

Current Jewish Questions

Flawed and Fallen Rabbis

I. Recent Examples

1. Baruch Lanner

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baruch_Lanner

In 2000, an investigative series published in The Jewish Week alleged that Lanner had physically and sexually abused young people for decades. Lanner resigned the day after it was published. The story, "Stolen Innocence," later won an award for "meritorious journalism."

An investigation was conducted by the Orthodox Union (OU). The investigating committee, headed by then-Hillel President Richard Joel, spent over \$1 million interviewing more than 140 people and issued a 330-page report detailing the abuse. The report alleged that Lanner had physically and emotionally abused dozens of teenagers, including fondling girls and kneeling boys in the groin, and that the abuse had begun in 1970. As a result of the report, the executive vice president of the OU, Rabbi Raphael Butler, resigned. He had been criticized for failing to act on earlier complaints.

Lanner was convicted in 2002 of sexually abusing two teenage girls who attended the religious school where he had been principal, and sentenced to seven years in prison. An appeals court dismissed one of the child endangerment charges in 2005. He was released on parole on January 10, 2008, and will remain on parole for four years.

2. Leib Tropper

<http://nypost.com/2009/12/20/tal-mood-for-love-sex-tape-rabbi-tries-to-share-hottie/>

A prominent Orthodox rabbi has been caught on tape discussing his apparent love affair with a shiksa he was converting to Judaism — whom he allegedly also pushed to have sex with his friends.

Rabbi Leib Tropper of Rockland County is heard encouraging pretty, blond Shannon Orand of Houston to participate in phone sex and actual sex with men the rabbi knows, including one he calls "the Satmar guy."

Tropper, who calls the woman "darling" and "cutie pie," talks about his own love affair with her at one point, saying: "I want to squeeze you."

He also fantasized about rape. "I could role-play a rape with you but I couldn't actually rape you — you know what I'm saying, darling — does that make sense?" he asks.

3. Motti Elon

<http://www.jewishpress.com/news/breaking-news/guilty-rabbi-motti-elon-convicted-of-sexual-assault/2013/08/07/>

Three years after the scandal exploded, shaking up the Religious Zionist movement, a magistrate court in Jerusalem found Rabbi Motti Elon, scion of an exulted family of scholars and public servants, and himself a charismatic teacher and leader, guilty of sexual assault on a minor.

The indictment against Rabbi Elon charged him with indecent assault and indecent assault against a minor using his position as the victim's mentor.

4. Michael Broyde

<http://newsdesk.tjctv.com/2013/04/the-rabbi-behind-the-screen/>

A leading Orthodox rabbi and esteemed law professor appears to have created a fake professional identity which he used to gain access to members-only correspondence of a rival rabbinic group and tout his own work. The fake identity may also have been used to submit letters to scholarly journals.

Rabbi Hershel Goldwasser has been published in multiple scholarly journals and been a part of numerous online dialogues with other Orthodox rabbis. But Goldwasser does not appear to be a real person. In examining voter registration records, contacting rabbis in areas where he was said to have lived, and in research by yeshiva archivists, no record of his existence has been found over the course of The Jewish Channel's investigation. Yet the Goldwasser character's name and e-mail address have been used to publish correspondence that frequently touts Broyde's work. The Goldwasser character has generated correspondence over nearly 20 years. Going back to the early 1990s, the Goldwasser character has published letters in such well-regarded journals of Jewish thought as Tradition and Conservative Judaism.

5. George Finkelstein and Macy Gordon

<http://forward.com/articles/171993/yeshiva-u-rabbi-george-finkelstein-acted-inappropri/?p=all>

Rabbi George Finkelstein was quietly forced out of Yeshiva University High School for Boys in 1995 because of inappropriate wrestling with students that some of them considered abusive....

Although former students of Y.U.'s high school long complained about Finkelstein's behavior to staff members and administrators — both while he worked at the school and after he left — Y.U. appears never to have reported the complaints to police. Nor did Y.U. open an investigation until December 2012, when the Forward published allegations that Finkelstein and another former Y.U. staff member, Rabbi Macy Gordon, had sexually, emotionally and physically abused students over decades. Finkelstein and Gordon deny the abuse charges.

6. Barry Freundel

http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/crime/police-arrest-georgetown-rabbi-on-voyeurism-charge/2014/10/14/15a73206-53cc-11e4-809b-8cc0a295c773_story.html

A prominent modern Orthodox rabbi at a Georgetown synagogue was arrested by D.C. police on Tuesday morning and charged with voyeurism, according to a department spokeswoman.

Law enforcement authorities said the case involves a hidden camera but gave conflicting accounts of where the alleged voyeurism took place. Both the synagogue bathroom and the mikvah, where ritual bathing takes place, were mentioned.

<http://newsdesk.tjctv.com/2014/10/claim-freundel-innovated-practice-dunking-to-record-candidates-for-conversion/>

The rabbi arrested Tuesday on charges of voyeurism was recording women in the ritual bath of his synagogue going back to at least 2012, according to a woman who spoke with law enforcement Wednesday — in a practice that appears to be widespread and particularly focused on candidates for conversion. In a multi-part investigation conducted over more than a year by The Jewish Channel, at least six women told TJC of the process they underwent for conversion training with Rabbi Barry Freundel, pointing to several anomalies in his training methods — including an effort to get them alone in the ritual bath prior to conversion, in a practice they referred to as "practice dunking."

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/10/15/d-c-rabbi-charged-with-voyeurism-took-cross-country-trip-with-a-woman-other-than-his-wife.html>

Documents obtained by The Jewish Channel several months ago and reviewed The Daily Beast reveal that Freundel was booked on a cross-country trip with a woman who was not his wife this year, which is prohibited under Orthodox laws of yichud. It's not clear when they met or what the exact nature of their relationship was.

7. Shlomo Carlebach

<http://lilith.org/articles/rabbi-shlomo-carlebachs-shadow-side/>

Among the many people Lilith spoke with, nearly all had heard stories of Rabbi Carlebach's sexual indiscretions during his more than four decade rabbinic career. Spiritual leaders, psychotherapists and others report numerous incidents, from playful propositions to actual sexual contact. Most of the allegations include middle-of-the-night, sexually charged phone calls and unwanted attention or propositions. Others, which have been slower to emerge, relate to sexual molestation.

For secular examples see:

Johnson, Paul. *Intellectuals*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.

II. Managing Expectations

<p>8. Ecclesiastes 7:20 For there is no one on earth who is righteous, who does only good does not sin.</p>	<p>8. קהלת ז:כ כִּי אָדָם אֵין צַדִּיק בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה טוֹב וְלֹא יַחֲטָא :</p>
<p>9. Psalms 130:3 If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?</p>	<p>9. תהלים קל:ג אִם עֲוֹנוֹת תִּשְׁמַר יְיָ-הֵאֱדַנְי מִי יַעֲמֹד :</p>

III. Value of Truth Independent of its Source

<p>10. Rambam Introduction to Shemoneh Perakim https://archive.org/stream/eightchaptersofm00maim/eightchaptersofm00maim_djvu.txt Further, I deem it fit to preface the commentary on the respective laws proper by some useful chapters, from which the reader may learn certain basic principles which may later serve as a key to what I am going to say in the commentary. Know, however, that the ideas presented in these chapters and in the following commentary are not of my own invention; neither did I think out the explanations contained therein, but I have gleaned them from the words of the wise occurring in the Midrashim, in the Talmud, and in other of their works, as well as from the words of the philosophers, ancient and recent, and also from the works of various authors, <u>as one should accept the truth from whatever source it proceeds.</u></p>	<p>10. שמונה פרקים לרמב"ם הקדמה וראיתי להקדים, קודם שאתחיל בפירוש הלכה הלכה, פרקים מועילים, וישגו לאדם מהם הקדמות, ויהיו לו גם כן כמפתח למה שאנו עתידים לפרש. ודע, כי הדברים אשר אומר אותם באלו הפרקים, ובמה שיבוא מן הפירוש, אינם עניינים שחידשתים אני מעצמי, ולא פירושים שבדיתים, אלא הם עניינים מלוקטים מדברי החכמים, במדרשות ובתלמוד וזולתו מחיבוריהם, ומדברי הפילוסופים גם כן, הקדומים והחדשים, ומחיבורי הרבה בני אדם. <u>ושמע האמת ממי שאמרה.</u></p>
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IV. Personality of a Halakhically Competent Teacher

<p>11a. M. Avot 2:5 He [Hillel] would also say: A boor cannot be sin-fearing, an ignoramus cannot be pious, a bashful one cannot learn, <u>a short-tempered person cannot teach...</u></p>	<p>11. משנה אבות ב:ה הוא [הלל] היה אומר אין בור ירא חטא ולא עם הארץ חסיד ולא הביישן למד <u>ולא הקפדן מלמד...</u></p>
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<p>11b. B. Eiruvim 54b R. Akiva stated: Whence is it deduced that a man must go on teaching his pupil until he has mastered the subject? From Scripture where it says: And teach thou it to the children of Israel. And whence is it deduced that it must be taught until the students are well versed in it? From Scripture where it says. Put it in their mouths. And whence is it inferred that it is also his duty to explain to him the reasons? It has been said: Now these are the ordinances which thou shalt put before them.</p>	<p>תלמוד בבלי עירובין נד:ב רבי עקיבא אומר: מניין שחייב אדם לשנות לתלמידו עד שילמדנו - שנאמר ולמדה את בני ישראל. ומנין עד שתהא סדורה בפיהם - שנאמר שימה בפיהם. ומניין שחייב להראות לו פנים - שנאמר ואלה המשפטים אשר תשים לפניהם.</p>
<p>12a. B. Bava Batra 21a R. Samuel b. Shilath: When you punish a pupil, only hit him with a shoe latchet. The attentive one will read [of himself] and if one is inattentive put him next to a diligent one.</p>	<p>12. תלמוד בבלי בבא בתרא כא:א וא"ל רב לרב שמואל בר שילת: כי מחית לינוקא, לא תימחי אלא בערקתא דמסנא, דקארי - קארי, דלא קארי - ליהוי צוותא לחבריה.</p>
<p>12b. Rambam Talmud Torah 2:2 A teacher may employ corporal punishment to cast fear upon [the students]. However, he should not beat them cruelly, like an enemy. Therefore, he should not beat them with a rod or a staff, but rather with a small strap.</p>	<p>רמב"ם תלמוד תורה ב:ב ומכה אותן המלמד להטיל עליהם אימה, ואינו מכה אותם מכת אויב מכת אכזרי, לפיכך לא יכה אותם בשוטים ולא במקלות אלא ברצועה קטנה</p>

V. The Lessons from Elisha Ben Avuyah / Acher

<p>13. B. Haggigah 15b Aher's daughter [once] came before Rabbi and said to him: O master, support me! He asked her: 'Whose daughter art thou?' She replied: I am Aher's daughter. Said he: Are any of his children left in the world? Behold it is written: He shall have neither son nor son's son among his people, nor any remaining in his dwellings. She answered: <u>Remember his Torah and not his deeds</u>. Forthwith, a fire came down and enveloped Rabbi's bench. [Thereupon] Rabbi wept and said: If it be so on account of those who dishonor her, how much more so on account of those who honor her!</p> <p>But how did R. Meir learn Torah at the mouth of Aher? Behold Rabbah b. Bar Hana said that R. Johanan said: What is the meaning of the verse, For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the Law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts? [This means that] <u>if the teacher is like an angel of the Lord of hosts, they should seek the Law at his mouth, but if not, they should not seek the Law at his mouth!</u> — Resh Lakish answered: R. Meir found a verse and expounded it [as follows]: Incline thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thy heart unto my knowledge. <u>It does not say, 'unto their knowledge', but 'unto my knowledge'</u>. R. Hanina said, [he decided it] from here: Harken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house etc. The verses contradict one another! <u>There is no contradiction: in the one case Scripture refers to an adult, in the other to a child</u> (An adult, unlike a child, can use discrimination, and avoid the teacher's wrongdoing; hence the last two verses permit him to learn even from a heretic).</p>	<p>13. תלמוד בבלי חגיגה טו:ב בתו של אחר אתיא לקמיה דרבי, אמרה ליה: רבי, פרנסני. אמר לה: בת מי את? - אמרה לו: בתו של אחר אני. אמר לה: עדיין יש מזרעו בעולם? והא כתיב לא נין לו ולא נכד בעמו ואין שריד במגוריו! - אמרה לו: <u>זכור לתורתנו</u> ואל תזכור מעשיו. מיד ירדה אש ושכסכה ספסלו של רבי. בכה ואמר רבי: ומה למתגנין בה - כך, למשתבחין בה - על אחת כמה וכמה.</p> <p>ורבי מאיר היכי גמר תורה מפומיה דאחר? והאמר רבה בר בר חנה אמר רבי יוחנן: מאי דכתיב כי שפתי כהן ישמרו דעת ותורה יבקשו מפיהו כי מלאך ה' צבאות הוא, <u>אם דומה הרב למלאך ה' צבאות - יבקשו תורה מפיהו. ואם לאו - אל יבקשו תורה מפיהו!</u> - אמר ריש לקיש: רבי מאיר קרא אשכח ודרש הט אזנך ושמע דברי חכמים ולבך תשית לדעתי. <u>לדעתם לא נאמר, אלא לדעתי</u>. רב חנינא אמר מהכא: שמעי בת וראי והטי אזנך ושכחי עמך ובית אביך וגוי. קשו קראי אהדדי! - לא קשיא, הא - בגדול, הא - בקטן.</p>
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When R. Dimi came [to Babylon] he said: In the West, they say: R. Meir ate the date and threw the kernel away. Rava expounded: What is the meaning of the verse: I went down to the garden of nuts, to look at the green plants of the valley etc.? Why are the scholars likened to the nut? To tell you that just as [in the case of] the nut, though it be spoiled with mud and filth, yet are its contents not contemned, so [in the case of] a scholar, although he may have sinned, yet is his Torah not contemned.

Rabbah b. Shila [once] met Elijah. He said to him: What is the Holy One, blessed be He, doing? He answered: He utters traditions in the name of all the Rabbis, but in the name of R. Meir he does not utter. Rabbah asked him, Why? — Because he learnt traditions at the mouth of Aher. Said [Rabbah] to him: But why? R. Meir found a pomegranate; he ate [the fruit] within it, and the peel he threw away! He answered: Now He says: Meir my son says: When a man suffers, to what expression does the Shechinah give utterance? 'My head is heavy, my arm is heavy'. If the Holy One, blessed be He, is thus grieved over the blood of the wicked, how much more so over the blood of the righteous that is shed.

כי אתא רב דימי אמר, אמרי במערבא : רבי מאיר אכל תחלא ושדא שיחלא לברא. דרש רבא : מאי דכתיב אל גנת אגוז ירדתי לראות באבי הנחל וגוי למה נמשלו תלמידי חכמים לאגוז? לומר לך : מה אגוז זה, אף על פי שמלוכלך בטיט ובצואה - אין מה שבתוכו נמאס, אף תלמיד חכם, אף על פי שסרח - אין תורתו נמאסת.

אשכחיה רבה בר שילא לאלהו, אמר ליה : מאי קא עביד הקדוש ברוך הוא? אמר ליה : קאמר שמעתא מפומייהו דכולהו רבנן, ומפומיה דרבי מאיר לא קאמר. אמר ליה : אמאי? - משום דקא גמר שמעתא מפומיה דאחר. אמר ליה : אמאי? רבי מאיר רמון מצא, תוכו אכל, קליפתו זרק! אמר ליה : השתא קאמר : מאיר בני אומר : בזמן שאדם מצטער שכינה מה לשון אומרת - קלני מראשי, קלני מזרועי. אם כך הקדוש ברוך הוא מצטער על דמן של רשעים - קל וחומר על דמן של צדיקים שנשפך.

VI. Replacing a Teacher

14. B. Ta'anit 24a

Thereupon R. Jose b. Abin asked him: Why does not the Master add, 'and between the fins'? He replied : Are you not aware that R. Jose b. Abin had [already] stated this? [The former] retorted: I am R. Jose b. Abin. Thereupon R. Ashi enquired: Did you not frequent the discourses of R. Jose of Yokereth? He replied: Yes. R. Ashi then asked him: Why did you leave him, Sir, and come here? He replied: How could the man who showed no mercy to his son and daughter show mercy to me?

What happened to his son? Once R. Jose had day-laborers [working] in the field; night set in and no food was brought to them and they said to his son, 'We are hungry'. Now they were resting under a fig tree and he exclaimed: Fig tree, fig tree, bring forth thy fruit that my father's laborers may eat. It brought forth fruit and they ate. Meanwhile the father came and said to them, Do not bear a grievance against me; the reason for my delay is because I have been occupied up till now on an errand of charity. The laborers replied, May God satisfy you even as your son has satisfied us. Whereupon he asked: Whence? And they told him what had happened. Thereupon he said to his son: My son, you have troubled your Creator to cause the fig tree to bring forth its fruits before its time, may you too be taken hence before your time!

What happened to his daughter? He had a beautiful daughter. One day he saw a man boring a hole in the fence so that he might catch a

14. תלמוד בבלי תענית כד : אמר ליה : ולא סבר לה מר דההיא רבי יוסי בן רבי אבין אמרה? - אמר ליה : אנא ניהו. - אמר ליה : ולא קמיה דרבי יוסי דמן יוקרת הוה שכיח מר? - אמר ליה : (הין) +מסורת השי"ס : [הן] - אמר ליה : ומאי טעמא שבקיה מר ואתא הכא? - אמר ליה : גברא דעל בריה ועל ברתיא לא חס - עלי דידי היכי חיית?

בריה מאי היא - יומא חד הוו אגרי ליה אגרי בדברא, נגה להו ולא איתיה להו ריפתא. אמרו ליה לבריה : כפינן! הוו יתבי תותי תאינתא, אמר : תאנה, תאנה! הוציא פירותיך ויאכלו פועלי אבא. אפיקו ואכלו. אדהכי והכי אתא אבוה. אמר להו : לא תינקטו בדעתייכו, דהאי דנגהנא - אמצוה טרחנא, ועד השתא הוא דסגאי. אמרו ליה : רחמנא לישבעך כי היכי דאשבען בך. - אמר להו : מהיכא? אמרו : הכי והכי הוה מעשה. אמר לו : בני, אתה הטרחת את קונך להוציא תאנה פירותיה שלא בזמנה - יאסף שלא בזמנו.

ברתיא מאי היא? הויה ליה ברתיא בעלת יופי. יומא חד חזיא להווא גברא דהוה כריא בהוצא וקא חזי לה.

<p>glimpse of her. He said to the man, What is [the meaning of] this? And the man answered: Master, if I am not worthy enough to marry her, may I not at least be worthy to catch a glimpse of her? Thereupon he exclaimed: My daughter, you are a source of trouble to mankind; return to the dust so that men may not sin because of you.</p>	<p>אמר לו : מאי האי? - אמר ליה : רבי, אם ללוקחה לא זכיתי, לראותה לא אזכה? - אמר לה : בתי, קא מצערת להו לברייתא - שובי לעפריך, ואל יכשלו ביך בני אדם.</p>
<p>15. B. Bava Batra 21a Rava also said: If we have a teacher who gets on with the children and there is another who can get on better, we do not replace the first by the second, for fear that the second when appointed will become indolent.[Soncino – having no competition to fear] R. Dimi from Nehardea, however, held that he would exert himself still more if appointed: 'the jealousy of scribes increaseth wisdom.'</p>	<p>15. תלמוד בבלי בבא בתרא כא:א ואמר רבא : האי מקרי ינוקי דגריס, ואיכא אחרינא דגריס טפי מיניה - לא מסלקינן ליה, דלמא אתי לאיתרשולי. רב דימי מנהרדעא אמר : כ"ש דגריס טפי, קנאת סופרים תרבה חכמה.</p>
<p>16a. Shulhan Aruch Y.D. 245:18 If there is already a teacher of children, and someone who comes along who is better than he is, we replace the first with the second.</p> <p>16b. Shulhan Aruch Y.D. 246:8 A Rabbi who does not walk in the proper path, even if he is a wise sage and the entire nation needs him, we do not learn from him until he returns to good.</p>	<p>16. שו"ע יורה דעה רמה:יח אם יש כאן מלמד שמלמד לתינוקות, ובא אחר טוב ממנו, מסלקין הראשון מפני השני.</p> <p>שו"ע יורה דעה רמו סעיף ח הרב שאינו הולך בדרך טובה, אף על פי שחכם גדול הוא וכל העם צריכים לו, אין למדין ממנו עד שיחזור למוטב.</p>