

“Dems Fightin Words”

A Religious/Social Commentary

By HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

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It is amazing to me how many people do recognize that there are serious problems facing the religious Jewish public today. It also amazes me just how complacent many people really are. The same people who recognize and acknowledge the problems always seem to expect that it will be someone else other than themselves who will do the necessary work to get things fixed.



In spite of all the complaints about how bad things are and how they need to change, who really is doing anything about it? Who really is allowing themselves to be bothered? Who is willing to offer the time, or to make the effort to go against the crushing tide of political/cultural conformity?

The answer to all these questions is appallingly the same. Pretty much, no one really wants to be bothered. Everyone wants to talk about what is wrong, but no one really wants to act in order to fix it. Everyone is just way too busy, or so they say, to really get involved to make a difference. Complacency is really a problem. Unfortunately, it is not the only one.

People do not want to get involved, true. But while many bow-out due to complacency; many more are afraid to get involved. To challenge the religious system requires confronting the religious establishment. And any such challenges are interpreted and proclaimed by the leadership to be attacks, not on them or their system but rather as attacks on Torah and G-d Himself. Now, this type of accusation is a complete lie. But, nonetheless it is a compelling one; a lie that frightens most into silence, for fear of becoming an outcast.

For the most part, members of the religious community do not want to stand out from or away from the crowd. Most members of the religious public are afraid to be different. They fear being ostracized; they fear the rejection of their peers. Therefore, no one wants to push too hard. No one wants to stand up too tall. No one wants to speak out too loudly. So, as sheep to the slaughter, everyone follows the community leaders and collectively they together fall off into a precipice.

There are an overwhelming number of problems facing the Torah/religious community today. Amazingly the more one wraps oneself in the ethnicity and culture of religion the more one's eyes are blinded to the real truths of the matter. The general religious public has been instructed to believe and accept that Torah observance is foremost a cultural thing and the more one adopts the predominant religious Jewish leadership's idea of cultural purity, the closer to Torah and truth the religious individual becomes. And to the contrary, these leaders preach, those who do not adopt their vision of the proper cultural religious lifestyle are deemed to be the crux of the problem, regardless of their levels of Torah observance or for that matter their "fear of G-d."

To these religious leaders and their brain-washed minions, if you don't look like us, then you ain't one of us; and if you ain't one of us, then you are one of them: the enemy. Many may not come out and say this verbatim, but all too many others know from experience that these sentiments, however unspoken, are most certainly widely embraced.

Today, no one talks any more about the real definition and true meaning of Torah and religion. This is what we call being "Yirat Shamayim," having a true, honest and sincere fear and awe of Heaven. Today, the majority of religious leaders all seem to be concerned with cultural and ethnic identification within the greater religious community. Only this defines for them who is and who is not religious. This terrible perversion has led to all kinds of evils manifesting in the very heart of religious communities around the world.

Drug use among yeshiva students and other youth is out of control. There is rampant promiscuity among the religious youth, both among the young men and women. Even adultery and prostitution are widespread, even in the most ultra-Orthodox communities. Political corruption and financial crimes amongst the very religious are so widespread that they are front page news in both Israel and here in the U.S. Rabbis and other religious leaders have been arrested and prosecuted for child abuse, pedophilia and a host of other terrible crimes.

Many young men who study in yeshivot spend half their time goofing off instead of devoutly attending to their studies. They and the young women appear to be more interested in fashion and appearance than in Torah and modesty. While they might dress the part of being good standing members of the religious community, many certainly do not act it.

Yes, these are the problems. These are the problems which for the most part are either denied or ignored. What can we do about them, the leadership ask? The only solution is more Torah study, they say. So they reinforce a model that for decades now has proven itself over and over again to be a failure. Rather than make the necessary changes, the blind leadership tries to force the old model down everyone's throats; threatening objectors with ostracization and social outlasting. Comply, submit and conform, or else; this is the battle cry; this is the present leaderships answer for all the festering problems that are destroying the religious community from within.

And the majority of people are complacent. They are happy being followers. They are happy to be told what to think and what to do. In this way they do not have to think for themselves and to take serious actions that might endanger their social status. The majority have become mind-numbed robots, the blind led by the blind. They do not think, they do not see. They do not want to think; they do not want to see. They are afraid of thinking for themselves and they are afraid to open their eyes to see what is really right there in front of them.

So, they continue on in their blindness, in the arrogant denial of all problems and in the pompous chauvinism of their illusionary correctness thinking that their cultural religiosity has made them superior to others, closest to G-d and absolutely right in everything; just as their leaders have told them.

And they wonder why and how they have generated an entire generation of fellow Jews who have come to hate religious, hate Torah and hate G-d; all because of them. Granted, we have always had non-religious fellow Jews; but now there has grown a movement of extremely anti-religious secular Jews. They have become radicalized in response to all the hypocrisy and foolishness they see coming out of large segments of the religious community. As sad as it is, the greatest impediment to bringing lost

souls back to G-d and Torah is the behavior found amongst the religious. How ironic that it is the religious who are keeping people away from the religion.

Religious people claim that everyone should be carbon-copy clones of themselves. They want all the secular to become just like them. Yet, when they act with such glaring ignorance and arrogance, the secular not only condemn them, they condemn everything that the religious stand for, including Torah and G-d. This is a terrible disgrace!

I am certain that Heaven looks upon this with the greatest of scorn and that the religious community that defines itself by its cultural and ethnic identity as opposed to the honest and sincere fear of Heaven will pay the price for their lack of vision and for their lack of willingness to walk rightly before G-d.

In order to be really religious, one must place G-d first and the Fear of Heaven above all other concerns. Broken models from long ago outdated ways of life must be discarded and new ones based upon the present world must be adopted. This does not contradict Torah Law. On the contrary, this is the requirement of Torah Law. Torah must be restored into the hearts of individuals and not just into their clothing. Being religious must stop being an expression of culture and begin again to be what it has always been meant to be: a comprehensive transformation of a person.

Being religious today must again be defined as one who becomes better, better in character, better in morality, better in discipline and most importantly as one who becomes a better human being. This alone is what Torah defines as G-d's Way. This alone is what being religious is all about. If one has this then regardless of their religious ethnicity they are religious and if they lack any of this, then they are not religious, regardless of their religious ethnicity.

You cannot observe some of the mitzvot of the Torah and not others and still call yourself religious. This is not religion, this is hypocrisy. You cannot observe Shabat, keep kosher, wear black and at the same time act irresponsibly and immorally, living in a fantasy world and still be religious. You are not fooling Heaven, even when you are fooling yourself.

Real teshuva requires real change. We do not have real change and this is why we have no real teshuva and thus no Mashiah. Religious hypocrisy is and always has been a scourge to all humanity. Woe to them that embrace it. Woe to us who tolerate it, in others and more so in ourselves.

I know many of my readers may be offended by my tone or my comments. But, what I can I say? Sometimes, some words have to be harsh. I say, let the truth be told. This is Torah and I believe with perfect faith that this is Heaven's Way. I spend a lot of time reading the N'vi'im (Biblical prophets). I believe my critique in this essay is in line with what the N'vi'im might have said if they were alive today. I ask you, my readers, review for yourselves the words of the N'vi'im. Read them directly as if they were being spoken directly to you. Tell me then, what you think.