



# Barriers to Belief: Jews & Non-Jews

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Dedicated in memory of my Zaidie,

Dr. M. Herbert Danzger z"l

מרדכי צבי בן פנחס וחיה ז"ל

and based on his book

"Returning to Tradition"

# Tonight's Hurdles

- Based on Problems in Orthodox Beliefs (Returning to Tradition p[290-297](#))
- Jews and Gentiles
  - “Laws involving Jewish-Gentile relations present a major problem for Orthodoxy”

- For example, a Jew may not accept interest payments from another Jew, but he may take interest from a Gentile (Exodus 22:24 and Leviticus 25:35-37)
  - (לה) וְכִי־יִמּוֹךְ אַחִיךָ וּמָטָה יָדוֹ עִמָּךְ וְהִחַזְקֵתָּ בּוֹ גֵר וְתוֹשֵׁב וְחִי עִמָּךְ: (לו) אֲל־תִּקַּח מֵאִתּוֹ נֶשֶׁךְ וְתִרְבִּית וְיִרְאֵתָּ מֵאֲ-לֵהֶיךָ וְחִי אַחִיךָ עִמָּךְ: (לז) אֶת־כֶּסֶףךָ לֹא־תִתֵּן לוֹ בְּנֶשֶׁךְ וּבַמִּרְבִּית לֹא־תִתֵּן אֶכְלָךְ:
  - (לח) אֲנִי יְקֹוֹק אֱ-לֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר־הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לָתֵת לָכֶם אֶת־אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן לְהִיּוֹת לָכֶם לֹא־לֵהִימ:
    - 35: If your kinsman, being in straits, comes under your authority, and you hold him as though a resident alien, let him live by your side: 36) do not exact from him advance or accrued interest, but fear your G-d. Let him live by your side as your kinsman. 37) Do not lend him your money at advance interest, or give him your food at accrued interest. 38) I the L-rd am your G-d, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your G-d. (JPS translation)
- More difficult still is the law that permits any manner of work to rescue a Jew on Shabbat and theory forbids work on Shabbat to save the life of a Gentile, although in practice the Gentile must be rescued.

# Challenging Laws

- Allowance of Usury (Interest) to non-Jews
  - Not our brothers
- Prohibition to intermarry
  - Different value
- Rabbinic Prohibitions (מאכלי עכו"ם) on Food
  - so we don't intermarry
- Violating Shabbat to Save a Jew's life, not Gentile
- Destroying Amalek, 7 Nations
- Shelo Asani Goy
  - Next week with Shelo Asani Isha

# Why do these issues bother us

- ‘Rabbi Mendel Weinbach of Ohr Someyach feels that these laws are particularly difficult for ba'alei t'shuva to accept. "These are people with a highly developed sense of ethics and morality. These questions really bother them.”’
- They are not problems for Reform Jews, who can simply say that they are the primitive conceptions of morality of an earlier age. Conservatives attempt to explain these laws in terms of the prevailing social and economic conditions at the time they were laid down. But for the Orthodox, to whom the laws are eternal and unchanging, they present a problem.

# Kabbalistic Conundrum

- The most problematic answers in terms of universalistic values are offered by those whose theory of souls suggests that some have holier souls or are derived from higher Divine sparks than others. But, as already pointed out, discussion of souls is part of the "hidden knowledge" (nistar) that is only alluded to. Such a position seems acceptable to those who believe in reincarnation and the progression of souls from lower to higher levels through continued rebirth, a view not inconsistent with the teachings of Far Eastern religions and gnostic and mystical Christianity. This perspective, however, and to a lesser extent the traditionalistic one still leave the community of the most worthy drawn very tightly, with only a few—the critical sparks—as the chosen, and the rest of lesser importance. Furthermore, the more countercultural the stand, the more tightly have the boundaries between "we" and "they" been drawn and the smaller the community of the "we" has been.

# Bad Answers

- Nor is it satisfying to respond that the laws are no longer applicable, that Orthodox Jewish law today requires the violation of Shabbat law to save the life of a Gentile because of *darkei shalom* (to promote peace between Jew and Gentile), for that still leaves unanswered the question of the ethic of the law.
- Nor is it meaningful to argue that other faiths make distinction between the faithful and infidels that are far more shocking, that call for the faithful to kill and destroy unbelievers. That position is of little comfort for the Orthodox Jewish believer. It reflects the relativistic position of modern religious and anthropological thought, not the position of one who believes that his or her religion is truly Divinely revealed and without flaw.
- Nor can one suggest that the rabbis erred in their interpretation of the law. In the framework of rabbinical Judaism, the rabbis of the Talmud do not err in their interpretations of the law. Their interpretation would be true even if contradicted by some Divine sign or miracle. Conceding error once a majority decision has been accepted by the community of committed is theologically impossible and would raise the most weighty questions about the nature of the authority of Jewish law. In fact this concept of authority is the heart of the difference between Orthodoxy and the other wings of Judaism.

## Darkei Shalom & Eivah – Creating Just & Moral Society

And so it appears to me that we treat a Resident Convert as we would a Jew, that is with respect and loving-kindness, since we are commanded to keep him alive [*sustain and support him*], as it says, “*to the stranger who is within your gates you shall give, that he may eat of it*” ([Deut. 14:21](#)). Our Sages have said that we do not double<sup>120</sup> *Literally double by saying “Shalom. Shalom”*. our saying of Shalom refers to the non-Jews, but we do with a Resident Convert. And that that our Sages have commanded us to visit their sick and bury their dead along with Jewish dead, and sustain their poor along with the poor of Israel is for the “sake of peace”, since it says, “*G-d is good to all, and His mercies extend upon all his works*” ([Psalms 145:9](#)) and it says, “*her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*” ([Proverbs 3:17](#)).  
(Translation by Reuven Brauner)

Rambam: Laws Kings 10:12

וכן יראה לי שנוהגין עם גרי תושב בדרך ארץ  
וגמילות חסדים כישראל. שהרי אנו מצוין  
להחיותן שנאמר ([דברים יד, כא](#)) "לגר אשר  
בשעריך תתננה ואכלה". וזה שאמרו חכמים  
אין כופלין להן שלום בעכו"ם לא בגר תושב.  
אפלו העכו"ם צוו חכמים לבקר חוליהם ולקבר  
מתיהם עם מתי ישראל ולפרנס ענייהם בכלל  
עניי ישראל מפני דרכי שלום. הרי נאמר  
([תהילים קמה, ט](#)) "טוב ה' לכל ורחמיו על כל  
מעשיו". ונאמר ([משלי ג, יז](#)) "דרכיה דרכי נעם  
וכל נתיבותיה שלום":



# Balancing Interest

- Weinbach's answers to the question of taking interest and the question of violating laws of Shabbat to save a life demonstrate how these knotty issues are treated.
- Regarding interest, Weinbach says: If you were to borrow someone's car or live in his house for a period, you would expect to pay for the use of that commodity. There is nothing unethical about this; we do it all the time. The Torah acknowledges the equity and ethical character of this arrangement by specifically allowing one to rent another's ox or land. By the same token, there is nothing ethically or morally reprehensible about charging a person interest for the use of money. However, the Torah requires that a Jew be especially concerned with his brother the Israelite. To show this brotherhood and concern, he must not take interest from a fellow Jew. This is not a matter of ethics or morality but a matter of showing a particular connection and concern. To all others one must act morally and ethically. But that does not preclude the taking of interest, which is simply equity or fairness.
- It has long been a practice for Jews to charge interest for lending money to other Jews, and this is not considered a breach of halakhah. Rabbeinu Tam, a twelfth-century Tosafist, instituted the Heter Iska, a document that makes the lender a partner in the venture and thus eligible for a share of the profit—that is, interest.

# Holiness of Shabbat – is it Wholly Satisfying?

- The theoretical (not actual) inviolability of Shabbat law, even when following it may endanger the life of a Gentile, is answered by stressing the holiness of Shabbat. Confronted with this issue by a ba'al t'shuva who insistently beseeched him for an answer, Weinbach replied by asking: "How would you feel if you were the one assigned to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima? You knew that the war effort and the lives of tens of thousands of your countrymen depended on you. But you also knew that tens, maybe hundreds, of thousands of people would be killed and many more times that maimed by the bomb. You would hesitate. Well, violating Shabbat is like dropping that atomic bomb. The Shabbat is so holy, so important, you can't violate it with impunity even if the reasons are terribly important." The answer seemed to satisfy the ba'al t'shuva, who decided to remain at the yeshiva.
- Yet the question of why the Sabbath may be violated as a matter of course in order to save a Jew remains. Weinbach's answer suggests the terrible moral dilemma one is in regarding this law. Perhaps all the student wanted was to know that the teacher was also sensitive to this moral problem and made uncomfortable by it.

# Who are non-Jews?

- Modernists, who follow Maimonides' teachings a little more closely, sometimes answer the question by pointing out that these laws referred not to Gentiles generally but to "star worshipers," a precise legal category meaning those who deny the existence of deity, who practice no law and no justice, whose ways are cruel and murderous. Judaism's daughter religions do not fall into this category. The case of the Gentile who is not helped is therefore a legal category, but concretely an empty one. It exists primarily to teach a lesson about religious values rather than about how to conduct oneself in relation to others. Halakhah does require that the Gentile be rescued even if this involves the desecration of Shabbat.
- This position is clearly stated in a much earlier source (see BT, Hulin 13b quoted with approval by Rashi, BT, Kiddushin 68b, and Tosafot; BT, Avodah Zarah za) and also by the Me'iri (Bet Ha Behirah on Avodah Zarah). Jacob Katz (1961) discusses this fully. It is puzzling that these sources are not cited in traditionalistic Yeshivot.

# Rabbi Menachem Meiri's view (1249-1315)

Many have been seen wondering that nowadays no one is careful about these things at all. And we already explained that the essential intent of the book about which nations it circles around, such as when it refers to their 'days of worship' that we mentioned that they are all the earlier nations that were not fenced in by the ways of religion and were affixed to and always worshipping idols and stars, & other forces because all of these and those like it are the essential of idolatry, as we explained. In any event, regarding the suspicion of violating Shabbat, or suspicion of forbidden foods and drink, such as yayin nesech (wine libated idolatrously) and Stam yaynam (unclear status) and other similar prohibitions they are forbidden in benefit or in eating because of the fear of intermarriage, all nations are equal... and now these words should be upright to your heart and not need to have every element explained, rather you will decide which fits for ancient peoples and which for all of them and you will understand.

מַאִירֵי עֲבוּדָה זָרָה דָּף כּו עֲמוּד א

הַרְבֵּה רָאִינוּ שְׁמֵת־פְּלֵאִים עַל שְׁבַזְמָנִים אֱלוֹ אֵין אָדָם  
נִזְהָר מִדְּבָרִים אֱלוֹ כָּלֵל וְאָנוּ כָּבֵר בְּאַרְנוֹ עֵקֶר כְּוֹנֵת הַסֵּפֶר  
עַל אֵיזוֹ אִמָּה הִיא סוֹבֶבֶת כְּמוֹ שְׁיַעֲיֵדוּ יָמֵי אִי־דִיהֶן  
שְׁהִזְכְּרָנוּ שֶׁהֵם כָּלֵם לְאֻמוֹת הַקְּדוּמוֹת שְׁלֵא הִיוּ גְדוּרוֹת  
בְּדַרְכֵי הַדְּתוֹת וְהֵן אֲדוּקוֹת וּמִתְמִידוֹת בְּעֲבוּדַת הָאֱלִילִים  
וְהַכּוֹכָבִים וְהַטְּלִיזְמָאשׁ שְׁכָל אֱלוֹ וְכִיּוֹצֵא בְּהֵן הֵם עֵקֶרִי  
ע"ז כְּמוֹ שֶׁהִתְבָּאֵר וּמ"מ לְעַנְיֵן חֲשֵׁשׁ אֲסוּר שַׁבָּת וְחֲשֵׁשׁ  
אֲסוּר מֵאֲכֻלוֹת וּמִשְׁתַּאוֹת כִּיּוֹן נִסְךְ וְסִתָּם יֵינָם וְשִׁאָר  
אֲסוּרֵי־הַדּוּמִים לְאֱלוֹ הֵן שְׁנֵאֲסָרוּ בְּהִנָּאָה הֵן שְׁנֵאֲסָרוּ  
בְּאֲכִילָה הֵן מֵאוֹתָם שְׁגָזְרוּ עֲלֵיהֶם מִחֲשֵׁשׁ חֲתָנוּת כָּל  
הָאֻמוֹת שְׁוֹת... וּמַעֲתָה יְהוּ דְּבָרִים אֱלוֹ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל עַל לִבָּךְ  
וְלֹא נִצְטַרְךְ לְהַשִּׁיבָם בְּכָל דְּבָר וְדָבָר אֲלֵא שֶׁתְּהֵא אֶתְּהָ  
בוֹחֵן בְּאֵיזוֹ אֶתְּהָ מְפָרֵשׁ עַל הָאֻמוֹת הַקְּדוּמוֹת וּבְאֵיזוֹ  
אֶתְּהָ מְפָרֵשׁ עַל כָּלֵל הַכֹּל וּבֵין וְתַדְע:

# Idolatry as fundamentally corrupt

- Cham, Canaan, Pharaoh, Sdom, Shchem, Efron haCHiti, and the list goes on

# Approaches to Resolving them

- Bad answers

- Jews are simply better (Kabbala)
- G-d said so
- Rabbis got it wrong
- Other religions mistreat infidels
- Teeth Taken out by Darkei Shalom (Paths of Peace) or Eivah (fear of enmity)
  - Unless this is rabbinic ideal (R' Aharon Lichtenstein)

- Workable Answers

- Extra kindness to those within our group
- Emphasis on Shabbat's sanctity
- Akum (Idolater) is different from Gentile nowadays
- Show that religious figures grappled with the issues

בס"ד

# Barriers to Belief

with Rabbi Chaim Metzger

Wednesday Nights @8:15 pm

Jarvis Freedman Library

[tiny.cc/chaimmetzger](http://tiny.cc/chaimmetzger)

When Values Collide

July 6: Jews & Non-Jews

July 13: Men & Women

July 20: Language Barrier



Dedicated in memory of my Zaidie,  
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and based on his book  
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תורת ה' תמימה  
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