

## The Terrible Sin of Our Generation That Undermines Judaism

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The modern idolatry worshipped by those of our generation. How authentic Judaism protects us against the nonsense of this new time period

The glorification of the monarchy leads in general to the development of a personality cult. Yet again, Judaism has drawn a boundary between appropriate respect for individuals and foolish deification of them. Judaism was the first to espouse the importance and worth of the individual, "חביב האדם שנברא בצלם" and demanded that we respect our fellow citizens. We are all familiar with the importance the Halacha places on transgressions between man and man, בין אדם לחברו, transgressions that not even repentance or Yom Kippur atone for as long as one does not request forgiveness from the aggrieved party. Despite this importance accorded the individual, the Halacha forbids us to express absolute faith in a human being. One who relies on a human being and has unbounded faith in him and is overwhelmed by his ethical/moral expressions and actions, is worshipping a false god. "ארור הגבר אשר יבטח באדם ושם רהבים מבטחו (ירמיהו יז:א)".

in the last period we Jews have egregiously violated the principle of the unification of God's name, ייחוד השם, in the political arena. Our transgression in this area is two-fold: 1) we have undeservedly glorified and overvalued non-Jewish statesmen and shown them almost absolute trust. 2) We have also permitted our own political leaders to glorify themselves.

The Zionist movement of the 20's and 30's was obstinately oriented in the British colonial office and trusted blindly in English fairness. The official Zionist political ideology from that period relied on 2 fundamental ideas: 1) we are weak 2) we can rely on the excessive respect shown us by certain non-Jewish British political leaders. I personally heard Nachum Sokolow display miracles in how he manipulated his erudite speech and knowledge of history and literature to make the case that the British Colonial Office was developing a prophetic approach towards the Jews and Israel. One need not be a historical revisionist to recognize a simple fact that the official Zionist political leadership often tended toward the absurd in its extreme admiration for certain non-Jewish political leaders. Is it then any wonder that Churchill still considers himself a Zionist and the "architect" of the Jewish future? The Zionist leaders themselves convinced him of this! The Zionist

organization was awe struck by political idolatry just as the Jews of the period of the first Temple were led astray by the Baal idol.

We, American Jews, have also failed with our naive faith in people, no matter how good they may have been, or we perceived them to be. For example, we have created an almost religious cult around the personality of President Roosevelt. The expressions of awe for him were paradoxical and bordered on idolatry. I want to make sure that my statements are interpreted correctly. Roosevelt had attributes of a great political leader - a liberal outlook, sympathy for the oppressed and, in many cases, vision. However, there is a wide gulf between respecting a good president and idolizing him. With all his fine attributes, he has not earned the admiration that we have accorded him for 2 reasons: 1) No man may be glorified and deified 2) With all his great attributes (as I have already noted) Roosevelt suffered from all the weaknesses of a politician. We should remember how he acted spitefully towards Jews in Eretz Yisrael and his handling of the terrible Jewish tragedy of the Holocaust, where he showed himself to be a heartless, small person instead of a great president.

The reward for our juvenile and unquestioning faith in these leaders and its tragic costs are well known to us all. As soon as Jews start to worship idolatry, the object of their worship will betray them. The natural punishment for personal deification and trust is disappointment. "וסרתם ועבדתם אלהים אחרים... ועצר את השמים ולא יהיה מטר והאדמה לא תתן את יבולה (דברים יא: יז) If you will worship nature, it will also disappoint you.

The malady of personal worship has also spread to our own ranks. Jewish political leaders, even those with great historical accomplishments, were not satisfied with the relative expression of thanks accorded them by the Jewish nation for their roles. They desire to portray themselves as the only redeemers and Messiahs, to be showered with praise that far exceeds the praise their real accomplishments warrant. They minimize the importance of their predecessors' accomplishments, the true pioneers, who laid the foundations of their movements. They did not tolerate any opposition, and completely excluded their opponents from their movement. They made great demands on the Jewish nation, and lost sight of the fact that the nation owes them nothing, as their entire *raison d'être* and importance reflects the historical greatness of the Jewish people. I do not want to deal with specifics here, as this would extend my article. One thing however is very clear: their claims to greatness have not been borne out. Our "old fashioned", venerated Chazal once expressed "גאולי מלך המשיח לא נאמר גאולי אליהו לא נאמר אלא גאולי ד' נאמר!" We do not speak of those redeemed by the Messiah King, nor do we speak of those

redeemed by Elijah, we speak only of those redeemed by God. Today's leaders demand the absolute expression of thanks from the nation, something not even the Messiah and Elijah are entitled to! This arrogance has proven destructive in many areas, to this very day.

If the modern person would understand the concept of **יחוד השם**, unification of the name of God, in the political arena, he would pray and proclaim with understanding **"ומלוך עלינו אתה ד' לבדך בחסד וברחמים"** - only You, God, has the absolute power. You alone are the absolute King. Your world order is eternal and perfect, all else is relative, finite and riddled with deficiencies. Only then would it be impossible for the emergence of a Stalin or a Hitler idolatry-cult that devastates mankind. If we, modern Jews, were to pray and unify the name of God with all our hearts, we would understand and appreciate the words of the psalmist that we recite in Hallel: **"אני אמרתי בחפזי כל האדם כוזב (תהלים קטז:יא)"** and we would be careful to no longer place excessive faith in a human being.

If the present-day Jewish leadership would pray, they would appreciate their insignificance and the small part they play in the great Jewish historical drama. If they would recite carefully (with **כונה**, focus and concentration) the words **"ומביא"** **"גואל (צדק) לבני בניהם למען שמו באהבה"**, a new light would shine before their eyes and they would recognize God Almighty as the true redeemer and they are His insignificant emissaries.

Were we rabbis to really pray, we would not be afraid to stand up to the president of the synagogue or its board of directors. We would not compromise on core issues. If we would consciously recite the Modim prayer **"על חיינו המסורים בידיך"** **"ועל נשמותינו הפקודות לך.. הטוב כי לא כלו רחמיך והמרחם כי לא תמו חסדיך כי מעולם"** **"קוינו לך"** we would know that if God is with us, no one can harm us. And if He, God forbid, forsakes us, the synagogue directors will be powerless to help us. Were we to pray properly, the honor of the rabbinate would be greatly enhanced.

Modern man sins against the unification of God's name through the worship of a new form of idolatry, public or popular opinion. We prostrate ourselves before popular sentiment and trends. Modern man has lost his unique standards of ethical behavior, as everything is viewed through the lens of a society that formulates laws and modes of conduct for the individual to adhere to. A situation is not evaluated through objective criteria, but rather through the prism of public opinion. If society agrees, the worst situation can be viewed as a positive success. But if society rejects it, the most noble effort can be criticized. The glorification of popular opinion stems in truth from a democratic principle, that says the majority must

always rule and is correct. Judaism, which formulated the concept of majority rule, אחרי רבים להטות, knew very well that in certain times and situations and with regards to certain principles, we must not listen to the majority. Indeed, in such situations, the individual must persevere against the majority opinion. Did the prophets follow the masses? We ourselves have always been an insignificant minority among the nations, and despite this we struggled and suffered for a Torah and way of life the surrounding world rejected.

Unfortunately, we modern Jews misinterpret the principle of אחרי רבים להטות and worship the idolatry of public opinion. This sin has devastated Judaism. It has laid waste to the Jewish home and the study hall, בית מדרש. We are driven to insanity through a desire to emulate others and imitate lifestyles that are foreign to us.

Were man to truly pray and converse with God, if he appreciated that conversation, if he understood how to pour out his heart in accord with לא גבה לבי ולא רמו עיני, he would grasp that he must develop and expose that which is unique in himself. He would acknowledge that the principles of right and wrong are determined by God and not by society. Then it would be impossible for hatred, left/right radicalism to take hold and metastasize.

Were we, modern jews, to understand how to pray, we would not seek to emulate the nations of the world "איכה יעבדו הגוים האלה את אלהיהם ואעשה כן גם אני (דברים. We would proudly display and publicize that which is unique in our lifestyle and in our prayer (עבודה שבלב). We would be respected by the nations of the world. If we would unify the name of God on the societal stage and nullify the idolatry of public opinion, we would be able to answer emphatically the question "is it possible that the whole world is guilty and the Jews alone are innocent" with the same answer given by Achad Ha'am: it is possible, and it *is* possible, אפשר ואפשר!

In conclusion, I would like to discuss the point of unification of God's name in the realm of intimate family life. Of course, Judaism values greatly family life. Love from children to parents was proclaimed at Mount Sinai as one of the 10 commandments. Love from parent to child and between husband and wife is practically one of the main themes of Tanach. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, Jacob and Joseph symbolize the ideal of the respect required in the relationship between husband and wife, father and son, sanctified throughout countless generations. The Halacha and the Aggadah are replete with laws and aphorisms that emphasize the importance of love between family members.

However, Judaism has also drawn a boundary line in this area as well. The love between parents and children, between husband and wife, as holy as it may be, may not be valued as the greatest and ultimate feeling in the life of an individual. The passionate love for God must supersede and exceed the burning love a person has for his only child or for the wife he has loved since his youth. Love for God is absolute and infinite. Love towards a human being, even the closest person, despite its beauty and intensity, must remain relative and limited. This idea is the underlying motive of the Akeida described in the Torah. Of course, we trust our father, our child, our spouse. Of course, we must be proud of them and consider them a rare treasure. However, having absolute faith and trust in those close to us and considering them to be the greatest and best is also idolatry. Man may not relax his focus on the concept of unification of the name of God even for a second. He must always realize that only God is his most precious treasure, and He alone deserves the highest of all love. Only in God may man express a love that overshadows his very life and existence; a love that borders on insanity "סמכוני באשישות רפדוני בתפוחים כי חולת אהבה אני (שיר השירים ב:ה)" (Maimonides equates the words שגיון לדוד with שגיון, insanity.) One is forbidden to be enveloped in such a powerful love for a human being.

Were we, modern Jews, to fully and properly understand that prayer requires the complete surrender and capitulation of the human being to God, the flesh and blood individual with illusions of grandeur, love and fame would suddenly awake from his sleepy dream and realize that all his hopes and aspirations were false and misleading. Were man to realize that his visions of beauty are seductive mirages based on naïve beliefs that will eventually expose him to ridicule, his prayers of the heart, עבודה שבלב, would assume a different appearance and meaning. The praying individual would feel helpless and unfortunate, alone and insignificant. Only then would the modern Jew eschew "family compromise and peace" and would no longer consider the presence of his wife at his side during prayers to be a necessary or progressive reform. Were we to pray with the mindset of "כי אבי ואמי עזבוני וד' יאספני (תהלים כז:י)" we would understand and appreciate that man must not rely on his beloved wife to be at his side for support when he prays. His wife must not feel assured by standing next to her protective husband when she prays and assumes he will care for her in sickness and need. Then all of us would seek to be alone with God.

Were modern Jews to truly believe in unification of the name of God, we would not abandon our children and we would imbue in them a respect for the authority of God. Only then would the elderly father who puts on Phylacteries in accordance

with the opinion of Rabbeinu Tam not be influenced by the “smart” words of his only child, a child who is a “קרקפתא דלא מנח תפילין”, someone who does not put on Phylacteries (see Gemara in Rosh Hashana), is ignorant of Judaism and has no desire to participate in the Jewish tradition. Were we to pray correctly, our children would honor their parents instead of parents honoring their children. We would simultaneously preserve 2 generations of Jews.

Indeed, were the world (Jew and Gentile) to pray and meditate on the words that we recite in נעילה, the closing service on Yom Kippur: “מה אנו, מה חיינו מה כחנו מה גבורותנו הלא כל הגבורים כאין לפניך ואנשי השם כדא היו וחכמים כבלי מדע ונבונים כבלי השכל ומותר האדם מן הבהמה אין כי הכל הבל:”, the world would be a much better and holier place. Unfortunately, the world does not pray, it does not understand the meaning of the unification of the name of God, and therefore it is constantly seeking unsuccessfully its own method of improvement!

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