



Humility: The Ethic of Faith

30.11.2006 | Joseph, Rabbi Howard S.

Rabbi Howard S. Joseph of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, Montreal, explores the implications of the virtue of humility for one's attitude toward other faiths.

Humility: The Ethic of Faith

Rabbi Howard S. Joseph

In Jewish tradition, humility is a quality that includes the full range of the continuum from modesty to self-esteem. There is good reason for this virtue and what I call "theological humility" to occupy an important role in religious life. Indeed, one of the alarming features of much contemporary religiosity is the absence of humility. This is often seen in self-righteous fanaticism or in equally self-righteous retreat from the world of human affairs.

Those exposed to the multiplicity of faiths and lifestyles in the modern world must reach some modus vivendi with the question of universalism versus particularism. The most difficult spiritual and intellectual challenge we face is the truth question implicit in this issue: if my religion is true, absolutely true, then what is the status of other religions and their adherents' beliefs that their faiths are true, absolutely true.

Often we ignore or repress the issue, or simply adopt the classic democratic pose of tolerance that is expected in an open and free society. This may be a satisfactory position on many issues; but, when it comes to religion, with God's choices not ours, the either-or question seems most pressing. Religions and believers tend to deal with absolutes. At best, one may come to some realization that the question of plural religious truths embedded in multiple religions is part of the mystery of faith. Is there some conceptual framework that can take us further -- beyond mystery and tolerance to the religious affirmation of other faiths?

The prevailing view of Jews towards other religions has been that they are false. Despite this general view, Jews appreciated that the two primary religious groups among whom they lived, Christians and Moslems, did have some relationship to true religion to the extent that they borrowed and perpetuated Biblical teachings about God and human behavior.¹ This view was held under circumstances of oppression and humiliation and the denial of legitimacy to Judaism as a religion that had been superseded by the others. Remembering the context will enable us to appreciate that this attitude is more remarkably generous than we might otherwise think.

Thus, Islam and Christianity were credited with helping to remove idolatry from the earth and the excesses of violence and immorality associated with idolatry in the eyes of the Bible. They also spread the idea of God as the Creator and giver of the Torah and commandments and they prepare the earth for the true coming of the Messiah. At that time the misinterpretations of Judaic doctrine will be clarified. Meanwhile, the hope is often expressed that the individual believers in these faiths will live up to the religious and moral code they have derived from the Torah.

Sometimes this code is called the Seven Commandments of Noah, given to him after the deluge to ensure that humans never descend to the ante-deluvian level of violence and immorality. Indeed, there are those who already are to be considered among the righteous or the pious of the nations, *zadikim* or *hasidei umot ha-olam*.

Important Jewish thinkers such as Maimonides and others articulated this view throughout the Middle Ages. Therefore, we must consider this view seriously before moving on. In the minds of many today this might be the best treatment that the adherents of other faiths could expect from Judaism. Some might wish to say that we no longer wish to comment upon another religion. We can live in peace and toleration respecting other human beings as creatures of God even though we have no opinion about the truth of their faith.

The latter position would be acceptable if we were decidedly neutral on the subject. However, would there remain no inner and implicit attitudes towards other faiths? Would these be neutral as well? And, if not, would they be likely to be favorably or unfavorably disposed towards other faiths?

This posture has become impossible to maintain and, I suggest, dangerous as well. For example, there is movement today towards interreligious dialogue and critical self-examination of one's own tradition's statements regarding others. Implicit in much of dialogue activity is a realization that implied meanings might result in a particularly nasty form of articulation. Words uttered within the community as only words may eventually prompt and justify murderous deeds that were far from the original intention of those who spoke them. I am, of course, referring to our twentieth century experience of the Holocaust which has taught us that harsh beliefs and attitudes may ultimately influence our behavior towards others. Deeds catch up with words and eventually the process of dehumanization can lead to destruction.

This awareness does lie behind much dialogue activity. One must congratulate the courageous efforts of the many churches that have openly confronted their own traditions of contempt towards Jews and Judaism. They have demonstrated the urgency of this endeavor and the impossibility of letting matters drift along while hoping for a pleasant outcome.

Thus, we return to our theme which poses an important challenge to Jews as well as to others. What is the relation of our way to the many ways of the others among whom we live?

The medieval view is therefore seen to possess many difficulties. It judges others according to oneself, an act that goes against the wise counsel given in the Ethics of the Fathers, "Do not judge your fellow until you are in the same situation." It accords respect to individuals as human beings but not when they form a group to celebrate their most cherished beliefs. In addition, while recognizing elements of truth in those faiths that borrowed from our own, it ignores completely the issue of the many other faiths in the human community.²

Pluralism can be derived from the general commandment of love for others that is the basis of the religious ethical attitude. That love is challenged to extend not only to our neighbor who shares our beliefs and values but also to the stranger in our midst. Presumably, the stranger's strangeness is not limited to foreign origins but to beliefs and values that are also strange to us. As difficult as this may be it is a noble goal towards which to strive. Overcoming the fear of the otherness of the other and replacing it with respect, care and love would certainly be a lofty accomplishment, an example of love at its highest.

However, this approach leaves somewhat open the question of the legitimacy of the other's beliefs. One can maintain that this is affirmed out of that same love as legitimate despite my conviction of

the absoluteness of my faith. Any contradictions are resolved in the mystery of the infinite God. This is a form of tolerance but is not an affirmation of the truth of the other's most precious commitments. Ultimately, it breeds an arrogance about one's own beliefs and a condescension towards others' that certainly runs counter to the ideal of humility that, with love, is an important hallmark of piety. The arrogance is a product of the knowledge that while my own beliefs are clearly explained, the beliefs of the other remain cloudy and mysterious and even threatening to my own. My beliefs occupy the entire landscape of legitimacy leaving no theological room for others. Paradoxically, therefore, even if the encounter with the stranger may enhance our ability to love, it may reduce our humility. This often leads to the creation of a protective wall about one's faith to prevent a sincere encounter with the import of other viewpoints and ideas. For the challenge of the other to us is not limited to the ethical plane but equally to the reflective, intellectual and, for the pious, to the theological dimension.

For these reasons the pursuit of a theoretical framework for religious pluralism is a necessity. The category of theological humility in the face of the infinite and mysterious God is, hopefully, a movement in that direction. It focuses on the infinite nature of God's Being, the finite nature of our understanding and, therefore, the possibility of a plurality of legitimate approaches to the divine.

The stimulus to find a religious ground to pluralism is a challenge posed by the modern secular experience. Modernity portrayed religion as a source of intolerance and exclusiveness for in pre-modern society religion determined membership in or exclusion from society.

The Enlightenment thinkers developed a new basis for society: the natural and individual rights of each person. Religion would be a private affair, of no concern to the political structure as such.

The new states founded upon these democratic principles -- especially in the New World -- attracted numerous peoples from all over the world who were escaping religious intolerance and persecution. But in this more open environment many lost their faith as they integrated into the new society, joining with others to create a common, secular culture shared by all and particular to none. Those who tried to retain an intense commitment to their original faith and culture had to learn to tolerate -- often unwillingly -- the presence of many other faiths. Thus arose the impulse towards pluralism.

Pluralism is, therefore, a product of the Enlightenment emphasis on Reason as a source of values. Reason created the modern state and its open society. Democracy is an ongoing process requiring constant vigilance and rational discourse to maintain the liberty of its members.

The initiators of modern society may have hoped that with time significant differences among citizens would diminish and disappear; a truly common culture would emerge further binding the citizens together.³ That culture may even have elements of spirituality and, what is often called, 'civil religion.' Despite these expectations we are witnesses to the remarkable persistence of the many traditional faiths. They have refused to disappear and continue to attract committed believers and address the spiritual lives of millions. This persistence and the current revitalization of faith make the elaboration of a principled religious pluralism into an urgent necessity. In a system based upon Reason and rational discourse a rational religious approach is more secure and more appealing. Religions do not have to be perceived as sources of conflict and intolerance and the persistence and revitalization of religion is not necessarily a threat to the open democratic society. Religions can embrace a degree of openness in their own self-understanding. The issue of pluralism can thus be seen to form another chapter in the ongoing history of the relation between reason and revelation, faith and knowledge.

Religionists must humbly acknowledge sins in the persecution, suppression and denigration of other faiths.⁴ Without the challenge of the modern experience we may not have arrived at the

opportunity to rise above this historic failure. Encountering the integrity of others in a free society we have been stimulated to renew and refresh our self-understanding. We can maintain both our humility and love.

Ultimately, we are dealing here with the challenge of reason to revelation. For pre-moderns the issue remained on the intellectual-theological plane. For us, the issue has filtered into the fabric of modern social experience, frightening many into withdrawal from the encounter. For some, it is a constant source of enrichment and renewal on the perpetual road to understanding of the mystery of God and the complex majesty of Creation.

There are many questions entangled in this issue. By posing the question of whether or not a religion is true or possesses truth, we are assuming that we know what we mean when we use the word truth in regard to religion, even our own. Is it in the very nature of religion to deal with certainty and truth in the same way that other human endeavors operate? What then do we mean by faith, trust and belief?

Humility is a characteristic that includes both modesty and self-esteem but which moves to the modesty side of a continuum that ranges between these attributes.⁵ Humble persons avoid both extremes, displaying neither arrogance nor excessive self-effacement unworthy of a creature in the Divine image, who can be addressed, challenged and commanded by the loving Creator. They are secure in their humility and trust in it as an essential disposition to the world around them.

The importance of humility lies not only in the interpersonal sphere. It is a theological quality as well, a category of thought that describes tendencies already present in theological reflection. Once defined as such it can become a more useful concept, guiding us as we consider religious questions.⁶

Theological humility reaches its clearest expression during Moses' second stay on Mt. Sinai as told in Exodus 32-34. Moses attempts to seize the gracious moment to gain as much understanding of God as possible. He boldly asks for a full disclosure of God's Glory or Presence. He is told that this is impossible: no human can realize this goal. While humans can recognize God's Graciousness, "you cannot see My face, for humans cannot see Me and live." Finally, he is told, "you will see My back, but My face will not be seen."

This text has often motivated us to be reluctant or modest theologians. There is no real possibility to fully develop our subject, so why bother?

But the lesson is stronger. We are being taught here that this elevated spiritual moment does not lead to any absolute knowledge. Encounter with the Absolute is overwhelming and convincing but does not yield an absolutely accurate description of the Divine. One sees God's back, but not God's face. Our attempt to know God must remain incomplete. Nevertheless, the inspired believer continues to be faithful after the encounter. What has been seen is evidence enough.

This becomes clear in Maimonides' discussion of Moses' experience.⁷ He reminds us that all descriptions of God are metaphors or analogies, not meant to be understood literally. "The Truth of God's Presence cannot be understood, nor perceived nor examined. What then did Moses request of the Holy One?... He asked to know the reality of God's existence so that his knowledge would be similar to the knowledge of a person whose face one had seen and is now known as a unique being." This was impossible. But, "God did reveal to him what was not known to any other person before or after him: until he perceived from God's Existence some matter in which God's uniqueness would remain in his mind as distinguished from other beings." Then Maimonides

explains the metaphor in the Biblical text. It is similar to the recognition of someone you know only through seeing that person from the back, but this is sufficient to recognize that it is the particular person.

Maimonides does not say what was specifically revealed to Moses that would enable him to recognize God from the back, so to speak. However, the text does speak of God making "all my Goodness pass before you as I proclaim the name of the Lord before You: I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and show compassion to whom I show compassion."

According to Jewish tradition, this day became Yom Kippur. It was the day upon which the sin of the Golden Calf was forgiven. It was the day when the message of God's gracious love was loudly proclaimed.

On Yom Kippur, as at other times, when this moment is remembered, Moses' name does not appear in the prayer text. Instead he is referred to as "the humble one." We are being reminded that of all the many qualities which Moses undoubtedly possessed, it is his humility for which he is most acclaimed.

In Numbers 11-12 Moses is referred to as "a very humble man, more than any other man on earth." This refers to Moses' perception of his own honor and responsibility. He does not flinch from sharing the divine spirit with others in order that the people would be properly led. "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord put His spirit upon them!" He chooses to ignore whatever slander Miriam and Aaron may levy against him, confident that his actions have been consistent with his mission. Thus, on Yom Kippur, and at other times, when we wish to recall the message of divine love and graciousness it is to Moses as anav, the humble one, that we refer. It was his humility that made possible this revelation which now stands as the central hope for forgiveness to his appreciative disciples.

The mature Moses is quite different from the moment we first meet him in the Bible. As a young prince of Egypt he decides to leave the palace and go out to his brothers. Filled with youthful enthusiasm and maybe a touch of arrogance he strikes down an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew slave. Did he expect with one blow to liberate Israel? His necessary departure from Egypt and exile for many years in Midian leave him totally impotent to assist his people. He learned his humility the hard way.

At the burning bush Moses continues to learn humility. Here he is too self-effacing, offering repeated arguments against his selection as the messenger of redemption. From overconfidence he has gone to excessive meekness. He mounts successive arguments against the redemptive venture, from his own ineffectiveness to the impossibility of winning Pharaoh's consent and the arousal of a demoralized nation languishing in captivity.

Moses must be directed to develop into the leadership role. Humility, patience, and recognition of the complexity of human issues, as well as of the possibility of setbacks, - such as the Golden Calf episode - are all required to lead a people to redemption. When he later returns to the mountain -- after the Exodus, the Sinai Revelation and the Golden Calf -- he learns of the limitations of human achievement: human beings may not see Me and live. It is a humble Moses who accepts that he cannot see God's face. No one can glimpse or understand the fullness of the glory of God. The back must be sufficient.

These texts suggest a message about the limits of religious knowledge: our vision and the words we use to describe an encounter with God are at best incomplete, finite and partial. The mysterious God can never be fully comprehended. The infinite God can be viewed from an infinite number of perspectives, each of which must be as ultimately correct as the others. By definition, one perspective cannot be infinite; it cannot comprehend all possible perspectives which comprise the

whole truth of God's existence.

This position might sound relativistic. However, there is a vast difference between the claim that all religions are essentially the same and the claim that many religions may be valid or true. The former position implies that there are no significant differences among religions. The latter maintains that there are significant differences. These may have to do with theological perspectives and truths but also relate to the foundational events and experiences upon which the tradition is built and the active historical community which celebrates that particular faith. To each community its foundational events and their articulation into living religiosity through the ages is sacred. There is much, therefore, that differentiates religions one from the other: event and interpretation, historical conditions and experiences, sacred literature, language and culture. Each one of these perspectives can be a real apprehension of the divine, not reducible to any other. It is one of the infinite ways in which the mysterious and infinite God can be apprehended.

The position I am advocating treats seriously the particularities of each tradition. In that regard it avoids the danger of nihilism which would deny the value of all beliefs and morals since no ultimate and absolute criteria can be developed. This position is also related to many currents in modern philosophy which have come to the conclusion that all knowledge is relative: relative to the consensus of individuals who accept this knowledge and live by it. Scientific knowledge is included in this view. It, too, is based upon the consensus of a community of scientists. What is considered to be science continually changes as new data are discovered and new theories are propounded. Meanwhile we build bridges and fly airplanes as if the principles on which they were based were absolutely risk free.

Modernity has witnessed an explosion in knowledge available to us. This material is organized into numerous categories each reflecting a method of approach. Thus, a datum can be subject to analysis by physics, chemistry and biology; history, sociology and psychology. Religion too might have something to say about it. Aesthetics might also offer its perspective. We have as a result a plurality of forms of knowing and knowledge: epistemological pluralism.

Thus, the consensus about religious knowledge upon which a particular faith community rests is a serious and a concrete foundation. Truth then becomes the coherent meaning a community gives to the events and traditions to which it is heir and how it orders their collective life. It has the authoritative support of its leaders and is acknowledged by the faithful. Through this truth they hope to get a glimpse of the divine and bring into their personal and communal lives the responsibilities of that vision. Theological humility, however, requires them to remember that this is their truth, of necessity a partial glimpse of the infinite. The wonder of this partial glimpse, this perspective, is that it is sufficient to shape and engage the total life of a community.

This position, therefore, can be the basis of pluralism without relativism. Or, it can be the basis of a new type of relativism⁸ that understands truth to be related to the individual perspective from which it is uttered. It also enables us to hold on to both ends of our question -- the particular and the universal, our belief in the truth of our own particular faith and the affirmation of the truth of other faiths.

The modern skepticism that characterizes discussions of philosophy of knowledge or, epistemology, and, hence, the move towards theological humility, is reflected in recent Jewish thought. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook acknowledged this skepticism as deriving from Kantian thought but believed that it is not a new idea for Judaism. In a letter written in 1907 he wrote:

Even the "turn to Kant" does not embrace the smallest part of Israel's strength. It is true that we

have always known that all human judgements are subjective and relative and did not need Kant to reveal this secret to us....⁹

Rabbi Kook also wrote:

It is impossible for a human being to know the essential character of anything, even of himself, and certainly, of another, neither an individual nor a people. We go around the center of knowledge occupied with estimates and evaluations... and attempt to speak of a unique character and particular soul. We must recognize that our knowledge of this hangs upon a thread and that judgement belongs to God.¹⁰

On this basis, Rabbi Kook concluded that:

In regard to the Higher Divine Truth, there is no difference between a formulated religious belief system (*ha-emunah ha-mezuyeret*) and skepticism. Neither gives truth. However, belief approaches closer to truth while skepticism is closer to falsehood....¹¹

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, treated this question in his 1944 essay *The Halakhic Mind*.¹² He was exploring the validity of philosophy and religious knowledge as forms of knowledge and concluded that epistemological pluralism leads to metaphysical pluralism. After this recognition that we live in a pluralistic universe as well as a pluralistic society has been successfully established the question treated in this essay can be raised: what is the relationship of our knowledge to other forms of knowledge. Religious knowledge claims to be absolute knowledge of the Absolute. If all knowledge is related to a perspective from which the knowledge is gathered, a method by which the knowledge is collected, then how can any claims of absoluteness be maintained. The category of theological humility helps to describe and define this sensibility in modern religious thought.

Are there no criteria that emerge from this analysis by which one faith can judge another? Are there no expectations that one faith community may look for in the other? In the reluctant and hesitant spirit of theological humility I offer some possible implications that might tempt as well as challenge us.

1. One criterion for the truth of a religious system might be theological humility itself, a self-critical recognition of the finite nature of any human understanding of the divine. Thus, any one way is just that. To claim any more would be unfaithful to the foundational religious experience.

Can believers achieve this? Must they assert the superiority of their perspective over others? Must they claim universal validity of their beliefs and seek to impose them upon others? Is it not enough to rejoice, celebrate and witness within their own system? Must they believe that in order for their system to be true it must be true for all and not only for themselves?

2. A second measure might be the lesson Moses learned on that first Yom Kippur day. You cannot comprehend God's ways and anticipate the manner in which God would be revealed for "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and show compassion to whom I show compassion." After the gracious Presence passes you will recognize it as such. In other words, wherever we find graciousness and compassion we are encountering the Presence, even if it were outside our own community.

Please remember my hesitation at presenting these suggestions. They are tempting but I

find comfort in them because they challenge us to avoid self-righteous criticism of other communities and look to ourselves: our own humility and our ability to recognize grace in others.

Chosenness is another consideration that must be addressed. Is there room for such a concept in the perspective of theological humility? My own feeling is definitely affirmative.

I referred above to various medieval Jewish traditions that relate to other religions. In each one there was recognized a divine purpose in those other religious traditions for which they were chosen. Maimonides says the following of both Christianity and Islam:

However, humans cannot fathom the thoughts (or, plans) of the Creator whose ways and thoughts are not like ours. All the matters of Jesus of Nazareth and the Ishmaelite (Mohammed) who followed him are only to straighten the path for the King Messiah and to prepare the entire world to serve God together....¹³

Thus, even Jewish thinkers who insist on the chosenness of Israel as a fundamental theological principle can conceive of a purposeful choice of others as well. The divine drama operating in humankind is never completely understood by us. By our own particular criteria we cannot fathom the mystery of other faiths. Each one can maintain its sense of particular chosenness and must leave room for others as well.

The cultural mood of the late twentieth century has changed throughout the world. It is once again legitimate to stand out and be different ethnically or religiously. Religion is 'in' once again. While we are tempted to welcome this development, serious questions are posed. Will the religious faith that is re-emerging repeat the mistakes of its past recreating a triumphal, arrogant and intolerant mood? Or will it be one that is humble, chastened by its weakness in secular societies and its suffering under totalitarian repression? Will it have learned anything that is valuable from the modern pluralist experience or will it try to return us to a pre-modern form of living in segregated exclusionary societies based on religious homogeneity? These questions should impress upon us the urgency of recognizing the truth as well as the value of theological humility as a concept to be articulated for our times.

Theological humility generates other forms of humility as well. The truly humble avoid arrogance and leave room for other perspectives; they learn from others because they know they do not have the whole truth; and they leave room for God's mysterious majesty to express itself in the world in ever new and unexpected ways. The truly humble have enough self-esteem to take human life seriously and try to accomplish whatever possible in helping heaven and earth to meet more often in moments of grace manifest in our lives; they believe that despite their inability to complete the task they are not free to desist from it; and they believe that God has confidence in their worthiness for the tasks.

Notes

1. There are many examples of this attitude. See Maimonides, Code, Judges (Kings 11,4). (The Mossad Harav Kook edition has the restored pre-censored text.) See Judah Halevi, Kuzari (4,23). For one that has been overlooked see David Kimhi's comments to the Akedah (Gen. 22). I will return to these texts later.

2. An exception to this would be that of Menahem Ha-Meiri who speaks approvingly of all peoples who are bound by religious and moral traditions.
3. In 1818, Mordecai M. Noah sent out copies of a speech given at the dedication of the second Mill Street Synagogue of New York's Shearith Israel. In response, James Madison wrote: "Having ever regarded the freedom of religious opinions and worship as equally belonging to every sect, and the secure enjoyment of it as the best human provision for bringing all, either into the same way of thinking, or into that mutual charity which is the only proper substitute...." In David DeSola Pool, *An Old Faith in the New World*, New York: 1955, p.452.
4. In response to the same oration by Noah, Thomas Jefferson wrote, "Your sect by its suffering has furnished a remarkable proof of the universal spirit of religious intolerance inherent in every sect, disclaimed by all while feeble and practised by all when in power...." Ibid.
5. See Maimonides, *Commentary to the Mishnah*, Introduction to Tractate Abot (Ethics of the Fathers), known as the Eight Chapters, ch. 4.
6. While reflecting upon this idea I discovered that the term 'theological modesty' had been used and with reference to some but not all the same texts that I hope to treat. Henry Seigman used the term 'theological modesty' in reference to our inability to arrive at theological precision. See his essay "Ten Years of Catholic-Jewish Relations: A Reassessment", in *FIFTEEN YEARS OF CATHOLIC-JEWISH DIALOGUE 1970-1985* (Roma: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988) p. 31.
7. Code, I (Mada), Yesodei Hatorah, Ch.1/9-10. Rabbi Dr. Emanuel Rackman, my teacher, first pointed out this text to me. The application here is my own. Rabbi Rackman has subsequently supported my application.
8. It might be called 'objective relativism'. My thinking about these issues of epistemology and metaphysics has been greatly influenced by the writing of Justus Buchler in his books, among others, *Nature and Judgment* and *The Metaphysics of Natural Complexes*. Jerome Eckstein introduced me to this material. In addition, my readings in Cultural Anthropology have helped shape this perspective.
9. See *Iggerot Reiyah* (Mossad Harav Kook: Jerusalem, 1985) p. 47. I am grateful to Dr. Tamar Ross for this and all the subsequent references in Rabbi Kook's thought.
10. *Orot Hakodesh*, Volume 3, (Mossad Harav Kook: Jerusalem, 1985), p. 119.
11. *Orot Ha-Emunah* (Jerusalem: 1985), pp. 23-24.
12. Seth Press: New York-London, 1986.
13. Code, Judges (Kings 11,4). The other sources in Halevi and David Kimhi noted earlier express similar views.

Maimonides' conclusion here, "to serve God together", bears study. Does he anticipate only one religion at the end of days with all converted to Judaism?

More recently, Rabbi Naphtali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (1817-93), known by the acrostic of his name as *Neziv*, addressed this general question in *Shear Yisrael*, *The Remnant of Israel*. He maintains that since Abraham was charged with being "a father to many nations," it is not God's plan to erase other nations and merge them into Israel. Rather, *Neziv* sees as the purpose of Israel's covenant to affect an elevation in the religious life, or covenants, of others. "Now your task is to teach all nations the recognition of God and not to convert them as had been done until now. From the beginning it had been God's intention to maintain the integrity of all nations, not incorporating everyone into Israel. It was also God's wish that all peoples come to recognize and worship God alone and that idolatry would cease. Therefore, Abraham was commanded to become a father of many nations even without their conversion."

Although he does not refer to Maimonides statement here he does refer to it elsewhere. See the commentary to Song of Songs called *Metiv Shir* (7,1). He might have assumed that Maimonides would have agreed with him.

This essay, *Shear Yisrael*, is printed together with *Metiv Shir*. The combined work he called *Rinna Shel Torah*, *The Song of Torah*. All Hebrew editions have maintained the two

together as was Neziv's desire. An English translation of *Metiv Shir* appeared recently under the title *Rinna Shel Torah* but without *Shear Yisrael*. I have published a translation of *Shear Yisrael* under the title, *Why Antisemitism?* (Jason Aronson: 1996).

Howard S. Joseph is Rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of Montreal, an Orthodox congregation that is the oldest synagogue in Canada.

[French version](#)