



The Way of the World

*By Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok
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There is an old adage, “teach not what people are not able to hear.” Some understand this as a license for leniency and interpret it to say, wherever people are at morally should not be challenged too strongly. After all if people make the choices they do, who should stand against the will of the people? Some people proudly embrace this “live and let live” attitude and are in turn embraced and beloved by those whose morals they justify and do not challenge. Forgive me that I do not hide my disgust for such self-serving blind and outright disgusting behavior. Such misguided political correctness is nothing other than an ever so slightly veiled debauchery and service of the basest attributes within mankind.

The other night I had the opportunity to speak at a Bar Mitzvah. I reminded my listeners that to be a Bar Mitzvah means that a boy becomes a man. This is common knowledge, no revelation here. I continued to remind them how the meaning of a Bar Mitzvah is that the young Jew becomes obligated to fulfill his responsibilities in observing the commandments. Again, this too is common knowledge, no revelation here. Then I put the two together, and said that in order for one to be considered a man one by definition has to fulfill his responsibilities and obligation in life. In other words, one is not being a man unless he fulfills his obligations and responsibilities. I reminded them how while many might have a Bar Mitzvah ceremony at the age of 13, many have not yet learned to be a man even by the age of 23, 33, 43, and counting. This conclusion of mine got their attention. By putting together two simple and very well known ideas, I drew attention to an idea ever so central to the human and Torah experience. This was considered by my listeners a “hiddush” (a revelation). Then I concluded and said woe to us that such a simple matter as defining manhood and maturity as the fulfillment of obligation and responsibility should be a hiddush (revelation). It should be simple and commonplace knowledge, clear as had been everything mentioned that preceded it.

To be a man, to embrace responsibility by definition means that one must learn to think and then act for oneself. It is unfortunately all too common to see people not wanting to be responsible for themselves. Indeed, most individuals do not even like to have to think for themselves. People who do not want to make the efforts to think for themselves always embrace the path of some collective and let the voice of the masses speak for them. This is not so because one agrees with the voice of the masses, but rather because one has no personal voice of their own. Therefore in order to be heard the one without thought is spoken for instead of speaking up. This disease of character and weakness of the mind prevails in our society today, both within religious and secular



circles. The reason why fundamentalist movements abound is because it is easier to surrender than to stand strong; it is easier to follow than to lead; it is easier to be told than to tell; it is easier to be a slave than a master. Yes, it is easy to tell people what is easy for them to hear, rather than to rock the proverbial boat. Lazy people enjoy smooth rides. Nothing aggravates the lazy more than having to make any type of extra effort in any endeavor.

There is another old adage, “show me a smooth operation, and I will show you a cover-up. Real boats rock.” Here we have touched a nerve that will do more than just mildly aggravate a few. Here we have hit the nail on the head. For in order for life to be smooth and easy, in order for the mind to become lazy and complacent, there has to be an effort made by some party to lull into complacency all the others. Conspiracy theories abound in our society. We have one for everything. Yet, the true conspiracy, the one that lulls us to sleep is ever so cleverly hidden in the pile of theories and buried under so many layers of alleged absurdities. In this way the truth lies buried, and the people remain slumbering slaves, oblivious to their fate, deceived into believing that they are still alive and living. Woe to the children who believe themselves adults, who live in the adult world all the while acting like children; who add insult to injury and reverse the definitions of adult and child. Woe to a world upside down. It is no wonder that such a world no longer functions as it should and why society is so terribly out of balance.

OK, now we have defined a problem, a big problem. Well, we had better offer some big solutions that can make a big difference, or maybe better that we remain silent and not make matters worse than they are. Solutions, we need, so solutions we have. Solutions, however, are addressed to the real problem, which is not society, or the masters of the conspiracy; the solution is addressed to you, because you are the real problem. If we can address the issue of being a man in you (even if you are female, for man is a generic term devoid of gender), then we will have succeeded in creating a true Bar Mitzvah, and as another old adage goes, “one down, more to go.”

The big solution to the big problems facing us all is in reality rather a small thing in and of itself. Individually the solution will appear as either easy or hard, great or small, all depending upon our personal point of view. You see, the solution for the big problem starts with the little problem. Society itself is the big problem, lazy individual you is the small problem. What we have to work on first and foremost is the correcting and refining of ourselves, our character and behavior. We have to take the first little steps in stop playing the “follow the leader” game everyone else is playing and start “marching to the beat of a different drummer.” In others words, the lazy have to start to exert themselves to move and to exercise the most neglected part of our bodies which is our minds.

So then, how do we energize the lazy to get up and go? How to we get the sleeper to arouse from slumber? The answer to these questions are well known and very much not



well liked. The answer is the push! People who are lazy need to be pushed; sometimes they even might need a good swift kick (metaphorically speaking). Every parent knows that a child who does not buckle down to school work and other obligations loses privileges, and can be otherwise punished. Judging from the Bible and the warnings of the prophets that is exactly how HaShem deals with us. Biblical words of admonishment were never soft and compassionate. They were always harsh, hard, in your face and to the point. Prophetic admonition which spoke about the need for personal change and character development was never placed in flowery terms; on the contrary they were worded with fire and brimstone. People may not have liked the prophets, but they definitely heard what they had to say.

In like kind, our Sages throughout the centuries have always spoken their words tersely, often harshly, with the intent that the students not become weak, wishy-washy, or full of themselves and their accomplishments. Our Sages molded their students to be strong inside and outside. Our Sages held dear more than anything else walking the right path, and always doing the right thing. Somehow this concept gets lost in translation, but if we look to the Hebrew original, we will see this clearly. In Hebrew, to be right is called Tzodek. One who is right and who does the right thing is called a Tzadik. The doing of the right thing is called Tzedaka. These terms are all well known today, however with slightly different meanings that tend to blur their original intent.

Many in our religious world today like to pride themselves as doing the right things because they bare all the externals of religion. Long coats, big hats, eastern European language and culture are "all the rave" today and define the religious individual today. Yet, one need simply return to a perusal of our classic sacred texts, such as the Gemara, Zohar and Shulchan Arukh to see that these bedrocks of Judaism have a very different meaning and definition of what it means to be religious. Our Sages paid little attention to the externals so important today. Indeed, our Sages would view such an over-emphasis on externals at the expense of inner substance as being nothing other than a terrible state of affairs, and the very essence of religious hypocrisy. Indeed, one can look into our classical Torah literature and find much more colorful language of condemnation for these types of religious hypocrisy so prevalent today.

According to our Sages, (and their sacred words are what defines Torah and Judaism), the essential defining factor on who is religious, and thus who is truly walking the right path (i.e., the derekh Tzodek, walked by the Tzadik) is defined as a matter of one's character, one's ethical behavior, one's modesty, one's simplicity, one's decency and one's morals. These are the defining character of what it means to be religious. Without these attributes in every aspect of one's being, one cannot be called truly religious, regardless of how much Torah one has studied or how much one identifies with religious culture and trappings.



Rabbi Shimon Ben Gamliel had a rule that he would not allow to study in yeshiva those who were hypocrites, “whose insides were not like their outsides.” This was the long standing rule for centuries. Indeed, in the Shulkhan Arukh there are laws that stipulate just who it is who may come and study Torah and who it is that may not, and the criteria of judgment rests firmly on the judgment of one’s character. Simply put, many today are allowed to study Torah who should be expelled from their yeshivot. This is the Halakha, one that is unfortunately ignored by most everyone.

We see that yeshiva educations do not help those with a bad heart. For regardless of how much academic knowledge they stuff into their heads, their hearts remain empty and cold. These types of religious hypocrites are now able to twist the Torah they have learned to attempt to justify their lack of morals and good behavior. And in our society of “academia worship” we consider the one with the biggest brain and the greatest learning to be the greatest Tzadik. In truth, academia and being a Tzadik have absolutely nothing to do with one another. A Tzadik is one defined by what is in his heart, not his head. Woe to us that we have forgotten the truth of things.

The uncomfortable truths today have become forbidden speech. One who speaks of such things is usually shunned. Such a speaker is outcast and given the title “not-mainstream.” In other words, such a speaker is “not one of us” he is not to be considered completely kosher, like “we” are. How upside-down is our world in that the most truthful of things is today viewed askance and called untrue. Woe to the “mainstream” for the stream in which their boat floats is heading them towards seriously troubled waters. Their boat floating now in what they have deceived themselves into believing is a calm stream will soon hit the mighty rapids of worldly upheavals and be dashed to pieces.

Even debate about addressing the important issues and problems with the religious Torah world today is silenced. If one even mentions one of the uncomfortable truths, exposing today’s religious community as not living up to proper Torah standards such a one is silenced by disinterest and sometimes outright hostility. The speaker of uncomfortable truths is accused of being a trouble making, and going against the ways of our leaders. The speaker of uncomfortable truths is often mocked as being an extremist or “simply not getting it.” In this and many other ways the speaker of uncomfortable truths and the truths he represents are maligned, ignored, and thus safely discarded and delegated into the trash heap of forgotten ideas.

Woe to us for this state of affairs, for this exact same attitude of arrogant ignorance preceded the destructions of both Temples and was prevalent throughout Europe before the Holocaust. Many voices arose in each of the times to warn the people about changing their ways, and yet each and every time these speakers of uncomfortable truths were smiled at, mocked, and ignored.



The leaders of the generation spoke with similar disregard for truth. They all advised everyone to continue doing what they were doing and to ignore those who were rocking the boat. Yet, in the end, the boat not only rocked, it crashed and sunk, killing all who were aboard, leader and layman alike. The speakers of uncomfortable truths who had long before jumped ship and set sail along the rivers of Torah and truth survived and saved the day. Yet, as time goes by their messages are forgotten over and over again, causing the need for everything to happen all over again.

Just seventy years ago, the great boat of European Jewry came to a crashing end. For generations speakers of uncomfortable truths preached and warned the people to leave Europe, but their calls, pleas and warnings fell of deaf ears, the same ears that eventually were gassed and burned in the concentration camps. Such is the harsh penalty from Heaven for disobedience and disregard of truth.

Now here we are again. The flames of Jew hatred grow hotter and hotter around the world, and in response Torah Jewry become more and more rigid and external, void of heart and empty of passion. Young Torah trained youths are fleeing the yeshivot and religious lifestyles, becoming ensnared in drugs and immorality, and all the leaders preach is to reinforce the system that itself has been a dismal failure. What blindness is it to proscribe as a cure for illness more of the illness itself?

The uncomfortable truths need to be spoken and heard. Those who wish to silence these voices must themselves be silenced. Change at the fundamental level must occur. A return (teshuva) to the basics of Torah, emphasis on heart and not head must be accomplished. If this is not achieved soon; if the uncomfortable words are again silenced and not heard; if the people continue to walk in their present path; then suffer the same fate of the past, they will. It is inevitable; it is prophecy; it is a terrible shame; and it is the truth.

If we do not return to the Torah basics of heart, musar and simplicity, doing the right things, and walking the right way, then those who walk the wrong path under the guise of Torah righteousness will follow their hypocrisies to their ultimate conclusion. Choose well, your path and know well what outcome awaits you. Hear the words of uncomfortable truth or continue in your slumber and following the leader. As the leaders of Europe blindly and arrogantly led their flocks into Auschwitz, so the leaders of today will lead their flocks into whatever disasters the future holds.

G-d forbid, you say, I shouldn't talk like this, you say? Tell that to the millions who last words and thoughts before they died were, "we should have listened when we had the chance."