demanding of them compliance with Kabbalistic folklore. If an individual

wishes for him/herself to observe Halakha in accordance to Kabbalah, then that individual may do so personally. However, no individual has the right to impose Kabbalistic practices on any other. This is true with regards to practices of Jewish Law, and this is even truer with regards to beliefs, and ideas in Judaism in general.

Torah Judaism today has been hijacked by a bunch of extremist thugs disguised as religious leaders. This is a sorry state of affairs, but unfortunately this is nothing new in the history of Israel, and Judaism. We have been subject to religious hypocrisy many times in the past. It is no surprise that this religious hypocrisy has resurfaced again in our days. However, instead of submitting to the extremist whims of the misguided, the Jewish community must rise up, and promote proper, rationalist education as the first line of defense against those who seek to rob uneducated minds from their chance to receive a proper well-rounded Torah education.

A Torah education requires that one have a broad range of knowledge covering many topics, ideas, and opinions. These must include knowledge of science, the arts, and the many other philosophies of the world. One must learn how to think for oneself, instead of being told what to think by the “overlords of religion,” who seek to dominate the definition of Judaism.

To repent means to come back to the center path, avoiding all extremes, either to the extreme left, or the extreme right. It is wise and prudent for all sincere seekers of Torah knowledge to review again the basics of the Fundamentals of Torah. The code, Mishneh Torah, by the Sage Maimonides, is a good place to start such a review.

In conclusion, I respond to my detractors by saying, yes, I must rock the boat. The boat is sinking, and the passengers are all asleep. The captain and crew are absent from the helm. If I don't rock the boat, then I passively acquiesce to all that happens. This, I will not do!

Judaism today needs to return to the authentic Torah outlined, and practiced long ago, by the wise Sages of the Talmud. Judaism needs to discover its rich past of respect for science, philosophy, and the exploration for truths, regardless of where these searches may lead. Kabbalah today must be stripped of its superstitions, legends, and myths. Kabbalah today must become again what it once was, what it was originally designed to be, a system of psychological transformation, that enables the practitioner to discover one's internal “image of God.”

Saving Judaism means saving ourselves. If we lose the one, the other will also be lost. This is a tragedy that no one can afford. So, my detractors, my message to you is this: do not criticize me for my harsh condemnation of modern religious extremism, hypocrisy, and insanity. Do not condemn me, but rather join me in condemning that which is destroying everything that we mutually hold so dear.