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# Religious freedom as a basic human right. The Jewish perspective

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## 1. Introduction

A dramatic event took place in Yavneh, south of Tel-Aviv, to where the *Sanhedrin*, the High Court of Ancient Israel<sup>1</sup>, moved after the destruction of the Second Temple. The event evolved around the sanctification of the month. The Jewish calendar combines lunar months with the solar year. A new month begins with the “rebirth” of the new moon. The proclamation of a new month is of utmost importance as the religious festivals are set in accordance with that declaration. Nowadays the beginning of the month is determined according to set charts. However, when the *Sanhedrin* existed the new moon was proclaimed on the basis of its observation by witnesses. The *Mishnah* describes a disagreement between Rabban Gamliel, President of the *Sanhedrin*, and Rabbi Yehoshua, an imminent scholar, regarding the reliability of witnesses to the new moon. Rabbi Yehoshua was of the opinion that their testimony did not make sense, while Rabban Gamliel accepted it. The *Mishnah* tells us:

Rabban Gamliel sent him a message: «I decree that you must appear before me with your staff and coins on the day which, according to your calculation, would be Yom Kippur», which would have been desecration of the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. Rabbi Yehoshua was in distress. However, we are told that in the end «he took his staff and his coins and went to Yavneh, to Rabban Gamliel, on the day of Yom Kippur according to his calculation. Rabban Gamliel stood up and kissed him on his head, and said to him: Go in

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<sup>1</sup> The word *Sanhedrin* [“assembly”] is of Greek origin *synedrion* [“sitting together”]. This is the name given to the council of seventy-one Jewish sages who constituted the supreme court and legislative body of Ancient Israel.

peace, my teacher and student – my teacher in wisdom and my student in that you followed my words»<sup>2</sup>.

Does the Yavneh episode bear any relevance to the theme of the present session dealing with freedom of religion?

I shall postpone this question till a later part of my intervention.

## 2. Two Meanings of “Freedom of Religion”

Religious tolerance seems problematic. If you know that truth lies with you why should you tolerate opposite teachings? Why should you sanction the freedom to practice a religion that you know is false?

The term “freedom of religion” is a modern one. It does not appear in Jewish classical texts. This term may convey two different messages: the freedom of “the other” to adhere to a different religion and the tolerance towards different streams within your own fate, as well as towards non-religious members of your community. In Judaism this dilemma is further complicated by the fact that Judaism is a nation-religion<sup>3</sup>. By belonging to the Jewish people one nilly willy belongs to the Jewish fate. By converting to Judaism you also become a daughter, or a son, of the Jewish people.

If we were to summarize the Jewish attitude, in a nutshell, it may be correct to state, that while Jewish religion is non-missionary outward, it is missionary indeed inward.

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<sup>2</sup> *Babylonian Talmud*, tractate *Rosh Hashanah*, 24b. The classic sources of Jewish law comprise Written Law, the Torah or Pentateuch together with the rest of the Hebrew Bible [Old Testament] and Oral Law, or the *Talmud*. The latter consists of the *Mishnah* and Gemara. The *Mishnah* is a codification of post-Biblical oral law, compiled in Palestine [*Eretz Israel*] circa year 200. The *Gemara* is a collection of commentaries and expositions on the *Mishnah*. There are two *Talmuds*: The *Jerusalem Talmud*, known also as the *Palestinian Talmud*, or the *Talmud of the West* and the *Babylonian Talmud*. The *Jerusalem Talmud* was compiled in the second half of the fourth century in Palestine and the *Babylonian Talmud* was compiled in Babylon in the sixth century. The *Babylonian Talmud* has traditionally been studied more widely and has had greater influence than the *Jerusalem Talmud*. Reference to the *Talmud*, or to a tractate in general, is always to the *Babylonian Talmud*.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. A. MAOZ, *State and Religion in Israel*, in M. MOR (ed.), *International Perspectives on Church and State*, Omaha 1993, 239, 243.

### 3. Freedom of Religion of “the Other”

Let's start with the external world. Before doing so it is wise to add a word of caution: It would be wrong to look for monolithic answers in Judaism. The Jewish fate is one of the oldest. It hardly speaks with one voice. Historical not less than theological aspects influenced its attitude<sup>4</sup>. What I will try to do for the rest of the paper is to describe the attitude of what I believe to be mainstream contemporary Judaism.

Thus, my statement that Jewish religion is not a missionary one might be challenged. Indeed in ancient times we may trace periods of massive, even forcible, conversion to Judaism. What signifies those episodes is that they were carried out for political, rather than religious, reasons and were not welcomed by the sages. Even nowadays, we may witness rather esoteric movements that advocate conversion in order to strengthen the Jewish people.

It would be accurate to state that from a Jewish point of view the option of conversion exists. However, there is an ostensible reluctance to conversion let alone massive conversion.

The attitude towards other fates might be split into three historical eras – past, present and future.

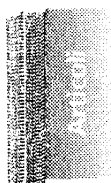
After the flood, we were told that «the people [were] one, and they [had] all one language»<sup>5</sup>. This people were all descendants of Noah, with whom God made a covenant, known as the Covenant of the Rainbow. According to Judaic sources the covenant included what is coined as «the seven Noahide commandments» that are binding upon all mankind<sup>6</sup>. Though known as Noahide commandments the *Talmud* tells us that six of the seven commandments were given already to Adam and Eve<sup>7</sup>. These commandments are of basic moral character, described by some philosophers as rules of natural law. However, one of the commandments prohibiting the cursing of God, as well as prohibition to worship other gods might be described as

<sup>4</sup> See: A. MAOZ, *Can Judaism Serve as a Source of Human Rights?*, in Heidelberg J. Int'l L. 64 (2004) 677, 714-718.

<sup>5</sup> *Genesis* 11,6.

<sup>6</sup> On the Noahide Laws see: A. LICHTENSTEIN, *The Seven Laws of Noah*, New York 1986<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate *Sanhedrin*, 56a/b, quoting *Tosefta* (a compilation of oral law from the period of the Mishnah) *Sanhedrin* 9,4. These commandments are based on exegesis of *Genesis* 2,16 and 9,4-6.



of religious flavor or even advocating monotheism, for they include the prohibition against blasphemy and the prohibition against idol worship<sup>8</sup>.

Maimonides states:

Whoever among the Nations fulfills the Seven Commandments to serve God belongs to the Righteous among the Nations, and has his share in the World to Come<sup>9</sup>.

Arguably this statement infers that the Noahide commandments are optional as only those who wish to be regarded as righteous must follow them. Yet, according to most authorities, these commandments are obligatory upon all descendants of Noah<sup>10</sup>. Maimonides teaches moreover, that a share in the World to Come is only earned if a person follows the Noahide laws specifically because they consider them to be of divine origin (through the Torah) and not if they simply consider them a good way to live (in which case they would simply be a wise person)<sup>11</sup>. This is a further demonstration of the religious nature of the commandments, yet other authorities do not follow Maimonides' distinction. In any case, we may justly infer that universal freedom of religion lies only beyond these laws. This applied to all mankind, as we must bear in mind that the Jewish people did not exist yet.

The second stage starts with the appearance of the Jewish people and the revelation on Mt. Sinai. However, in order to fully understand this stage it might be wise to move to the third phase – the end of the days. The prophet Micah tells us that «in the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths". The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem»<sup>12</sup>.

There is much debate as to which law will go out of Zion and what will be the

<sup>8</sup> Note, however, David Novak's reservation that these laws do not impose a positive obligation to worship God; in his book *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: An Historical and Constructive Study of the Noahide Laws*, Toronto 1983, 126 et seq.

<sup>9</sup> *Maimonides, Mishneh Torah* [verb., Repetition of the Law], known also as *Code of Maimonides, Hilkhot Melakhim u'Milhamot* [Laws of Kings and Wars] 8,14. Maimonides (Moshe ben Maimon, known as the Rambam), 12<sup>th</sup> century Spain, Pez and Egypt, is regarded as the greatest post-Talmudic codifier.

<sup>10</sup> See: M. J. BROYDE, *Jewish Law and the Obligation to Enforce Secular Law*, in D. SHATZ – C. WAXMAN (eds.), *The Orthodox Forum Proceedings VI: Jewish Responsibilities to Society*, 103-143 (1997), ch. II, sec. 1, reprinted in <http://www.jlaw.com/Articles/noach2.html> (last visited: 5 March, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> *Supra*, note 9.

<sup>12</sup> *Micha*, 4,1-3.

paths that the peoples will follow. Are they verbally the Torah of Israel or is it the ultimate word of the Lord, what may be referred to as scriptural truth.

I would like to attract your attention, however, to the fifth verse where Micah states: «All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever».

It is obvious that by this Micah refers to present reality for in the last days all the peoples will walk in the paths of the Lord.

This phrase may be understood as laying down the ground for contemporary attitude towards what may be coined, in present terminology, as freedom of religion of the non-Jews. For until the last days it is only the Children of Israel that must walk in the name of the Lord, while all other nations are free to walk in the name of their gods. Until then the Lord seems to entertain a dual character: he is the God of Israel yet at the same time he is the Lord of universe.

Maimonides makes an interesting observation. He notes that Moses bequeathed the *Torah* and commandments «to Israel only and to whomever wishes to proselyte from the other nations, but whoever does not wish, we do not coerce him to accept *Torah* and commandments»<sup>13</sup>. He continues and notes that «Moses our Master ordered, in the name of the Lord, to enforce all creatures on earth to accept all the commandments that were ordered to Noah, and whoever does not accept them will be put to death»<sup>14</sup>. Then he adds that a gentile must not observed the commandments given to the Israelites but only those given to Noah, and summarizes: «The general rule is: They are not permitted to innovate into religion and devise new commandments for themselves out of their own mind, but either he becomes a proselyte and accepts all the commandments, or adhere to his own religion, neither adding to it nor subtracting anything from it»<sup>15</sup>.

The attitude towards other religions is not unequivocal. From the passage in *Micah* we may infer the legitimacy of those religions yet it is obvious that they are of lower stature since in the Messianic days, when the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea<sup>16</sup>, they will be elevated to the utmost stage of walking in the paths of the Lord<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> *Code of Maimonides, Hilkhoh Melakhim u'Milhamot*, 8,10.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 8,13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 10,12.

<sup>16</sup> *Isaiah* 11,9.

<sup>17</sup> Moreover, a gentile who converts to Judaism may not renounce it and return to the status of a son of Noah; *Code of Maimonides, Hilkhoh Melakhim u'Milhamot*, 10,3.

We may find both in the Bible and in Judaic classic teachings harsh statements regarding idolatry<sup>18</sup> binding paganism with moral corruption. It is essential to note, in this context, that according to the sagas this does not apply to monotheistic faiths. In this regard a distinction was drawn between Islam and Christianity. Maimonides, and his disciples, while regarding Islam as pure monotheism, viewed Christian Trinity to be idolatrous<sup>19</sup>. On the other hand, sagas that lived in Christian countries ruled that «though they utter the name of an alien divinity, their intention is to the creator of heaven and earth»<sup>20</sup>. Nowadays there is full agreement that the rules regarding idolatrous religions apply to neither Muslims nor Christians. Rabbi Menachem haMeiri regarded both Muslims and Christians «nations bound by the way of religion», different from the pagan societies of ancient times, that were not restricted by religious laws and norms<sup>21</sup>. Thus both Christians and Muslims were regarded as «assemblies for the sake of Heaven, destined to endure; their intentions are for the sake of Heaven and their reward will not be withheld»<sup>22</sup>. Rabbi Joseph Albo even admitted the existence of «two divine Torahs, at the same time, for different nations»<sup>23</sup>. Christianity and Islam were not only regarded as legitimate religions but were even praised for removing the idols and subordinating their nations to the Noahide laws, thus giving them «moral attributes» far beyond what was demanded of them by the Torah of Moses<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> The Hebrew term for idolatry is *avodah zarah* (foreign worship) or *avodat kochavim umazalot* (worship of planets and constellations).

<sup>19</sup> See: *Code of Maimonides, Hilkhot Akkum* [Laws Concerning Idolatry and the Ordinances of the Heathens] 9.4. See, further, D. NOVAK, *The Treatment of Islam and Muslims in the Legal Writings of Maimonides*, in W. M. BRINNER – S. D. RICKS (eds.), *Studies in Islamic and Jewish Traditions*, vol. I, Atlanta 1986, 233-350; In., *Maimonides on Judaism and Other Religions*, Cincinnati 1977.

<sup>20</sup> Rema on *Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim*, sec. 156. The Rema [Rabbi Moshe Isserles], of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Poland, wrote glosses to the *Shulhan Arukh* [lit.: Set Table] a code of *halakha*, composed by Rabbi Joseph Caro, of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in *Eretz Israel* [Palestine], considered the most authoritative compilation of Jewish Law since the *Talmud*. The *Shulhan Arukh* is divided into four books, the first of which is *Orah Hayyim* [ways of life]. See also Rabbeinu Tam (Rabbi Jacob ben Meir, 12<sup>th</sup> century, France), *Tosafot* [Critical and explanatory glosses on the *Talmud*], *Sanhedrin* 63b.

<sup>21</sup> See: Rabbi Menachem haMeiri, 13<sup>th</sup> century Provence, *Beit haBechira* [the Temple, Novellae on the *Talmud*], Tractate *Avodah Zarah* [Idolatry], 2b, 22a, 26a.

<sup>22</sup> Rabbi Jacob Emden, of 17<sup>th</sup> century Germany, see: D. ROZEN, *Esau – Jacob's Brother: The Christian World Changes its Attitude Towards Judaism*, in *De'ot* 9 (October 2001) 16 (Heb.).

<sup>23</sup> JOSEPH ALBO, *Sefer HaIkkarim* [Book of Fundamentals], Jerusalem 1951, 155. See NOVAK, *supra*, note 8, at 336-340. Rabbi Albo lived in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Spain.

<sup>24</sup> JACOB EMDEN, *Letter at the conclusion of Seder Olam Zuta ve-Rabbah* [Small and Large Order of the World] (chronicle in Hebrew and Aramaic, starting with Adam and concluding with Mar Zutra IV of the 6<sup>th</sup> cen-

In concluding his essay *Judaism Views Other Religions*<sup>25</sup>, on which I heavily rely in this part of my paper, Aviezer Ravitzky deals with the transition from coexistence or tolerance to religious pluralism requires welcoming the existence of the other religion. He points out the difficulties involved in such move and suggests to «support the minimalist conception of the “Seven Noahide Laws”, which requires us to rest content with the basic decency of the other as the controlling criterion and not to look to the other faith’s special contribution to divine truth or make any positive doctrinal demands».

#### 4. Inward Freedom of Religion

So much for external freedom of religion. Let’s move now to its internal manifestations. Here leniency is even more problematic, for all the Children of Israel are part to the covenant with God at Mt. Sinai. The covenant was made with «all the men of Israel, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water»<sup>26</sup> and we are being told that the covenant was made also with their children and children’s children. Therefore, all Children of Israel are bound by the covenant and are not free to deviate from the paths of the Torah.

A further relevant component is the sense of mutual solidarity within Judaism, the sense that «All Israelites are guarantors to each other»<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, it is the duty of each and every Jew not only to abide by *Halakhah*, but also to make sure that their fellow Jew abides by it. It is the behavior of each and every Jew that may influence the revelation of eternal salvation<sup>28</sup>.

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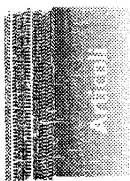
ture). See, further, A. MAOZ, *The Values of a Jewish and Democratic State*, in *Iyunei Mishpat* [Tel Aviv University Law Review] 19 (1995) 547, 578-587 (Heb.).

<sup>25</sup> A. RAVITZKY, *Judaism Views other Religions*, in J. D. GORT – H. JANSEN – H. M. VROOM (eds.), *Religions View Religions: Explorations in Pursuit of Understanding*, Amsterdam-New York 2006, 75-107.

<sup>26</sup> *Deuteronomy* 29,11.

<sup>27</sup> *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate *Shevuoth* [Oaths], 39a.

<sup>28</sup> *Vayikra Rabbah* [A collection of interpretations on Leviticus], portion 4, gives a vivid demonstration of this idea: «Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai taught: It can be compared to people on a boat. One took out an awl and began boring a hole in the boat beneath his seat. The others said to him: “What are you doing?”. He replied: “Is that any concern of yours? [I am not boring a beneath your seat] but only under mine”. They said: “But you will sink the whole ship, and we will all drown”».



It is therefore that Judaism cannot sanction freedom of religion from within. This is, however, an over simplistic statement of *halakhah*.

This might be a proper opportunity to return to the controversy over the sanctification of the month<sup>29</sup> and ask whether it bears any relevance to this query. The answer might be that this was a unique episode that has no implication on our issue. Sanctification of the month required declaration by court and as one sage stated, its decision is final whether right or wrong.

We may draw, however, from that episode an important conclusion: while there is freedom of thought it is not so with action, for Rabban Gamliel admitted that justice might have lied with Rabbi Yehoshua, yet he was forced to act in accordance with the court's ruling.

This distinction is even more emphasized in the case of the rebellious elder.

*Torah* tells us that a matter too hard for to judge should be brought before the levitical priests, or the magistrate in charge at the time and one must act «in accordance with the instructions given you and the ruling handed down to you», and must not deviate from them<sup>30</sup>. This function was carried out by the *Great Sanhedrin* who served as the final authority on Jewish law and any scholar who went against its decisions was regarded a rebellious elder and theoretically liable to capital punishment. However, the scholar does not become a rebellious elder by merely teaching his opposite opinion but only if he instructs others to act in accordance with his minority dissident opinion<sup>31</sup>.

We are told, in the *Talmud* of one of the leading Sages who was offered the position of President of the *Sanhedrin* if he rescind his differing opinions from that of the majority of the sages. He rejected the offer stating that he would rather be called a fool and not become an evil person by giving up the "truth" as he saw it<sup>32</sup>.

The same goes for the crime of «discovering new "faces" of Torah not in accordance with Halakhah». Again, this crime does not include one who merely reaches a conclusion different than that of the Sages<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> *Supra*, text to note 2.

<sup>30</sup> *Deuteronomy* 17,8-11.

<sup>31</sup> See: *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate *Sanhedrin*, 86b; *Code of Maimonides, Hilchot Mamrim* [Laws of Rebels], 3,6.

<sup>32</sup> *Mishnah, Eduyot*, 5,6.

<sup>33</sup> See: Rabbi Chaim Hirschensohn, *Sefer Yamim Mikedem* [The book of Ancient Days - The Biblical Chronology (Jerusalem 1908), 233-236 (Heb.)] For an English synopsis see <http://www.netivot-shalom.org.il/judaism/yamked.php>.

The *Talmud* is full with conflicting opinions and both majority and minority opinions are regarded to be «words of the living G-d.»<sup>34</sup>. The Talmud, moreover, does not regard the ruling opinion of the majority as more right than the minority opinion. We are even told that the conflicting opinion is reported since in the future it may become the decisive one<sup>35</sup>.

The right to deviate is not restricted to the academic sphere. There is no Pope in Jewish religion. Even the institute of Chief Rabbi, which is so common nowadays, is not a *Halakhic* institute. And since the abolition of the Sanhedrin Judaism lacks a central institute that will decide controversial issues. The rule is rather that each and every Jew may choose the rabbi whose rulings in *halakhic* matters he will obey<sup>36</sup>.

Referring to this phenomenon, Justice Menachem Elon, of the Supreme Court of Israel, wrote:

It is well-known that Jewish thought over the ages – including the halachic system... – is full of varying perceptions and conflicting approaches. No litigant finds it difficult to extract from the recesses of the sources some support for his own arguments and views. This applies to each and every issue... Certainly it goes without saying that these approaches and perceptions taken together have contributed to the deepening and enriching of Jewish thought. Those, however, who seek understanding must distinguish between that which of temporary significance and that which is of continuing importance, between the expression of the generally accepted opinion as against something exceptional... From this vast and abundant storehouse, the inquirer must draw liberally that which his time and place require, and which they themselves join the treasury of Jewish philosophy and Jewish heritage...

Pluralism is not a negative phenomenon or a defect: it is of the essence of the *Halacha*. «It is not a question of inconstancy or deficiency to say, Heaven forbid, that the *Torah* was thereby made into two *Torot*. On the contrary, that is the way of the *Torah*, the utterance of both are the words of the living God» (Hayim b. Betzalel, *Mayim Hayim*, Introduction). A multiplicity of views and approaches tend, moreover, to create harmony and uniformity through diversity. In the fine words of the latest of the codifiers, R. Y. M. Epstein (*Arukh haShulhan*, *Hoshen Mishpat*, Introduction) at the beginning of the century:

«Every dispute among the *Tanaim* [Sages of the *Mishna*], the *Amoraim* [Sages of the *Talmud*], the *Geonim* [Sages that operated from the end of the sixth century until the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century] and the *Poskim* [codifiers of *Halacha*] in pursuit of true understand-

<sup>34</sup> *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate *Eruvin* 13b; *Gittin* 6b; *Jerusalem Talmud*, Tractate *Berakhot* 1,4; *Mishnah*, *Yevamoth* 1,6.

<sup>35</sup> See: *Tosefta*, *Eduyyot* 1,4; *Commentary of Rabbi Samson of Sens to Mishnah, Eduyyot*, 1,5.

<sup>36</sup> See: A. MAOZ, *The Values of a Jewish and Democratic State*, in N. RAKOVER (ed.), *Jerusalem City of Law and Justice*, Jerusalem 1996, 147, 152.

ing constitutes the word of the living God and each has a place in the *Halacha*. That is indeed the glory of our holy and immaculate *Torah*. The whole *Torah* is called a song and it is the glory of song that its different sounds are various but harmonious»<sup>37</sup>.

Commenting on Rabbi Epstein's view, Elon wrote:

The *Halacha* is a mighty symphony made up of many different notes; therein lies its greatness and beauty. In every generation, it needs a great conductor, blessed with inspiration and vision, who can find the interpretation of its many individual notes that will please the ear and respond to the needs of the contemporary audience<sup>39</sup>.

Professor Rackman noted: «In halakhic literature one can find support for virtually every theory of legal philosophy known to secular jurisprudence. No one theory by itself dominates the scene»<sup>39</sup>.

All said so far is limited to activities within the boundaries of the Jewish faith and established rules. Judaism does not accept the right to trespass these boundaries. In cases that might have endangered the existence of Judaism and the future of the Jewish people and faith the establishment might have reacted sharply, in very rare cases even leading to ex-communication<sup>40</sup>.

Reverting to the theme of this paper, I would conclude by saying that Judaism does not recognize Freedom of Religion for its members. It does sanction, however, freedom within religion.

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<sup>37</sup> Election Appeal 2/84 *Neiman v. The Chairman of the Central Elections Committee to the Eleventh Knesset*, 39(2) P.D. [*Piskei Din* – Judgements of the Supreme Court of Israel] 225, quoted from N. RAKOVER, *Modern Application of Jewish Law: Resolution of Contemporary Problems According to Jewish Source*, Jerusalem 1993, vol. I, 209.

<sup>38</sup> M. ELON, *Jewish Law – History, Sources, Principles*, Philadelphia 1994, vol. III, 1452.

<sup>39</sup> E. RACKMAN, *Secular Jurisprudence and Halacha*, in *The Jewish Law Annual* 6 (1987) 45.

<sup>40</sup> As was the case with Shpinoza; see: J. W. WESSELIUS, *Spinoza's excommunication and related matters*, in *Studia Rosenthaliana* 24 (1990), nr. 1, 43. Note, however, the case of Elisha Ben Abuyah, a Jewish heretic of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Rabbi Meir, one of the leading sages during the *Mishnaic* period, and former disciple of Elisha, continued studying *Torah* from Elisha, even after he became a heretic. When asked how he could do so, the response was: «Rabbi Meir found a pomegranate. He ate its contents and discarded its shell»; *Talmud*, Tractate *Chagigah* 15b. Rabbi Meir said: «Do not look at the vessel, but rather at what it contains»; *Mishnah*, *Pirkei Avot* [teachings of the fathers] 4,20. Referring to this proverb, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, explained: «In addition to the obvious lesson, this clause also explains why Rabbi Meir could study Torah from Elisha. Rabbi Meir did not look at the "vessel" - Elisha and his conduct - "but rather at what it contains" - the Torah knowledge he possessed»; *Sichot Shabbat, Parashat* [Sabat talks, portion *Emor*] 5742-1982; *In The Paths of Our Fathers: Insights Into Pirkei Avos*, Adapted From The Works of The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson Shlita: <http://www.sichosinenglish.org/books/ethics/04-20.htm#t68> (last visited: 5 March, 2006).