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Rabbis for Religious Freedom & Equality in Israel



“The State of Israel... will guarantee freedom of religion and conscience...”
Israel's Declaration of Independence (May 1948)

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Editorial

January 25, 2015

Dear Friends

After the tragedy in France, a local woman said to me, "I know the right thing to do, I just don't want to do it." She didn't want to allow Muslims into the U.S. She knew it was wrong. She knew we have for decades protested that had Jews been allowed into the U.S. before WW II hundreds of thousands of lives may have been saved, with millions of Jewish descendants. Now others flee for their lives. But she is frightened. Perhaps two years ago you read about the neo-Nazi who murdered three religious Christians coming out of Jewish facilities in Overland Park, KS. He was gunning for Jews but couldn't distinguish between gentiles and Jews. This woman lives in one of those facilities. She's frightened. Who can blame her?

Discuss this and other issues with fellow RRFEI members in the network's new Facebook group by clicking [HERE!](#)

 join facebook group

A snippet from Jewish Theology and World Religions, Chapter 8

A book edited by Alon Goshen-Gottstein and Eugene Korn

In his book, [JEWISH THEOLOGY AND WORLD RELIGIONS](#), Rabbi Eugene Korn writes in summary in the eighth chapter:

"If one looks at this map temporally, one can plot four stages in the evolution of Jewish religious thinking about Christianity under different historical circumstances:

1. In the first and second centuries, Jewish Christians came to be regarded as heretics (minim) or apostates from Judaism. For Jews to believe in Jesus and the 'new covenant' was considered avodah zarah.
2. In the Middle Ages, when Jews lived in small communities in Christian Europe and were dependent on economic interaction with Christians, most Rishonim in Ashkenaz ruled (in accordance with the Talmudic opinion of R. Yohanan previously cited) that Christians were not idolaters, but they still considered belief in



Perhaps Nahman of Bratslav had it right, "The entire world is a narrow bridge, and the *ikar* is not to be afraid."

Do we judge others as *tselem elokim*, or is "V'ahavta l'reyecha komocha" really only about our relations with Jews? These questions confront us daily. With the publication of **Torah HaMelech** we shuddered at a halakhic justification for murder of "the other." With the publication of **Derech HaMelech** by Ariel Finkelstein, we are presented with a halakhic refutation.

We witness the human confrontation with the fear of the "other," whether the other is perceived as a Jew or a gentile.

On the right side column, Orthodox posek Rabbi Yaakov Ariel speaks of basic human decency, a proto-Toraitic understanding, that murder is wrong. Anything forbidden to gentiles in the Noahide commandments is forbidden also to Jews.

I write this knowing that our mutual daily concern in RRFEI is the soul of the Jewish people. Here are two links to important articles by Tamar Rotem [\[link\]](#), writing about changes in the Haredi world; and

Christian doctrine to be illegitimate avodah zarah.

3. *In the late Middle Ages and early modernity, the majority of Aharonim did not consider Christianity to be avodah zarah for non-Jews.*
4. *From the seventeenth century to the twentieth, when Christian toleration of Jews grew, Christianity as a positive historical and theological phenomenon for non-Jews that helped spread fundamental beliefs of Judaism (for example, God, revelation, and the Noahide commandments) and thus advanced the Jewish religious purpose.*

... Jews who have been touched by modernity and who value openness to Western culture, dignified relations with Christians, and appreciation of Christianity's moral and spiritual values can also find ample halakhic justification for their aspirations."

Basic human decency: a proto-Toraitic understanding

by Rabbi Yaakov Ariel, Orthodox Posek



האם הפוסק באמת יכול לגשת להלכה כשיש לו הנחות יסוד תורניות מוקדמות? מסתבר שלא רק שהוא יכול, אלא הוא אף חייב, במיוחד כאשר הוא דן בדיני נפשות. בהקשר זה ראוי לראות את דבריו של פוסק מובהק כמו הרב יעקב אריאל, על מספר רבנים ש"הקלו" בהריגת גוי לפני כחמש עשרה שנה:

השאלה הבסיסית היא: מהי נקודת המוצא לכל דיון בדיני נפשות? האם נקודת המוצא היא החרדה מפני העבירה החמורה של שפיכות דמים של כל אדם ואדם, והיתר ליטול נשמתו של אדם הוא חידוש ואין לך בו אלא חידוש, או שנקודת המוצא הפוכה, אדם שאינו מישראל הוא חלילה כדגי הים והאיסור לשפוך את דמם של חלק מבני האדם הוא החידוש? לא מצינו חלילה היתר כל שהוא לאיסור חמור זה של שפיכות דמים, שלא כפי שת"ח שלא שימשו כל צרכם התבטאו בתקשורת שלפי ההלכה מותר, כביכול, להרוג גוי. אין ספק שאת שורש העיוות הנורא הזה יש לחפש במידותיו של האדם, ביראת שמים הבסיסית שלו, בדרך ארץ שקדמה לתורה. המחריד הוא שצורבים שלא פסקו מעולם בדיני עגונות והפללות, "פסקו" בהבל פיהם בדיני נפשות, כשחסר להם הרקע הבסיסי לעצם הדיון בנושא כה רגיש, ששפיכות דמים היא העבירה החמורה ביותר בתורה. ולא עוד אלא שהוציאו דיבתם הרעה לתקשורת לתת חרב בידה נגד תורת ישראל, לומדיה ומקיימיה.

Anshel Pfeffer [\[link\]](#), predicting that a family leaving the Haredi world is just the tip of what's coming. You will see that some in Israel are naturally, on their own, arriving at some of our shared conclusions: that the Chief Rabbinate of Israel has no business controlling people's lives, that Jews should be allowed to freely choose our religious practices.

Even so, the struggle for the Jewish soul continues. Who gets to define legitimate Judaism? Which Jews does the Chief Rabbinate represent? How do we build a Jewish state for all of the world's Jews?

Please take a look at the articles, and let us know in the Facebook group for RRFEI [\[link\]](#) what you think.

Kol tuv,

Mark

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Resources

- [Chief Rabbi Lau attacks Bennett over pluralism](#)
- [J-REC / AJC Mission to Israel](#)
- [Giyur K'halacha](#)
- [Acts of violence](#)
- [Kashrut regulations for hotels and event halls](#)

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Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel represents a broad spectrum of Jewish belief and practice, and champions the values of religious freedom and equality fundamental to World Jewry, in partnership with Hiddush for the realization of these principles in Israel and the Diaspora.

Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel

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