



Feb. 16, 2005

To Be One Nation Under G-d, Indivisible

*By Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok
Copyright © 2005 by Ariel Bar Tzadok. All rights reserved.*

We must always remember that the words of our Sages recorded throughout the centuries were written to be read and embraced mostly by religious people. Being religious, G-d fearing souls themselves, our Sages figured that their words were directed towards like-minded individuals. Therefore, in order to properly appreciate the classical words of our Sages, one would have to be of a similar spiritual, G-d oriented, religious state of mind as were they.

Do not take these words too lightly, because what seems to be a clear and obvious statement to us actually explains why we have such an epidemic of religious hypocrisy today. You see, in order to properly appreciate the words of our Sages one has to be of the same state of mind as they were. Today, the fear of G-d, the embrace of proper character and the pursuit of righteousness, ever so dear and central to our Sages are for us inconsequential matters, honored in name only, but seldom pursued in reality and deed.

Religious hypocrisy in our days has spread amongst Torah religious communities like a viral epidemic. Everyone in the religious world acknowledges that it is all around us, but at the same time, everyone hides behind the self-righteous piety of mitzvot to avoid exposing the culprits and functionally dealing with the problem. When trying to expose the religious hypocrisy amongst us, immediately the voices of censorship arise. In their zeal to cover up true problems (or in their fear of facing the truth) they cry out "lashon hara, lashon hara" (slandorous talk) or says, we must judge with "kaf zechut" (benefit of doubt). Yet, while indeed we must observe these precious mitzvot, we must not at the same time use them as excuses to avoid dealing with the presence of evil and hypocrisy amongst us. And yes, there is outright evil amongst us, within the very heart and leadership of the religious community.

We must never be so blind not to pay heed to the warnings and admonitions of our Sages. Throughout classical literature and especially in the Zohar (1, 25a), we are told about the existence of a group of religious hypocrites within the religious community given the generic name "Erev Rav" (the mixed multitude). These are those souls who came forth from Egypt with the Jewish people, appearing to be sincere converts on the outside, but whose hearts were very far away from HaShem and His Torah. Midrashically speaking this is the term applied to all throughout the generations sharing



these same attributes, meaning those who externally put on the appearances of being religious whereas in their hearts and character they lack any semblance of true fear of G-d and fail to live their lives according to proper Torah moral behavior.

Today the name Erev Rav is thrown about and applied by ever so many religious groups to all those who oppose their personal teachings and individualized Torah lifestyle. Thus we have today some so-called pious religious who condemn as the Erev Rav other religious Jews because of their love of the Land of Israel and their commitment to observe the Halakha to settle the Land. We have some groups who condemn other religious Jews because they combine their religious life with university study learning for a career. Last and certainly not least, we have those so-called pious religious who act with such snobbery and condescension towards all those who do not wear Eastern European garb, speak its language or who do not observe extreme religious stringencies to their satisfaction.

Today the concept of being “one nation” under G-d indivisible is a foreign idea to most of the religious. Factionalism reigns supreme amongst Jewish groups. Each group defines who is a kosher Jew by their own criteria and all who do not meet that criteria are viewed as being outsiders, and sometimes are viewed a lot worse. Yet, the true identity of who is a kosher Jew and who is the Erev Rav is not defined by allegiance to this or that sect; rather it is defined as it has always been defined. Who is a sincere Torah observant Jew and who embraces the spirit of the Erev Rav is defined by a matter of character and personal behavior, and not by the way someone dresses or to which sect one belongs.

Indeed, it is more accurate to identify the religious hypocrites and Erev Rav as those who are the factionalists and the “finger-pointers,” those who wish to condemn all others unlike themselves. Those who create division amongst Torah observant Jews condemning the legitimate as illegitimate, condoning and praising hypocritical religious behavior for the sake of power, wealth and pride, these are the true Erev Rav, and the source of evil amongst us. In our many sins, the number of hypocrites amongst us is epidemic, all because we allow them to proliferate without confronting their lack of religious sincerity, their absence of true fear of Heaven and their not having any true fervor and love for HaShem in their hearts. In our many sins, we turn a blind eye to this insane and harmful behavior.

We allow blind leaders to perpetuate communal divisions and prejudice again fellow Torah observant Jews who practice differently from ourselves. Instead of following the tried and true age old lessons of our Sages who spoke about sincerity and unity, we today have leaders who preach about observance by academic rote instead of training and strengthening of the heart with proper morals and values.



Our Sages have warned us over and over again, external observance without internal sincerity is a worse sin than non-observance. For the religious hypocrite is not truly observing the mitzvot of the Torah, they are only observing what is culturally comfortable for them. Their connection is with their culture and not with HaShem and the true spirit of His Torah. Such hypocrites observe all the mitzvot that can be seen by others in order to gain their approval and praise, all the while the mitzvot of the heart, seen and known only to G-d are very far off from them. This then is a greater sin than the secular. For the secular is not a hypocrite. He chooses not to observe and is honest about it. The religious hypocrite is worse in that he too does not observe in his heart, and on top of this, he is a liar about it.

One of the greatest sins that can ever be performed is that called "Hillul HaShem," the desecration of G-d's Name. This is when a Jew performs actions so terrible that they actually disgrace the Torah and the Jewish people. These are actions that when a Jew performs them, those knowing about it or seeing it do not say, "what a rotten individual so and so is," but rather they say, "what a dirty Jew, typical behavior for Jews." It is bad enough when a secular Jew acts in a deplorable manner. Yet, we can excuse somewhat his behavior and say that the secular Jew chooses not to be a Jew and therefore does not act like one.

While deplorable, the secular Jew is not the worst kind of Jew. What is worse that a secular Jew acting deplorably is when a religious Jew acts in such a manner. A religious Jew is supposed to be educated in the wise ways of our Torah; he is supposed to know Jewish Law and act in accordance to the high moral standards that Torah ordains that there be between fellow Jew and all human beings. When a religious Jew acts in a deplorable manner, acting disgracefully with bad character and disgusting behavior, his actions reflect upon the entire Torah community of the world. People who see the deplorable behavior of the religious hypocrite do not condemn just the individual, they condemn the entire Torah way of life, the religious community, and in the end turn their hearts away from G-d saying if religion is like what the hypocrite represents, then they want no part of it. Thus the religious hypocrite, by his despicable character and lack of honor turns people away from Torah and causes them to actually hate G-d in their hearts. Such a religious hypocrite is thus a murderer of souls; he is the epitome of evil, the true definition of the Erev Rav, and unfortunately he is all too common amongst us.

Unfortunately, the leadership in many Torah communities worldwide is inundated with hypocrites, whose primary interest seems to be making money, seeking power and making for themselves a great name. These pursuits are exactly what the Zohar (1, 25a) describes as the attributes of the Erev Rav. Many laymen Torah observant Jews often feel powerless to stand up against the religious hypocrisy so prevalent surrounding us. Unfortunately, there are simply not enough sincere souls who are outraged enough to stand up, be heard and make a difference. Unfortunately, the hypocrites and their



followers outnumber the sincere, most likely by a margin of six to one. At least this is the number the Gemara gives. You see, religious hypocrisy is nothing new. In the Gemara, Sotah 22b, it is recorded that there are seven types of religious individual, six of whom are hypocrites, and only one in seven being sincere and truly devout. As Shlomo HaMelekh said in his perennial wisdom, “there is nothing new under the sun” (Koh. 1:9).

Throughout Jewish history HaShem has allowed devastation to befall us because of our sins. The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed twice because of our sins, and let no one fool you; the Holocaust came upon European Jewry because of their sins too. Now, do not go pointing a finger exclusively at the secular Jews of Europe and blame them for everything, because the sins were not theirs exclusively. The religious community had very much its own share of sins and Hillul HaShem behavior, and they too therefore suffered and died in the retribution sent from Heaven. This does not excuse the evil behavior of the Europeans with the German at their head, but we must understand that punishment does not come upon the world unless there are sins in need of punishment. Just like the generations of the Temple, European Jewry was wiped out by G-d because of their sins.

Woe to those today that seek to resurrect the old forms of Galut (exile) Jewry, to revive and re-embrace that which G-d ordained destroyed. G-d moved us out of Europe and restored us to our Holy Land. This was a historical precedent, and according to all legitimate Torah Sages the beginning of the final redemption. HaShem revived our presence in our home Land and revived for us that which Europe strove to kill, this being the concept of all Jews being one people, a united nation, one, under G-d indivisible.

With the return to Zion, Jews from all over the entire world were given again the opportunity to not only build our holy Land, but also to build Jewish cohesion and the sense of unity in nationhood. We were no longer to be divided up as Ashkenazi Jews, Sephardic Jews, Yemenite Jews or any other kind. We Jews began to create a new identity for ourselves as Jews of Israel, Jews of the Land of Israel; we are now all supposed to be Israeli Jews, with all the good this name is supposed to imply.

We will no longer tolerate being condemned as “Shylocks” and “Christ-killers.” We were meant never again to be a weak, spit upon, defenseless group of perennial victims. No, G-d restored us to our Land and revived within us the spirit of Torah freedom, so that we should again come together as a nation, strong, robust, and tough, not to be pushed around anymore.

To be Israeli at one time meant that one was a proud pioneer and a rugged soldier. Religious Jews stood side by side with their secular fellow Jews and served, built, lived and died together in our common Land. The religious Jew rose out of the European ghettos and entered into the universities as a religious Jew and graduated as a religious



Jew and went on to become pioneers in the forefront of medicine and every other field in science and technology. Indeed, religious Jews today have contributed much to Israeli and world society and have greatly increased the respect given to Jews in general and religious Jews in particular. Their example and role model have been exemplary, and all because they have moved forward beyond the European ghetto (exile) identity and have embraced the Israeli identity of freedom and redemption.

Woe to us in our many sins that the newly created Israeli identity of the strong robust Jew of freedom has again fallen to the lows of what was in ghetto Europe. Again, the Israeli Jew has in many ways become like the worst of what existed before there was a state of Israel. Today, many have forgotten the message, responsibilities and obligations of freedom earned through Holocaust and Middle East wars. There is a saying in the Israeli army, "freedom is only preserved for those willing to fight for it." Such a fight is both in the military field as well as in the field of morals and ethics.

Let us understand that freedom is not just a political or social concept, it is a psychological and spiritual concept as well. Spiritual and psychological freedom means that one is free of hypocrisy and free to live a life of honor and good character. Psychological freedom means that one is a master of one's behavior and not a slave to wanton and irresponsible acts. Freedom is the essential message of Torah; it is the essence of the exodus of Egypt. How many of us recite words to this effect everyday, and yet fail to live up to them everyday. This is the ultimate hypocrisy when we fail to live up to the basic tenet of all Torah: to live as free men in our free country.

In the Pesah Hagadah we are taught that one who does not see himself as if he personally has come forth from Egypt has not fulfilled his obligation of the mitzvah of the Seder. This is not referring just to the historical exodus; it is also talking about the spiritual exodus of the soul. Although none of us today were physically present at the historical exodus, all of us were there in spirit. Each one of our souls was there and then given the gift of freedom. Each of our souls stood at Sinai and received the Torah along side all those in the flesh in those days. Each of us received a spark from Heaven within our souls, within the recesses of our unconscious minds that enable us to walk the path of Torah intuitively with proper character, sincerity, honor and devotion.

The one today who therefore does not live this way, but who is far from HaShem in his heart, might very well have a soul from the Erev Rav, those who stood far apart from the Jewish nation at Sinai and did not share in the wonderful revelation of the Torah.

We cannot point fingers at any one group of religious Jews and condemn them all as being religious hypocrites or Erev Rav. Each group of religious Jews within the wide diversity of the Torah community has both it's sincerely devote and its hypocrites. Our Torah obligation is not to stand up against this or that group, but rather to stand up



against those individuals in every group whose pursuit of money, power and glory outweigh their pursuit of sincere Torah, Jewish unity, true devotion, humility and to act with the best character that any human being can have, all in accordance to Torah and the direction of our true Sages.

Proper character as defined by Torah is both an individual obligation and a national responsibility. We Jews will only gain the respect we deserve when we all start acting like Jews in accordance to the attributes of heart and sincere behavior that our Torah demands of us.

We must start treating one another with the proper respect and honor due our fellow human beings. We must strive for Torah renewal at the most basic of levels, at the level of the heart. The models of the past must be abandoned as the dismal failures that they now are. What once worked does no longer. We must put all old and foreign ways behind us and move forward in the creation of Torah national unity; as one nation under G-d, indivisible.

We must not mock this message, or pay it only lip service. We must take it to heart and change our ways. We must have an upheaval in our communities and demand the removal of those leaders who indeed are divisive hypocrites.

We can only be a sincere people once we are each individually sincere. We can only be sincere once we remove the influences of insincerity from amongst us.

Thus, today we are at war, against a great and evil foe, as dangerous and vicious as were the Hellenists and Greeks in the days of Hanukah and the Macabees. Only today, our enemy is not the secularism within our culture; the enemy is the secularism and hypocrisy in the heart of the religious Jew.

War must be fought; the enemy must be rooted out. Hypocrisy must be defeated, or suffer the fate of our previous generations and ancestors we will. The battle cry must go forth. As spoken by Moshe in the camp against the builders of the Golden Calf, and as spoken by the Macabees upon beginning the Hanukah wars, the cry went forth, "whoever is for HaShem, come follow me!"

Thus HaShem calls out to us today, the voice of conscience cries forth from Sinai today saying, "who will stand for the Torah in truth?"

You hear now the call in your heart. How will you answer it? Remember your answer is not to be based upon your words or your feelings, but rather upon your behavior and actions. This is what our Sages have always taught. This is their meaning and intent. Those of common mind will understand this message. Those who do not understand



what it is I am saying here had better ask themselves if they understand anything about what it is our Sages are trying to teach.

Torah observance has a lot more to it than just the mitzvot between G-d and man. There are the mitzvot between man and his fellow that must be equally observed, along side proper midot (attributes of character). Indeed, it has been taught that “midot kadmon l'mitzvot” (proper character is a prerequisite for sincere Torah observance). We either observe all the Torah that is in our hands to do, or we have no right to call ourselves religious.

Choose wisely what you will do next, and after that, and after that again. Choose wisely whether you wish to honor the Name of Heaven or to desecrate it. Choose wisely if you are going to act as a sincere son of Torah or be a religious hypocrite. Choose wisely if you will work for Jewish unity and the building of our nation or if your behavior causes factionalism and division.

Bottom line; choose whether you are sincerely a religious Jew or if you are just a hypocrite. And choose quickly, G-d Himself and His entire Heavenly Court is watching you and waiting! Do the right thing.