**Introduction**

In recent years, I have met many different types of Jews who identify as religious. Yet despite shared practice of *mitzvah* observance, little similarity obtains between them. One group comprises men and women who hold what I consider completely superstitious beliefs. These include using folk remedies such as separating challah **[this is a *mitzvah*, why is it included in superstitions?]**or baking key-shaped *challot*, belief in contemporary miracles, and in visiting the graves of the righteous to solicit assistance with problems great and small, from terminal diseases and fertility struggles to the success of a new business venture. This trend, which I consider involves perceiving reality in distorted form, has gradually taken over the bastions of religious faith themselves, so much so that they have transformed prayer and *mitzvot* into something supernatural.

Another group comes from the study halls inspired by the late Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook. They excel in his particular historiosophy, a philosophy of history organizing a clear hierarchy that positions The Jewish People at the apex of human pyramid, as the physical manifestation of *Segulat Yisrael*, a talismanic function with world-historical redemptive implications. Rabbis who are normally sane also fall into this trap. And it is common to hear in synagogues, as I in fact heard recently, complete sermons focusing on how The Jewish People has become impure through living amongst Gentiles and must by purified by the sanctity of the Land of Israel. This rabbi spoke not a word about what was actually written in the weekly Torah portion we had just read. It was all based on approaches beyond the realm of the Tanakh and the *halakhah*.

Didn't Judaism exist before Rabbi Kook?

The most dangerous group, in my opinion, comprises those who continue the Lubavitch (Chabad) tradition, led by Rabbi Yitzhak Ginzburg. This group relates to The Jewish People's holy essence as a given, and draw from this premise all sorts pseudo-*halakhic* conclusions, up to and including the murder of babies. \*1

These two ideological stances disseminate a doctrine of human hierarchy, not only vis-à-vis The Jewish People and Gentiles, but also regarding relationships between men and women, determined by conceiving their different essences. They even produce anti-*halakhic* rulings as a result of their hierarchical and essentialist *weltanschauung*.

This is not the religion I know. It is not the religion I read in the Torah, and that is interpreted in the Talmud and responsa literature over generations of rational *halakhic* discussion. Nor is it the religion that determined clear judicial rules and requirements, such as “a decree the public cannot abide by”, “considerations of peace”, “because of hatred”, etc .

This is not the religion that positioned the people as equal to the “Great Court”, thus disproving the recurring false mantra popularized by Meir Kahane that “Judaism is not Democracy”. Nor is it the religion that commands us to rule over reality through conscious awareness, as I try to show in my book.

If *halachic* adjudicators can disregard these fundamental *halakhic* traditions and arrive at a ruling that justifies murdering babies, it is past time to raise a cry of protest.

And so I wrote this book.

My quest was for the God that I believe in within the text of the Torah; to locate in its verses ethics of freedom, equality, opposition to slavery, and the authorization of non-hierarchical relationships. Furthermore, I sought to expose essentialist lies in order to refute them. All of these stem from the most important text known to humankind.

The text responded to me, and my request was granted.

Structural Notes

a) The Torah is not organized like a book of science a philosophical treatise. Yet it seems to me that most of *Bereshit* and the beginning of *Shemot*, the huge crescendo leading to the Exodus and the Giving of the Torah, is devoted to the idea of negating slavery.

Just as it is impossible to subdue the might of nature, so it is impossible to enslave a human being created in the image of God. I intentionally compare this Divine sparkto an urge, an outburst, because I can only define it in terms of intention, as articulated by Franz Brentano and Edmund Husserl. As Edmund Levinas wrote in their wake: “Every awareness is an awareness of something…and this expresses an initial basic disagreement with western thought regarding the precedence afforded to the theoretical…” (*Ethics and Infinity, Conversations with Phillippe Nemo*).

In other words, the ability to accomplish and define an awareness like this must be directed at whatever is external to it. Awareness and the ‘I’ are not defined by a characteristic or by their essence. They are but the ability to turn outwards and apply it through absorbing it. Or as they say in Hebrew slang, “to grasp the material in order to pass the test”.

This is the Divine Image in human beings, and since it is impossible to control God, it is also forbidden to control a person created in His Image. The ‘I’ is the surplus that remains after enslaving all the rest **[this requires more explanation]**, and is defined as “the unenslaved”. (see “The Birth of the I” in the Appendix).

This is the first step in liberating the human race and this theme develops throughout primordial history until God introduces the concepts of freedom and redemption into the world at the time of the Exodus from Egypt.

After the Giving of the Torah, which establishes the existence of the autonomous subject through the relationship between the command and the commanded, we arrive at the second significant part of the Torah: the war against idolatry. We encounter this throughout the continuum of Torah portions dealing with the preparations for The Tabernacle, the sin of the Golden Calf, the building and dedication of The Tabernacle, and the sin of Nadav and Avihu.

b) As we have noted, the Revelation at Sinai was the event that established human autonomy via the relationship between the command and the commanded. In the next chapters, we encounter various types of commands. Some we accept as part of the ethical tapestry of our lives and some are less obvious to us. It is worth clarifying in advance that in light of understanding the necessity of the command-commanded connection, perhaps there is no need to provide a satisfactory reason for each and every command.

It is also worth thinking about the commands which, through the Sages’ initiatives or tacit approval, have disappeared. For example: the *ir hanidachat*,\*2; *ben sorer umoreh* (rebellious child), *isha sotah* (adultress), obligations regarding a Hebrew slave or maidservant, sacrifices, and of course all the laws of ritual purity and impurity connected to the Temple. As Talmud scholar Professor Ruchama Weiss points out: “Since we do not have a Sanhedrin today, and no Temple, we only observe three commandments of the 41 enumerated in Parashat Shoftim.”

Communal rulings were added, including laws for the modern State of Israel, such as inheritance laws and how to divide money between a couple going through divorce proceedings. These contradict *halakhah*, but are validated by the *halakhic* principle that “the community is like the Great Court.”

Some of the commandments no longer observed express primeval emotions. For example, *ben sorer umoreh* expresses a parent’s terrible fear of a child becoming irredeemably good for nothing; *ir hanidachat* expresses the bitter fight against idolatry; *sotah*, the place of suspicion in our lives, etc.

These are but tentative suggestions. The book I am writing does not aspire to discuss each and every commandment, but attempts to discover what God wants from us through the commandments in the Torah.

c) Upon completing and publishing the book in Hebrew, I developed a more general understanding of the Torah. Although the Torah was given to The Jewish People at Sinai, it is clear that its primary and central message was intended as a proposal for the entire human race.