

Jeremy Rosen - Was Alexander Good for the Jews

- Hello, everybody. So, today I'm going to talk about Alexander the Great. It's interesting that no other non-Jewish character is mentioned with such reverence and recurrence in Talmudic sources. Alexander the Great, as we know, conquered the known universe at the time, or almost all of it. The the death of his father, Philip of Macedon, he succeeded to the throne and proceeded to expand the Macedonian empire to conquer Greece, and then Asia Minor, then Persia down to Egypt, went as far as India. He had been educated by Aristotle. Aristotle, the greatest in many respects of the Greek philosophers, had given him a grounding in the science and rational argument of the time. And he, for the first time, built up a systematic army, according to, if you like, rational principles rather than ideas handed down from a previous generation, which enabled him to be innovative like nobody else was before him.

Although that's not entirely true. Before Alexander the Great there was the Persian Empire founded by Cyrus. And Cyrus, in founding this empire, insisted that every religion should be allowed to practise whatever it wanted in whichever way, so long as they accepted the authority of the Persian Empire. Alexander followed this example. And he said, "I don't mind what everybody worships in the places I conquer, so long as they accept me as the authority, as the great guide." And having succeeded in 336 before the common era, he attacked the Persian Empire in 334, having united the Greeks behind him and melded them into one army. And then he moved on down to Egypt. And from Egypt, he then went across to Babylon and then into India before coming back when his troops said we've had enough travelling and died either of illness or poison or drunkenness, there's still a debate, in Babylon at the end of his life, at 323. Alexander came down to Egypt and he passed the coastal plain, he conquered Ake, today, he went on to conquer Gaza and went down to Egypt.

There is, in Greek sources, no mention of his direct encounter with Jerusalem. In Jerusalem at his time, the Judeans, they were called Judeans because they had rebuilt the state. Those Judeans who'd been exiled originally by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon stayed together, reconstituted community, and some of those Judeans came back to rebuild Judea. And it was from Judea that you get the name of the Jews as opposed to the Israelites or the sons of Israel. They were, in Jerusalem, ruled by the high priest. The high priest was established by the Persians as the official representative of the Jewish community. Now, whereas originally the Bible says quite specifically that priests should not become wealthy landowners and forbade them for owning land. By the time we get to the Persian high priests in Jerusalem, they've become very wealthy, and unfortunately the wealth has corrupted them, and by and large they have this tendency to fight for power between themselves.

But Alexander comes down to meet them and comes past Jerusalem, and Jerusalem sent the high priest down to meet Alexander. And his mission to go to meet Alexander was that he wanted to make sure that there'd be no effigies or idols of Alexander in the temple. They were prepared to accept his authority politically, but of course not religiously. Now, according to the Talmud, it was the high priest Shimon Hatzadik who happened to be, if you like, the last of the

great, honest, good priests who went down to meet him. And he went down dressed in his magnificent high priest clothes. And Alexander the Great was so impressed by this that he agreed to Shimon's request not to put an effigy in the temple, and instead agreed that all Jewish children born that year, all the boys would be called Alexander, and then went on his way down to Egypt. It's interesting that this same story, this tradition is told by Josephus who lived some 300 years later, but he talked about a high priest called Judah, and he talked about Alexander having a general called Parmenion who objected to such tolerance, but Alexander insisted on it.

But there you have the two different versions of the encounter with Alexander. There was another version which says Alexander actually came up to Jerusalem and was shown around the palace, and he was shown around the palace in shoes that were soled with diamonds and jewels so that his feet shouldn't actually touch the Holy Stones of the temple. But again, that is, most of this is all myth. And the Talmud includes an amazing range of myths about Alexander the Great. The mere fact that they mention these myths shows how seriously the Israelites took Alexander, and how much they respected him. So, the first of the myths in the Talmud is that when Alexander came down, all the different nations at the time gathered round to ask him to support them in their particular political arguments. So then, for example, Canaan the Canaanites who said, "the Israelites have no right to be here, the Judeans." Or the sons of Ishmael and the sons of Esau who said, "We have an equal right to this land."

And in addition, there were the Egyptians. And the Egyptians came, according to the Talmud, to Alexander with a request. They said, "Look, when the Israelites left, we gave them gold and silver in large amounts of money, we want that money back." You already have here the beginning of an idea that this is all about money. On the other hand, from the Ishmaelites and the Esaus, you already have the arguments about who does this land belong to? The same sort of arguments that we've been hearing for thousands of years. And the Talmud then tells a story that there was this man called who was a hunchback, and he went to the rabbis and said, "Look, they're all claiming in the Supreme Court or the International Court of Human Rights, they're all claiming that we have no rights. Let me go and plead. I'm a humble man with a hunchback, and if I lose, nobody's going to say it's too serious 'cause I'm a nobody. And if I win, I win." And so, what happened is Alexander, according to the myth, agreed. So, up come the Egyptians and they say to Alexander, "They owe us money."

And says, "Well, look, let me argue back again. What's your source? Your source of the Bible? Fair enough, my source is the Bible. The Bible says that for 400 years, all of us were your slaves. If you compensate us for the 400 years of slavery, then we'll compensate you for any golden silver we took." And at that moment, according to the text, they were so embarrassed, they turned their heels and went back to Egypt. And similar debates went on with the Ishmaelites and the Esauites and the Canaanites and everybody else. And of course this was the basis of all those jokes that you must have heard of debates later on under Christianity between bishops and Jews trying to win the argument for Christianity, and the Jews having to defend themselves and coming back with some very clever and sometimes funny responses. But Alexandra is seen as the objective rationalist, the guy who's open to argument, who's not

prejudiced, who's prepared to listen. And there are other myths.

There's another myth that talks about Alexander having a debate with the elders of the south, and asking them what their opinion is. How did the world come to be created? What came first, the bottom or the top, the earth or the sky? What is the right approach for somebody to deal with the challenges of life? Is wealth the most important thing? Is power the most important thing? Or indeed, is love the most important thing? And then the Talmud goes on to talk about Alexander being very impressed by the debate and the argument, goes on his journeys and bumps into a tribe of Amazons, of these powerful women, and he starts having discussion with them. And they, and he exchanged witticisms. But again, they are showing that there is no single way of running this universe. We look at things from different perspectives. There's a rational perspective, there's a mystical way of looking at things. That this wisdom encourages us to examine, not just to accept blindly. And the story goes that when Shimon Hatzadik, Simone the Righteous, came out of his encounter with Alexander the Great, he came home and he said, "We are never going to be able to overpower these people."

They're so powerful, they're so strong. Their cultural influence is going to be so great. Our only response can be to study Torah. So, we have to fall back on studying our traditions, which Alexander agrees, he respects, and we can't beat them at their game, but we might be able to survive using our game." And this then introduces the area of debate about the influence of Alexander the Great on Jewish life and Jewish thought. Because Alexander the Great, as we know, inherits the great Greek philosophical traditions. Essentially, there are two great Greek philosophical traditions. There is the stoic approach to life, which essentially says life is meaningless. We're pure physical beings that collapse into dust. We are full of vanity, vanity of vanities, as King Solomon says, nothing is worthwhile. We can live in a barrel like Diogenes. And on the other hand, you have the epicureans. And the epicurean say we must enjoy life. It's true life ends in the grave and in dust, but at least while we are here, let's take advantage of it and enjoy it.

And in effect, these two conflicting ideas of great philosophy continued long, long after Alexander the Great. Alexander's great contribution was that wherever he travelled, he took his culture with him, the Greek approach. And not only did he take his culture with him, but he encouraged his generals to interact with the cultures he encountered in the East, going as far as India. And encouraged them to marry local princesses and to settle down. So, he was interested not just in conquering, but spreading Greek ideals. And it would seem that, in principle, the Judeans, the Israelites were happy with this, and that's exactly why they respected his wisdom, thought he was so wise and thought it important to put these ideas down in their holy books or in the Talmudic tradition. But then at the same time, there is competition between the Greek way of looking at life and the Jewish way of looking at life. The Jewish way of looking at life is more holistic. It doesn't see this difference between bad and good. It doesn't see this difference between a rigid way of life with all discipline and a non-disciplined way of life that includes pleasure. It wants to combine both of them.

And that's why the Torah includes pleasure as well as discipline. And so, for them, it wasn't the idea of Greek science, which is what Aristotle was a great founder of, they had a problem with; not with their technology, not with their system of education, on the contrary, they borrowed all these things, they integrated those things into the Jewish system, that's where the Yeshiva, the academy comes from. It imitates the Greek idea of coming together, the symposium, exchanging ideas and challenging each other, the Talmudic method in many respects. So, if this is the clash, how does the Talmud deal with it? And surprisingly, the Talmud, several places, talks about , the wisdom of Greece. Or , the Greek wisdom. And there's a slight difference between the two of them. And there are certain places in the Torah where it says quite specifically that one mustn't teach one's children Greek wisdom.

Now, the big question is, look, Greek wisdom is philosophy; are you telling me we mustn't study philosophy? If so, how come the great Maimonides in the first millennium, the greatest of all Jewish thinkers was an Aristotelian thinker? Or even before him, Philo of Alexandria at the year zero was a follower of Plato, a great Greek philosopher. They weren't excommunicated, they weren't considered bad Jews for that. So, what does the Talmud mean when it talks about being forbidden? And there are many different interpretations of what this actually means. Actually, the first example of saying is forbidden is in the Talmud given about an event that happened during the Hasmoneans. And a time when the Jews who were holding the control of the temple were being challenged by the Assyrian Greeks. And the Assyrian Greeks sent were, the temple accepted all kinds of sacrifices from all people all the time, it didn't matter what so long as they were kosher animals, but on one occasion, the Syrians decided to send up a pig in a basket.

And when that pig was climbing up the wall of the temple, the rabbis of priests looking down said, "Ah! This is what Greek civilization brings us; we mustn't have anything to do with it!" And of course, that was all a metaphor. It was a metaphor precisely because at that moment, the Syrian Greeks were trying to stop the Jews retaining their religious identity, which Alexander the Great had always stood for. Then you have the idea that means: trying to find solutions purely on a rational basis, which is why in that part of the Talmud where they talk about mysticism, they contrast mysticism with the idea of Greek rational thought. And their argument again, is not that Greek rational thought is no good, just that it's only one way of looking at things. There's got to be another way of looking at things which is not so rigidly rational. After all, we want to try to bring people together, and different people think in different ways, we must be flexible to different approaches, so long as these different approaches don't undermine ours. They might run far parallel, but don't undermine.

And that's where things began to go wrong with the idea of Greek civilization. Because by the time we come to the rise of Christianity, and Christianity, as it came to be, not as it originated, but as it came to be, took on much of the Greek way of thinking. The idea that the body was not as good as the soul or the spirit. That one had to control the body rigidly. And the way to do that was, for example, by celibacy or by a monastic existence where it was the soul and being the mind, and the mind being greater than matter. Whereas in, if you like, a holistic interpretation, mind and body are part of the same structure, they're not in conflict, but they have different roles

and different functions. So, it was because the early Christians were essentially followers of a Greek way of life. This Greek way of life, of course, had been absorbed by the Romans, Romans essentially were Greek of culture, they added on a militaristic, industrialised, commercial engineering technical empire onto the Greek ideas, which by then Greece was no longer significant, and so, Greek came to be identified with Christianity.

And indeed, the early force of Christianity was what we called Byzantium. It was around that area, which is now in the Ottoman Empire. And they were the major challenges at that moment to the Jewish people because they were proselytising. Whereas before Christianity became the religion of the of the Roman Empire, all religions were treated equally as they continue to be during the Persian Empire and the Roman Empire. But just as the Talmud has inordinate respect for Alexander, the one man after Alexander the Talmud has inordinate respect for is a man called Antoninus. We don't know exactly who Antoninus was because this is around the time when the head of the Jewish community in Jerusalem was Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi, Rabbi Judah the Prince, who had written down the oral law, the Mishnah, which then became the core of the Talmud. And as the head of the Jewish community, he was the main man that the Romans related to. And as they related to him, he had to engage with them.

And in engaging with them, it records that he spoke to this man, Antoninus. Now, the most famous Antoninus round about that time, and lots of Romans call themselves Antoninus one way or another after Mark Anthony, was Marcus Aurelius. Marcus Aurelius the most, if you like, philosophical of all the Roman emperors. And very tolerant; tolerant of the Jews. He came after Hadrian who persecuted the Jews. He was open-minded. And the Talmud records a whole series of interactions between Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi and Antoninus. Very similar to the reactions that they record earlier in relation to Alexander the Great. How does the world work? What comes first? What is more important? For example, they have a debate about the soul. When does the soul enter the body? Does it enter the body at conception or does it enter the body at birth? Does it enter the body at different stages? All things which differentiate nowadays, for example, the Catholic attitude to abortion, which is it's never allowed, almost never, as opposed to the Jewish version which says, no, during the first 40 days, no problem, and we can use it to save life.

Largely now taken over, but that's originally until relatively recently, this was a fundamental difference between Judaism and Catholicism and Christianity. So, these questions that are being asked are being asked by the rabbis of the Talmud, both of the Greeks, of the Romans; they have no problem inserting these conversations. They don't call them heretics, the Jews. You mustn't speak to the non-Jews. You mustn't have anything to do with them. On the contrary, this is part of their tradition. And there's one small third link to the puzzle, and that is the Persian Empire. At this time, the Persian Empire had moved on from the Zoroastrian and from the earlier Persian societies, and there was now a king called Shapur, there were several Shapurs, but Shapur was the master of Persian jury. And the Talmud also recalls lots of conversations between Shapur and the rabbis. Actually, they also suggest that Shapur's mother was Jewish, but we have nothing to back that up. And Shapur sometimes could be pretty tough on Jews who

stepped out of line, but so long as they accepted him, there was no problem.

And so, again, you can see from this that what Alexander has done is he has in a sense opened up the minds of the Jewish scholars to awareness of scientific method, of other cultures, of other traditions. So, the question is, to this day, where does Alexander and the Greek tradition stand? And it's my opinion that western civilization has benefited enormously, of course, from Alexandria and the Greek tradition. But it has also suffered. It's suffered in the sense that we have come to assume too much, that it is rationalism, that the scientific approach is the only, certainly the correct approach to getting on with how this universe works. At the same time, when you look back at the Talmud, you see the Talmud has much more of a non-rational approach to life. There is a danger in both of them. The danger in the scientific method is that you become too dry, too technical, too specific, looking for the truth as if there are no other truths. And that, for example, is the origin; it goes back to the Socratic method and Aristotle and Plato who wanted to know the answer.

And as you know, even amongst themselves, they couldn't agree about the answer, but that was the quest for, so to speak, the holy grail of the answer to philosophy. At the same time, you have this, what we call this mystical tradition again that there is such a thing as experience, as emotion, as sensibility that can't be defined. You can't really define love. You might know it or recognise it when you see it, but you can't put it into a formula. And the role, therefore, of a spiritual approach was to recognise human limitations. There's more to this world than we know of in our philosophy. There are more things that we need to take into account. And all these ideas, in a sense, have entered our tradition. But when we look at the rational, we're inclined to go back to Alexander the Great. And of course, the tradition of Alexander the Great is one which is both a tribute and a warning. He is regarded as probably the greatest conqueror, the best general, the example of Plato's perfect scholar, warrior and Prince, the idea of the perfect human being.

And yet at the same time, he showed his failures, his driving his people too hard, too far in pursuit of his ideal, a kind of a, if you like, the man who Napoleon himself modelled on and made exactly the same mistakes as Alexander the Great did. And so, looking back, I think Alexander had a fundamental and a positive impact on Judaism. I think what developed out of Alexander afterwards came into conflict. The Jews always accepted that if you want to interact with non-Jewish society, to some extent you need to meet pay concessions. And so again, the Talmud mentions the fact that Rabbi Gamaliel, one of the later princes of the Jewish community, trained his sons to dress like Greeks, to have Greek haircuts, to speak in Greek and to interact with Greeks. The Talmud also says you can say blessings in Greek. So, their objection was not to Greek culture in the broader sense. Some people even suggest there were certain special codes that the Greek had, and that those shouldn't be used, magic spells that they had and those shouldn't be used.

But still to this day, scholars debate what exactly it was about Greek that offended the Jews, and what it was about Greek and Greece that impressed them. And yet, it's clear from our Holy

Books, the amount of time and space that's devoted to Alexander is that he was regarded as a major positive influence on Jewish life. And this is where I rest my case for today. So, now we come to questions and answers. So, I hope there are people who are going to start challenging me on this a little bit. Maybe expanding the idea. So, if you'd like to put your questions in, I'll try and deal with them as best I can. I'm not getting any questions. Am I getting a chat? Ah. Here we've got one.

Q&A and Comments:

Q: "My uncle historian says that our surname Shenderovich comes from respect to Alexander the Great. Do you agree?"

A: Do I agree? Yes, I certainly do agree. Shender comes from Alexander. So Shenderovich is Alexander-rovich. And so, this is an accepted Jewish name, Shender, Alexander. This is the name that was given to Jewish boys born in that year. So yes, that's quite true.

Now we go on to Alexander and the Gordian Knot. Yes, that's interesting. There's a myth about the Gordian Knot. And the myth is that in Asia Minor, there was this king, of course you've heard of Midas, and this is a descendant of Midas, the famous king; and he was worried about succession. And he got this chariot, and he tied it up into his temple, and he tied it up so intricately and so difficultly. And he said, "Whoever can un-knot this knot of mine, called the Gordian Knot, this will rule the world." And when Alexander came through and heard this story, he said to hell with trying to undo the knot, he took out his sword, he cut it and cut the knot, and that's why he was the heir and why he was able to conquer as much as he did. Of course, this myth of cutting the Gordian Knot is replaced elsewhere. It's echoed, of course, in King Arthur. King Arthur and Excalibur, the sword that was stuck in the stone. And the myth was that only the true king of England would be able to draw this sword out of the stone. And of course, Arthur was able to do it, and that's why he became the great king that he was. So yes, there are all these kind of myths. There's so many traditions that cross all different religions.

Q: Did Ptolemy bring Jewish slaves to Egypt? Did Ptolemy bring Jewish slaves to Egypt? And when?

A: Now, in those days, we are going back 2,000 years, everybody who conquered anybody else took slaves. Whether they were Persians, or whether they were Huns, or whether they were Egyptians, or indeed, whether they were Judeans conquering other people. Taking slaves was considered what you do to win a war. And it was also a kind of a tool. Genghis Khan, in advance always used to say to cities, "Listen, come over to my side, don't fight me, and you'll live in peace. If you fight me, I'm going to destroy you, I'm going to kill you, I'm going to capture you, I'll take everybody away." This was par for the course in those days. There was no Geneva Convention. And because after Alexander the Great died, his empire was divided up by different generals. There were generals all around the place and they fought amongst themselves and they ruined the empire of Alexander. The two dynastic generals that took over Israel was

Seleucus in the the Syrian area, Greek Seleucus. There was Ptolemy down in Egypt. And there were a whole lot of Ptolemys. Almost every 50 years there was another Ptolemy. It's like saying another Pharaoh or another king. And whenever they came up through Judea, if the Judeans tried to stop them, or the Syrians came down and they tried to stop them, yes, they took slaves and took these slaves down to Egypt.

Actually, that doesn't mean to say they were the first Jews to go down to Egypt. Because in 586 before the common era, when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and they took away the middle and the upper classes, they left the working classes down in Jerusalem. And when the person in charge appointed by the Babylonians, Gedaliah, was assassinated, they all fled down to Egypt, even though Jeremiah told them not to and went with them. And there would also been actually a Jewish garrison under the Persians in upper Egypt, in Elephantine. And there were Jews living in Egypt at that stage. So both Jews and slaves go down to Egypt all the time. And certainly amongst the Romans, they needed slaves for their galleys. And interestingly enough, the Judeans had a reputation for being not only good fighters, because they were disciplined, because they wouldn't fight on Sabbath, and therefore they could be controlled, but also good gladiators. Not such a nice profession, but there we are. So, that's in response to that one.

Let's go down a bit more to the next one. Why can't I move down to the next one? There's one from Mary and Jill, but I can't see the question here. Dismiss? No. Ah, here we are.

Q: "Why was the New Testament written in Greek when the disciples presumably were Aramaic or Hebrew speakers?"

A: Yes, this is something that I'm going to also discuss when we deal with whether Jesus was a follower of Hillel in due course. But the truth is that, although Christianity started in a Jewish environment, it was soon taken over by the Greeks as part of the Grecian Empire and the Roman Empire, and spread into that Roman empire, and Greek became the language of culture, and so, anybody wanting to relate to Rome, and remember that the disciples or St. Paul took them over to the Roman side, whereas St. Peter wanted to keep them as a Jewish sect. And the gospels weren't written until several generations after the events they purport to describe. So, they were written in the language of the audience that they wanted to appeal to, which was Greek and not Aramaic. Also, because Aramaic was considered a popular language, and Greek was considered a more scholarly language.

Q: We now come onto, "Are there Jewish manuscripts in the old Library in Alexandria recently reopened?"

A: Actually, Alexander the Great, there were 20 cities named after Alexander the Great, but the greatest one was Alexandria. And Alexandria, he turned into this mecca of scholarship, which included people from all around the world. And it was an amazing place. And the Library of Alexandria was the greatest, greatest library in history, which had apparently, I suppose, like the

National Library in Washington, a copy of every book they could lay hold on in the universe in any language. It was an amazing institution, which there of course were lots of Jewish texts. The Bible had been translated into Greece, the Septuagint, and that was there. Of course this Bible was destroyed. And who was it destroyed by? When the Christians came, Cyril, the bishop of Alexandria said, "No, there's only one way of looking at culture. We refuse to accept the pagan Greek way." And he killed many of the greatest men and women of that era who were scholars in Alexandria because he only wanted one point of view. And this is always what happens when there's only one point of view. It doesn't matter whether it's Christian or, I don't want to compare in any way Nazism. When you start trying to say what's kosher and what's not, then you are crushing intellectual innovation and creativity.

Q: Yes, I am told by my brother, who is an expert in this field that there are Jewish manuscripts and Jewish books in the newly reopened Alexandria library. Anything more?

A: Ah, yes, we are.

Q: Howard Stein. "I'm told Alexandria's the only biblical name that Jewish people are named after. True or false?"

A: Well, yes and no. Remember that originally Jews only had Hebrew names. And in the time of the Hebrew period, then Jewish names were considered to be the ideal. But remember, there were non-Jewish names even mentioned in the Bible. Joseph was given a non-Jewish name. And so, having non-Jewish names in addition to your Jewish name was never considered a problem. And throughout the mediaeval period in the Sephardi and the Ashkenazi world, Jews were always known by so and so, the son of so and so. And the so and so was always a Jewish name. It was only really with the enlightenment that suddenly nationalist governments insisted on Jews having Jewish names. In the same way, for example, that Mussolini insisted that Italians had to have names that sounded Italian and had to end with an I, O, R or something of that kind. And when Jews were forced to take names, then they took names of different kinds.

Some of them took names after the towns, they were at like Frankforter or something of that kind. Some of them took from whatever profession they had, silver or gold or carpenter or Schuster, a shoemaker or a Schneider, a tailor. And some of them took sons of. So for example, Jacobson was the son of Jacob. For example, in Persia, when the similar situation happened, people added a Zadar onto the end of their name. So they had a Hebrew Jacob Zadar, Jacob is a Hebrew name, Zadar would be a secular name. So yes, originally we were open to different names, but prefer to have purely Hebrew names, which is why all Jewish documents, whether it is marriage or divorce use, or even commercial use Jewish names.

"Some rabbis at the time rejected Maimonides thinking because he used Greek philosophy in his thinking." Yes, that's absolutely true. Because going back to the time of Maimonides, everybody, whether it was Christian, whether it was Muslim, whether it was Jew, thought theologically, theologically, they thought philosophically, like people today think scientifically and

rationality. They all did. And at that stage, initially, the world was pretty much open to cross fertilisation. Ideally in Baghdad, at the time... this is going back to about the 850, 900, for a period of time, most open civilised society until the religious fanatics came in and ruined it. And similarly, in Spain, most open society, until the religious guys came in and ruined it. But the specific problem with Maimonides was that this is the moment of Kabbalah, of mysticism, which was the, if you like, the counter foil to rationalism. And in Spain, so many Jews at that time were assimilating, and they were thought to be assimilating because of the philosophy that gave them so much in common with the philosophy of the others around that that was the equivalent of what we're seeing today in Jerusalem and in parts of Israel; the rejection of any secular education because they see it as a threat to their own religious survival. But thank God, although Maimonides books were burned, and although there was opposition to Maimonides, he hung in there and although today in most Yeshivas, they don't study Maimonides philosophy, they still study his Jewish law and they still consider him one of the greatest Jews ever. So yes, these are examples of historical conflicts that boil over into the Jewish world.

"Is the idea of acting outside Jewish community then come from Alexander's influence. However, I find in my experience..." Yes, so, I've quite answered that to say I think expression goy is insulting. Yes, it is, but ironically the term goy means Jew, it means a nation. In the Bible, the Jews are described as a goy. Goyim. We are nations. That there are terms that are used abusively, yes, just as people call us yids and kikes. Unfortunately some of us fight back by calling them names back. I'm not happy about it. I don't think it's the right way. On the other hand, I do think if somebody insults you, you have two options: if you are a Christian, you'll turn the other cheek, and if you're a Jew, you might want to answer back.

Q: Are we Jews or Israelites?

A: Well, that's a good point. We are all of these. We started off as the Sons of Jacob. Then we became the Sons of Israel. Jacob's second name was Israel. Then after King Solomon, then were called the House of David. The earliest reference to the Jews in archaeology is the House of David. And then they're called the Israelites. But then when the kingdom split after King Solomon, the south was called Judea, the northern 10 tribes were called Israel. The 10 Israel tribes were destroyed. They didn't disappear, but the Judeans carried on. They were captured by the Babylonians and taken to Babylon and called the Judeans, and that's where Jews comes into it. And so, Mordecai living in Babylon is Mordecai, the Judean. Then they come from there back to the land of Israel, but they're still called Judeans. And then they are called Jews by the Greeks and then by the Romans, and sometimes we're also called Hebrews. We're called Hebrew in the Torah. Hebrew is more kind of a general term of people who are outsiders who've come from somewhere else. So we have all these different names, but you can call us what we like, we're still the same.

Q: Just as people have great difficulty understanding is Judaism is a religion, is it a culture, is it a nation, is it an ethnicity?

A: That's back to the problem of the Greeks wanting to know what the answer is. And sometimes there is no answer. We're everything and nothing.

Q: "Can you please expand on Jewish concept of the soul?"

A: Well, that's an interesting issue. It's something I'd like to spend a lot more on because the Bible doesn't define a soul. It uses four different languages for the life, the breath of life, for all living beings, from all soul beings. And I think that in the Bible, what soul meant essentially was the totality of who you are. Your intellectual, your spiritual, your physical. And in the same way animals are described as having souls as well. And the spirit comes from God and the spirit, if you like, returns to God. It's not until you get to Greece that you get this idea, there's the body and the mind. The mind, according to Aristotle and Greek philosophy is the soul. The soul is the mind. In one way makes sense, in another way it doesn't make sense. And then you have the body, which is not the soul. Now, if you say the soul is just the mind, well, then of course the body dies, the mind's part of the brain, the brain dies.

And so, where do we get this idea that there's something like a little sort of alternative heart inside us, or a little part of our brain that's connected to God that has an existence of its own and that flies up to heaven when the body dies. And some people say flies back down again if it has to have another round, none of this is clear because we have not been a philosophical, rational religion in our entirety. We have been a mystical one, which has a mystical answer as opposed to a rational answer. So, Maimonides gives a rational answer in which the soul is part of the brain, but it is that part of the brain that connects with God, and that part of the brain that connects with God likes to go back to God in the end. And it's something that you can rub out just as you can deny emotion or any passion, you can deny any religious involvement. And if you do, your soul just withers on the vine, so to speak. The mystics say, "No, the soul is a different thing altogether, it's part of God within us. It can never wither, it can never disappear." So, you have as many different interpretations of soul as there are people. And it merits a lecture on its own, and maybe that's something I'll come to at some later date.

Q: "Some Jews disagree vehemently with and even today forcing upset. What's your view?"

A: Yes, they do. I think it's a disagreeing. I don't mind people saying I have got another point of view. We should all have points of view. None of us think the same way. We all are free to explore what works. Some things work for us, some things don't. I don't understand superstition. Doesn't make any sense to me at all, but there are lots of people I meet who are terribly superstitious. Well, if that works for them, fine, I don't have a problem. I don't have a problem with placebos, but they're still placebos. So, my view is that intolerance, certainly intellectual intolerance is a terrible thing, and I despise it. And I want people to be open-minded and tolerant. I hate intolerance, whether it's intellectual, social or whatever kind.

Q: "Does this attitude still prevail in certain Jewish thinking?"

A: Yes, unfortunately it is. We Jews are no different to anybody else. I once heard Rabbi Jacoba, that's one of the previous chief rabbis of England, or the empire who I like very much. He said, "Jews, we're the same as everybody else, only more so." And so, our fights tend to be more so. But that's not true because whenever you look around, whatever religion, whatever culture, they're busy fighting each other. And we've always been a stiff neck people. I can't help it. It's a problem. As I've always said, the biggest challenge to my religious faith has not been the faith itself, the religion itself, it's been the behaviour of people who claim to be religious. But I can't control them, so what can you do?

Q: "If Alexander's so influence, why did they go pear shaped soon after his demise?"

A: Because unfortunately he died too young. He was a young man, he didn't have enough time to be able to influence the greater community, the greater world. And unfortunately, the people came after him were small little men, and as a result, sadly, that was it.

Q: So Hazelstien, "Just to say, I had several Alexanders in my family, one great-great-grandfather, two great-grand, all German... Could you say more about..."

A: Well, I think we've dealt with that, if you don't mind, so I'm going to skip that.

Q: To what extent did the architecture of the temple in Jerusalem depend on Greek prototypes?"

A: Well, that's interesting, 'cause the first temple certainly won't have been Greek. The first temple did indeed borrow very, very much from Babylonian and Euphrates culture, and borrowed in its architecture. Just as, for example, nowadays in many Hasidic communities, when they build a new building, they build it in the style of castles in Europe, because that takes them back to the past that some of them remember. So, the first temple definitely was influenced by the eastern traditions. The second temple will have definitely been influenced to some extent, but it was mainly built before Greek architecture. So, I'm not certain either the temples would be good examples of Greek architecture. But again, if you go to somewhere like Petra, the city of red rock in Jordan, you see how in the first, second century every body borrowed architectural styles from each other. So, I'm sure they did.

Q: "Was by the Greeks and Jews a cause of my Jewish assimilation, for example, lots of Jews in Alexandria?"

A: Oh, yes! Many Jews initially were attracted by Alexandria and Greek culture and assimilated, virtually the whole of the priesthood assimilated. The priests were the ones who brought the circus and the theatre and the games to Jerusalem. In Alexandria, too Jews were assimilating just as they have everywhere in the world. Wherever you look, Jews have assimilated. All the way round the Roman Empire. At the time, the Roman Empire, we were 1% of the population. If we'd have grown during that time, today we'd be one of the biggest religions instead of being one of the smallest religions. But either through voluntary assimilation to escape the tension or

ideologically because one prefers something else or just out of, shall we say, inertia, Jews have always assimilated. But what ended Jewish life in Alexandria was persecution, not assimilation.

Q: "You didn't mention Alex X, which in terms of excellence, similarly older than this is called the Septuagint, we are talking about to what extent your Jewish respect for the Septuagint is linked to Alexander?"

A: Well, that's an excellent question. The Septuagint was translated, the myth of the Septuagint is that 70 rabbis were invited by one of the Ptolemys to come down to Egypt to write a translation of the Bible, of the Torah, actually five books of Moses into Greek, 'cause that was a scholarly language. And as a result, he put them in 70 different rooms to make sure they all came up with the right version. And interestingly enough, not only did they come up with the right version, but there were 15 cases where they all agreed to change the text from a rude word to a polite word. But because it was regarded as written with rabbinic authority, that's why it was treated with respect and was used and copied. Okay. Hey, Adele Wolfson. Yes, of course I remember. How could I forget you and Dick and Lynn in Glasgow, one the happiest times in my life. And thank you very much for signing on here. I'm glad to be in touch with you. And all the rest of the Scots Brigade.

"Main contemporary source of Alexander the Great." Well, there's plenty of Greek sources. The easiest thing actually is look up Wikipedia. Wikipedia gives all the main references. It's a very good research resource. And to look up all the Jewish sources, look up a website called Sefaria.com. It's also very good sources, all available there. Gives you more information than I have in my brain.

Q: "Based on what you say, Jews were less threatened intellectually spiritually by the other. Alexander, if they were helpful, then the reverse, were the Jews a threat to other groups?"

A: Well, look, there was tension during the Alexandria period, the Greek period between merchants, between Greek merchants and Jewish merchants. There was great competition and sometimes they beat each other up and fought each other up, and sometimes the Jews got the upper hand, sometimes the Greeks got the upper hand. There was a lot of competition, but the competition during the Greek period was not ideological, it was practical, it was commercial.

"What did Rabbi Elisha," you're thinking of Elisha ben Abuyah I guess. He was this great leader at the time of Rabbi Akiva, who himself decided I prefer the rational approach. I don't want any of this nonsense, this mystical business, all this talk about life after death or anything like that. So, I really don't know specifically what you're asking is, but if Shauna is answering this question live, then I'm happy with that.

Q: Go on to David, hi, David. "Did the Babylonian Talmud, Jerusalem Talmud treat Alexander differently?"

A: Yes and no. There aren't as many stories than Jerusalem Talmud, which of course is much smaller than the Babylonian Talmud. The Babylonian Talmud is slightly, I would say more open-minded than the Jerusalem Talmud. But that could be simply because of its size and has room for more myths and stories.

En route to Alexander conquered one of few remain Jews of . Believe she was Jewish, she was common." Yes, the story is that Roxanna was Jewish. There are versions of her being Jewish. Stories. To what extent? I don't know. How religious? I don't know. But it was part of this general Alexandrian idea of let's marry everybody together and integrate.

Q: "What if any Greek customs were absorbed into Jewish practises?"

A: No specific customs because Greek's religion was a pagan religion. Although the philosophers didn't take it very seriously. It was a pagan religion with pagan gods that they kept symbolically, mythically. And of course, all religions have myths. It's not the myth that defines the religion so much as the practises. And Greek practises and Jewish practises were very, very different, so I can't think offhand of any specific practise. But for example, on Pesach we talk about the afikoman. Taking the afikoman, the matzah, we hide and taking it out at the end of the meal. And afikoman is a Greek name. Either means a party, you don't have a party after the Pesach's over, or it means a dessert. You don't have any dessert after you're finished eating matzah. There's an example of influence, and there are plenty of them. My friend, great scholar, Rabbi Sperber, Daniel Sperber got his doctorate on all the Greek influences in the Talmud. But I don't recall anything about specific customs. Well, again, yes, I suppose you would say also reclining at a Greek meal, the convention of the meal of reclining, of having tables brought to you and slaves taking away. So there were, but it didn't impact on the religious life other than peripherally.

"A driven leaf that he wouldn't come back." We're talking about Elisha ben Abuyah, and you're talking about that great book about him "As A Driven Leaf," which is a lovely book, and I recommend, but I don't know if that's what you're asking or not.

"Jews in the modern era named Alexander after Alexander the Great, definitely not Czar Alexander the Great. Nobody liked Alexander the Great at all. So, they wouldn't have want to named him after him, although maybe they did in order to maybe get preferment in the government, I don't know. You, it really depends on who gave the name.

Q: "Mentioned crushing scholarship, isn't that what's going on?"

A: Yes. Academia now is a disaster area. There's only one point of view again, but this is again a product of this western way of thinking. There's my way or no way. There's my religion or no. There's my politics or no. It's horrific what has happened. This whole woke culture is having a disastrous impact on freedom of thought and intellectuality, but it's dominating certainly the American universities now. Once it only dominated the European ones, which I believe is why

anti-Semitism perpetuated it so much there. But now it's coming very strongly in America and it's a very serious concern.

Q: "Did the hatred of Jews after the advent of Christianity emerge from the Greek or Roman side?"

A: Well, Greek became absorbed into the Roman Empire. It was part of the Roman Empire. And once Christianity condemned Judaism at the Council of Nasia in 325. It took 325 for Christianity to establish itself as one single discipline religion. And interestingly enough, Constantine, the emperor, who establishes council spent more time killing Christians who disagreed with his version of Christianity than anybody else. And in fact, Christians have killed far more Christians than they've killed Jews over the years, which is saying something. But that's a different issue altogether. Although the city states continue, and Romans sent their children to study at the Athenian academies, it became part of the Roman Empire, so by the time you get to Christianity, Greece and Rome are just one thing. And the Jewish tradition refer to them in code as Edom for the red of the Russian legions. And that's why they associated Edom with Esau, because Esau was the enemy, if you like, although from the Bible, he's not such a bad enemy. But Edom became a code name for Christianity. Christianity came to be regarded by the Jews of Europe as the real danger, existential danger to their survival.

Q: "Why do the Jews not have middle names in the Middle East? Or at least the girls don't."

A: Well, that's not entirely true. I do know my Persian community, middle names. But yes, there is indeed a tradition of different names. But for example, they're happy to name in the Sephardic world after living relatives, after fathers and grandfathers, which is not the custom in the Ashkenazi world. These are entirely matters of custom.

"No matter what language Jews spoke, Hebrew characters were used." That's correct, Hebrew characters were used in writing in Yiddish, in writing in Ladino. They were indeed used openly.

"Jews did pick up names from non-Jewish environments. Oh, absolutely, definitely. No question about it. We borrowed names from all over the place.

Q: "Would you consider Alexander a benign dictator?"

A: Yes, I would, I wouldn't have minded living under Alexander. I can't think of any other dictator I would've liked to live under. But yes, if I had to choose, I would choose him.

Q: "The Jewish and Greek culture, was it not more to do with the Jews being opposed to the Greek of physical prowess, Olympic games being played in the nude?"

A: Well, that was part of this, that was part of it, but it wasn't the main issue. The main issue was rather more this idea of our approach is a physical one that draws on Greek philosophy and

Greek ideas as opposed to the Jewish ones. It was more ideas than trying to stop people running around nude, which they didn't like, but that wasn't so much the issue. Do we have any more? I don't mind carrying on. Please comment. My attitude to stories and to mythology is not to take it literally. And after all, Maimonides said so much in the Bible is dreams, so much of the Bible is not as it appears to be. I'm just not a fundamentalist. I'm passionately committed to Torah, passionately committed to our tradition and to our holy books, which I think are the core of our tradition, passionately committed to a Jewish way of life, but my rational brain says, why should I be asked to believe something that doesn't make sense to me? I'm not saying it didn't happen. I wasn't there, it might have happened. But I have an open mind. That's really what my position is.

"As a child in Israel, I remember saying... Yes, you should speak Hebrew. Hebrew is our language to understand our culture. You can understand it in translation. After all the great philosophy of Alexandria Philo didn't speak Hebrew. But yes, I think I've found as a teacher, and everywhere, if you have the language, it's so much easier to master the holy texts. Most of the struggle that so many Jews have with Jewish prayer, with Talmud or with Torah, is they don't have the language. So, I do consider languages a core. I don't see how you can master French culture without speaking French or English culture without speaking English. So yes, I think it's very important. In Hebrew, we have we have other words. We have, we have and another one that's just gone out of my mind for a moment. But you have five words in the Torah and two words, the ought as well, that are given later that are part of the Midrash.

Q: "Do you think the Jews should make able too?"

A: We have always had the choice, whether it was in Babylon or whether it was in Europe or America. If we didn't make very often it was because the economic conditions didn't allow it or the society didn't allow it. I think it's an ideal, but I don't think one has to. And there are plenty of good Jews who live outside of Israel and plenty of bad Jews who live in Israel. So, I'm open-minded about that one. Although I know there's been debate in our tradition.

Q: "Do Greek education experiment was Carmel College?"

A: Hi, Richard. Yes, yes. My father always liked to talk about Athens and Jerusalem. And he didn't mean it literally because there's a lot in Jerusalem that's Athens's, a lot of Athens in Jerusalem. But yes, he did. And that's why on the crest of Carmel, you have both the Sephar Torah, you had the Sephar Torah and a book of the Bible, and you had the seven pillars of wisdom, which were of course the symbols of wisdom, which went beyond the limitation of Torah. Included Torah, but went beyond them too. So, sure, that was part of the tradition I was brought up in was to have a good secular education and have a good religious education. Now, there's disadvantages in that of course, that if you try to combine too much, you don't have the concentrated depth in one. But I still prefer a broader view than a narrow view. But that's subjective, it depends on the person. If a lot of people nowadays want to sit and focus on one, good luck to them, so long as they don't object to those who choose another path.

Q: "Where does the turn of the time and Messiah fit into all this?"

A: Oh, well that's a huge big subject. A huge, big subject. I'm going to put that one down on the list of things I have to talk about, but very simply, in the Torah, the Torah uses the word Messiah simply to mean an anointed anointed prince, anointed priest. When a priest was appointed, he was anointed, he was made the priest. That was adapted later on to be the idea of a king. So, Saul was anointed, David was anointed. After that, you only anointed somebody if there was a break in dynasty. But if there wasn't a break in dynasty, then you wouldn't anoint him. So, when the Jews went out to Babylon for the first time, they were looking forward to a king coming back who would be anointed and that was what they applied the Messiah to. And they applied Messiah to the house of David because they were Judean kings, whereas the 10 lost tribes talked about Messiah of because they were the 10 northern tribes. But they simply meant someone who would come and bring us back together and we'd live happily ever after together.

They had no notion that Samuel would come along and claim to be a Messiah, and then the world would continue on normally as it was after that. Because the whole point of the Messiah was to change human nature, change the world or change the status of the Jews. And later Messiahs didn't do any of those things, that's why we called them false Messiahs. Essentially, the idea of Messiah is one of two things: either we could look forward to making this world a better place, we should do whatever we can to make this world a better place that's in our hands, or we fail, this place is such a disaster. You can't imagine anybody thinking that way if they're in a concentration camp in Germany. Or this is such a mess, please, God, God will get us out of this 'cause we can't sort it out. And maybe that's what some people think is going to happen now with the COVID. That we won't be able to, others say, sure we will, we will deal with it. Who knows? But it's open. And each one has their own idea of what a Messiah is.

Q: "When was the restriction to access Kabbalah 40 years over first stated, and by who?"

A: It wasn't specifically stated by anybody, but after the popularisation, you see, up until that mind Kabbalah was considered to be esoteric. You don't start teaching a child Aristotelian philosophy. You wait until they can master the fundamentals. And so, the idea was you can't go into something like Kabbalah until you are behaving in a good way. You're leading a good religious life, then you can go on to the additional options. But once Kabbalah, after , Isaac Luria in the 16th century was popularised and then adopted by Hasidism, it was taught pretty universally. Although there was still people who objected to teaching the Kabbalah because of the false Messiah and Frank in Europe had given mysticism a bad name. People studied it, but they studied it as a much more complicated, esoteric, not a popular way of looking at things. Hi, Trevor. Trevor, Trevor , so good to hear, see you there. Let's keep in touch. Let's go on. Still got more. I'm happy to go on. Ronnie Sabbat.

Q: "It is said that linguistically the meaning of words Hebrew and Greek are very similar. Is that true?"

A: Yes, there are some cross influences. There are some words, mummy, imar, Abba, father, onomatopoeia words that are Greek have influenced Hebrew. Hebrew has influenced Greek. Yes, there's definitely be a cross influence. Even you take something like Babel, like from babble, babbling on about something. There are lots of cross examples of words.

Q: "How did the Jews the question of homosexuality?"

A: Well, homosexuality at that stage meant essentially that in the pursuit of intellectual perfection, the ideal is to go for a meeting of minds. And this meeting of minds was the truest love that you could have. Now, of course, we could say, and therefore they regarded heterosexual love in a way as quite inferior. That's why they came to think of women as quite inferior, because that was just giving into bodily lust. Whereas homosexuality was mental love. The trouble is that in fact, both of them are as physical as they are mental. And so, there were sort of, again, largely due to Christianity, the idea that you have to persecute people who have a different form of sexual pleasure or sexual validity. It's true that the Torah did not regard homosexuality as an ideal, because as an ideal, it looked at getting married to have children in the same way, it didn't look as being celibate as an ideal. It didn't look as a woman or a man who said, I don't want to get married, I want to be a scholar. Those were exceptions which were tolerated and understood and accepted. So, it was a different time. Very difficult to compare.

Q: "As the Septuagint was a translation of the Jewish Bible, why are some of the books not included in the Tanach, which was canonised earlier by the?"

A: Well, because the Bible is a canon of Jewish books. The Septuagint was already there, it's in the Torah, you don't need a translation of it. And most of the translations that came went into what were called the Apocrypha, other books. But there were even some books written in Hebrew that were not included. The rabbis went on, it was even after the great convention, that there was an argument, for example, over whether you should include the song of songs. Because until Rabbi Akiva claimed it was a love story between man and God or God in Israel, they thought, no, this is just pure love poetry, we don't want it there. And others sort of worried about Ecclesiastes because it says, "what's the purpose of life?" But essentially, the canon for us only contained Hebrew books written up until a particular moment in time. Okay, let's go on.

Q: "What bothers me very much is when we die, do you think we can go either to Gehenna or Gehinnom or just in limbo? Is that a punishment?"

A: It's interesting. Maimonides says that if we are just physical beings, then physical beings just die. And that's what we mean by Gehenna or by hell. We don't mean anything metaphorically than physical death. But if we are spiritual human beings and we develop a spiritual essence, then we continue after death. And that is called the Garden of Eden or paradise. It's again, a metaphor, not meant literally. But he said that the more of you that is spiritual, the more of you is there to continue into a spiritual world, the less of you is less. And it's up to you. So frankly, if it

doesn't matter to you, and if you don't care about it, I suppose you die. The mystics would disagree. The mystics say, no, you have a soul whatever happens. You got a Jewish soul and the Jewish soul goes to heaven no matter what you do to it. Well, he takes your pick.

Q: Thank you very much, Clara. "You mention Napoleon learning from Alexander, does Napoleon's treatment of..." Yes, Napoleon was great to the Jews. Napoleon, wherever he went, he gave the Jews free rights, he gave them equal rights. And the moment he was conquered, they rolled back the rights, the rest of the European powers. He was wonderful for the Jews. He convened a Sanhedrin to ask their opinion on various things. In that sense, Napoleon was the greatest since Alexander.

"Once again, it's been a joy." Thank you very much, Marcel, thank you.

...that people lived in. Well, these the people live in is in a realm that I consider to be superstitious. They consider to be meaningful. If it has an effect on them, an impact on them psychologically or as a placebo or these charms, then good luck to them. I have no time for that or for curses or for evil eyes or any of these things. If it has an impact, it's 'cause you want to let it have an impact. But I frankly don't take them seriously at all.

So, thank you everybody. Hey, Jack, thank you very much. Thank you, that's really sweet of you.

Okay. Oh, we've still got more. Okay. Where are we?

Q: Anita, "What's the relationship with Torah and Mishnah?"

A: Okay. Very simply. Torah initially meant the five books of Moses, but it came to be a general term for the whole of Jewish learning. The Bible is made up of three compartments; Torah, five books of Moses, prophets, , the writers, the later books like Psalms and like Proverbs and so forth and so on. They constitute the Bible, the Tanach, which was completed on the return from Babylon roundabout 2,500 years ago. At that period, in addition to the text of the Torah, you had an oral law, traditions that weren't written down. Those traditions continued for the next 500 years until the Roman destruction of Jewish life was so catastrophic that the rabbis decided to write it down. They wrote it down first in the second century in a book called The Mishnah. As soon as the Mishnah came out, of all the laws that had developed since the biblical times, there was a debate about the Mishnah. And it was debated both the Mishnah was written in Israel, but it was debated in Israel, which was a dying community, and in Babylon, which was still a great community, the discussion on the Mishnah is called the Gemara.

The Gemara in Jerusalem was completed 200 years later. In Babylon, it was completed about the year 500. And the Gemara and the Mishnah together are called the Talmud, it's a combination of both of them. And they are the last of, if you like, the canonical fundamental books of Jewish Torah. But since that time, Jewish law has gone on expanding and developing and reinterpreting. And every year hundreds of books have produced on continuing Jewish law

and history and tradition, dealing with new problems like computers and intellectual property and artificial intelligence. So, it's an ongoing process like all legal systems, unless they become fossilised and ours thank goodness didn't.

Q: "How does your belief in God fit in the cut of rationality?"

A: Because I don't consider God subject to rationality. God is not subject to experiment. You can't prove or disprove God. If you claim God is beyond the physical world, then how do you interact with God? Not rationally. I believe God is an experience, it's a sense, it's a feeling of something beyond, which is very personal and very subjective. And as my wife often tells me, I have conversations with God all the time. Doesn't mean to say that God answers me and he doesn't tell me what horse to bet on in the Derby. I think that's it.

Yeah, I think we've gone through the list. Have we? Oh no, I still got so many more. What am I supposed to do? Carry on? All right, well let's cancel it, let's carry on. Let's see if we've got more. Thank you. Where are we? Is going to answer this question live. Thank you. Thank you, Shauna. That's done. That's been done. Wrap you up. I'll see you again in two weeks time and we'll talk about Jesus and Judaism.