

Beware of Provocateurs Posing As Rabbis

by HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

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Tell me, what would you think of a doctor who gives you life altering medical advice and then it turns out that he is not a doctor and that he never graduated or even went to medical school? Would such not be a criminal act? Is not falsely pretending to be a doctor a serious crime, especially when someone's health and life can be a stake? Such a lying individual should rightly be exposed, prosecuted and punished. Reading books about medicine and learning about it on the internet does not make one a doctor. Regardless of how much medicine he claims that he knows, without verification and certification, he cannot be relied upon and most certainly, he can be dangerous.

I believe that such precautions need to be extended to every profession, where the practitioner needs to be a qualified expert, trained over years and who has the verification and certification to prove it. We would not want anything less from our doctors, lawyers or airplane pilots. Why then would any of us be willing to accept anything less from our Rabbis?

It has sadly come to my attention that in certain public forums there are certain individuals passing themselves off as Rabbis, answering peoples questions about Judaism. Upon investigating those in question it is discovered that in fact, not only are they not Rabbis, but they do not even have a traditional Yeshiva education or the expansive Judaic background in the variety of areas necessary to become an expert in Torah study. How can such individuals honestly cloak themselves in the mantle of being a Rabbi when they are so unprepared and unworthy of being so. I expect my doctor to be well trained and certified, I expect nothing less from a Rabbi.

Recently it was brought to my attention that certain pretentious and inflammatory comments were made in an open forum on the internet by an individual deceptively presenting himself to be a "Modern Orthodox" Rabbi. It became clear after an investigation that this individual certainly was no Rabbi. He has no Rabbinic ordination and apparently even lacks the fundamentals of a traditional Yeshiva education. His offensive comments displayed that he lacked even fundamental knowledge of classical Torah sources. This was made clearly evident by this individual's poor behavior, personal attacks and disrespect for the words of our holy Sages.

Under the deceptive label of being "M.O." (Modern Orthodox), this individual went off writing things that no properly trained and educated Rabbi would ever do. According to our Torah path, taught in every Yeshiva of value, there is a proper way of how we approach issues and how we publicly disagree with other Torah opinions. We do not mock the words of our Sages and we do not make personal attacks on other Rabbis because they hold to the opinions of other bonafide Torah sources. Anyone violating these basic religious principles displays a clear lack of education and places a cloud of suspicion over any claimed authority they might possess.

Modern Orthodox Judaism is merely a term to describe, what in my opinion, are those Torah faithful Jews who live in accordance to modern cultural norms, as opposed to the Ultra-Orthodox

(Haredim) who embrace a cultural identity of pre-WWII Eastern Europe. From the point of views of Torah law and beliefs both groups, for the most part, share similar positions. Maybe in the world of politics, the two differ, specifically with regards to anything having to do with the State of Israel. But on a day to day basis the two Orthodox communities manage to get along just fine.

Essentially, when it come to Torah law and mitzvot observance there should be no difference between the two camps other than in the details of practice that distinguishes the two groups. Therefore for someone to use the term Modern Orthodox as a pretense to attack Torah Judaism and the traditions of centuries in the Yeshiva world is wrong, deceptive and ultimately destructive.

It is important that when we see a Rabbi in the public forum that we at least have the ability to verify his authenticity. When we see a professional in any field acting outside the norms of his field, we have the right, if not the responsibility to become suspicious and to investigate.

When however, a known practicing professional in a field makes public statements about issues in his area of expertise that arouse curiosity, such statements are also subject to scrutiny. Professionals review the source material of their peers and either agree or disagree, all within the greater arena of their profession and their codes of proper behavior and ethics. Yet, people today masquerade as Rabbis, and say and do things in the name of being a Rabbi, which gives all Rabbis, and Torah itself a proverbial "black-eye." In my opinion, this is very wrong!

I, for one, often write about controversial Torah subjects. If and when I express my own opinion on a matter, I preface what I write with words, similar to, "in my opinion." Readers can then chose to agree or disagree with my opinion. However, if I am quoting words of our holy Sages, then in traditional Rabbinic manner, I quote not only the name of the source, but also its reference. So, traditionally, we just do not say, "so-and-so said," but rather, "so-and-so said in this book, in this section, on this page."

Now, a Rabbinic peer seeing the source of such a view can review the original and then conclude, whether or not the quote is accurate, translated properly or if he has a different understanding of the source. Then the qualified Rabbinic peer, if he so chooses, can write his own works, discussing his own views of the sources and how he either agrees or disagrees with his peers or their opinions.

This is how every commentary on every topic of Torah study has even been written. Professionally trained and ordained Rabbis know this. Apparently the charlatans do not. This is what makes them not only so false, but also so dangerous. In their lack of knowledge of true Torah sources, they mislead lesser educated individuals who in their innocence turn to them thinking them Rabbis and seeking answers and guidance in spiritual affairs.

I have seen this one individual who claims to be a Rabbi make ridiculous statements which are clearly outside the acceptance tolerance of any definition of Orthodox Judaism (Modern or Haredi). When we see such behavior, such as attack on Sages and respected Rabbis, we have to wonder not only about the attacker's Orthodoxy, but we must also be concerned about their psychological stability. After all, it takes an unstable mind in the first place to pretend to be something that one is not, and more so, to use this false identity to then attack those who have rightly earned it. Such behaviors are indicative of serious psychological problems, envy and hatred.

We should all be wise and safe and distance ourselves from such deceptive individuals. If given too much leeway they can easily turn themselves into cult leaders, with all the devastation and harm that can bring to others.

Let me say in conclusion that everyone is entitled to their own opinions. However, everyone is not entitled to claim that their personal opinions represent Orthodox Judaism (of whatever form), when indeed they might be contradictory.

Only those who have properly earned the title Rav are entitled to use it.

Those who speak against the holy Sages should be shunned. Those who act with disrespectful and insulting behavior should be scorned.

We all have an obligation to stand up for what is right and to defend true Torah Judaism from those who by their behavior, lack of education or poor character do more harm to the cause of Torah than most others.

Let us learn from our holy Sages how to properly walk the Torah path and to do it! No excuses, no name calling, no insults, no threats. These are not the Torah way and those who embrace them do not follow Torah.

Let us become aware of and stay away from the "wolves in sheep's clothing" amongst us. In this way, we and our children can stay safe, secure in the path of true Torah, growing in knowledge, learning, the fear of G-d and the highest standards of proper behavior.

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