

[REDACTED]

Rabbi Norman Lamb
Yeshiva University
Brooklyn, New York

Dear Rabbi Lamb;

I was greatly upset by your remarks as quoted in the New York Times, Jan. 24 concerning the recent ruling by the Israeli High Court. What bothered me was not your disagreement over the decision, but the comments, made by you and your colleagues, Rabbi Zev Siegal and Rabbi Benjamin Blech, that the very fiber of the Jewish community is weakened by this particular decision.

But probably what bothered me the most was the inferred opinion that unless a Jew is religious, he is not a Jew. That may be a false deduction from the article. If that is so, and this opinion I ascribe to you and your colleagues is untrue, then you may be free to disregard my following comments. However, if the above opinion is true, I ask you to read on-- and hopefully understand how the "other side" lives.

I am a 19 year-old college student at Northwestern. I was brought up in the Conservative tradition, which is, at best, nebulous. However, the religiousness of Judaism did not seem to rub off on me too well.

Yes, I went to Hebrew School, was Bar Mitzvahed, et. al. But somewhere along the way, I started to think. Maybe it was because one of my teachers had told me that Judaism is what you make of it, the laws are there for you to interpret, that no one can tell how to think or pray, that you could make of Judaism what you wanted, that there were no prescribed rules you had to follow to be a Jew.

So my thoughts began to run in a way that you could call contrary to common belief. No, not an atheist. Bu not an agnostic either. I guess the best way to put it is that I don't believe there is anybody upstairs pushing buttons.

No, I'm not being sacreligious. There just is no one super force that man can appeal to in order to solve his own problems. Religion seems to be just a crutch that insecure people lean on, a backbone that too many people refuse to question--like you and the many other millions of Jews who refuse to think realistically about what they believe. Instead they just accept the rulings and beliefs of those who came before them. It is almost as bad as the catholic church sending down doctrines. Only Judaism seems to have less doctrines.

The sad thing is that Orthodox Judaism is the worst offender of all--the most closed minded religious sect outside of Vatican City. It's a wonder that some orthodox rabbi hasn't come up with a brilliant theory advising the masses to follow all 500 some odd mitzvahs or face the consequences of ending up in an undesirable place when their time on earth is completed.

My intent is not malicious. It just seems to me unrealistic that intelligent men of your stature and learning should still believe so stoically in laws layed down before the world ever heard of atomic bombs and supersonic jets.

Granted--there is much sense in the Talmud, for it deals with relationships between people. In fact all the great books of the rabbis contain much wisdom on how to conduct your life. However it is when you start saying that these books were divinely inspired that I start to recoil. Men wrote these books. Yes, men wrote those words you read so religiously three times a week. No super force pushed their pens along the parchments. They were guided by what they saw and what they were told.

It must also be remembered that menthousands of years ago did not know the workings of nature as we do today. Thus many things which seemed supernatural then can be explained easily today.

But I'm getting off my subject.

I don't believe I have gone to a synagogue willingly for many a year. And I certainly haven't gotten anything out of a service in a long time--if ever. When I go to high holiday services, I sit in the coat room and talk--and not about religion. I don't believe that Israel is completely 100% correct in its present struggles. Yet I still consider myself a Jew. Why?

I believe there is such a thing as a "cultural Jew." One who doesn't follow all the rules but yet has pride in the fact that he is Jewish. Most of my friends are Jewish. In a voting booth(when I get in one) I will probably favor Jewish

candidates. I will probably send my kids to Hebrew School and they will probably be Bar Mitzvahed too. Hypocrite? Hardly. I just want them to have the opportunity I had-- to make up their own mind for themselves.

Religion is, in many ways, obsolete and out of style. However, many people need that crutch, need that wall to lean against when all is bad. It's much easier to let out your frustrations on God than on your wife. It's also much easier to talk to him. He doesn't talk back.

But, seriously, I don't need him. I can run my life without adhering to the dictates that someone else has made for me. I run my life based on common sense: common respect for the rights and beliefs of others. I don't need anyone telling me how to do that.

Yet I still feel that I am not damned or that I should be spoken of with scorn. That serves nothing.

I feel that I am a Jew, no matter what my religious beliefs are. And I am not the only person in my peer group who feels this way. It might be important to think about that when you ponder the future of Judaism. More and more young people are not responding to Judaism as it stands today. If changes are to be made, I feel that religion must be de-emphasized. Now that probably sounds like heresy. And in some ways, it probably is. But all institutions must change sometime-- even Orthodox Judaism.

But the important thing is to try to understand those whom you disagree with; to understand how they think and why they think that way.

I hope this letter had been a small step in that direction.

Sincerely

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