

Jeremy Rosen - Was Freud Right About Moses

- So why Freud and Moses? The fact is that I think these two very different human beings, 3000 years at least apart from each other, are the two, we'll call them Jews, who have had the biggest impact on the world, more than anybody else I can think of. But of course, they were aiming at different things, coming from different backgrounds, different eras, and different times. Let me start first of all with Freud. His greatness was in thinking completely outside of the box in terms of what we would call mental illness or mental difficulties. The way in which he played with ideas and explored ideas and came up with something so radically different in itself was amazing, but his impact was getting us to think about our minds and ourselves and our inner beings in a way that nobody else in the past ever came close to.

Now the fact is that many of his ideas are almost laughed at, it's not taken seriously nowadays, and yet at the time, their impact was fundamental. So the whole idea of consciousness, of the subconscious, of the way that we repress our thoughts, the way that our dreams reveal things about ourselves, these were all ideas that we have to thank Freud for. And even though men like Broyer who was initially his mentor and then his partner had already begun the process, he took it a lot, lot further. And in particular in the areas of sex, Freud had an amazingly innovative way of looking at things. And so I'm sure you are all familiar with the the libido, the ego, the super ego. And essentially what he said is that we are born a seething mass of feelings and demands and needs. At first we're not fully aware of me, but slowly we become aware of ourselves, the ego, and then the ego seems to take control.

A baby cries, I want this now. And slowly what happens is that through parents and through society, the super ego tells us, "You know, sometimes it pays to hold off a little bit and you'll get more if you wait a little longer." And so this initial idea still remains within our society fundamentally, delaying gratification is one of the most important features that distinguish a western culture from other cultures. But he also went further than that, and he came up with this strange idea of, we'll call it the Oedipus complex, he called it the Oedipus complex. You know the story of Oedipus, by accident, he slept with his mother and killed his father. And Freud came up with the idea that initially we are in fear of being castrated by our parents. The young man is frightened that because he loves his mother and wants to possess his mother, the father is going to castrate him, and the poor little girl looks down and sees she's already been castrated. And so she feels her position is one of weakness.

And many of these ideas no longer hold a great deal of, shall we say, authority, but nevertheless, they raise such important ideas about who we are and what we feel. And when we say something, do we realise what we are saying? Do jokes reveal something about our inner selves in the way that dreams reveal things about our inner selves? So for that alone, Freud had a profound impact. Him and his circle, the Vienna circle around him of writers and thinkers, all influenced by him. He was caught up in battles with his rivals and he was an impatient man and he didn't treat his family very nicely. And as with any great person, you can find fault as we are going to do with another great person in due course.

But it was this impact that was fundamental. But when it came to religion, Freud following in the footsteps of Marx saw religion purely as myth, almost irrelevant, an expression of neurosis, and fulfilling a need that we all have. And in one way I wouldn't argue with that, but I would say that even so, this can be a very, very valuable ingredient in our mental makeup and in our emotional makeup, as much as can self-conscious and self-awareness, the fact that I need a father or need a mother doesn't in any way detract from the role of father and mother. And the fact that I may have a spiritual component may not necessarily mean I'm fooling myself. And if we say we are dependent, yes, I think we are very dependent on love, we need love, that dependency in itself is not necessarily a bad thing. But generally it's true to say that Freud had no time for religion and considered religion, if anything, something negative, something repressive.

And interestingly enough, quite recently I was approached by somebody who said, "Look, I am a religious man, I'm a member of the Lubavitch Chabad Movement. I have a son who is so fixated on football, on soccer, that's all he dreams about. And he collects whatever he can about his favourite soccer team, and he looks whenever he can at with games they play when they're not on Shabbat. And this occupies his mind all the time, and I don't know how to deal with it." And I said to him, "You know what's happened? He sees his father, in a sense, obsessing about religion, obsessing about something that matters to him. And so he has learned from that, that if you care about something, you obsess about it." And here in a way, you have the crossover from Freud to Moses. And now I want to deal with Freud's engagement with Moses because as you know, towards the end of his life, Freud wrote a book called "Moses and Monotheism". It's an interesting, fascinating book, one that my father encouraged me to read.

And yet he has got it completely wrong. And let me tell you what his theory is. Roundabout 3,300 years ago in Egypt, there was a man called Akhenaten who came to power and challenged the established Egyptian order. And he tried to merge all the different gods into one god, "The Sun God". And Akhenaten tried his best to change Egyptian way of thinking, but he was deposed, he was killed, and Egypt reverted to the previous state it was in. In Freud's reading, Moses was an Egyptian, bible doesn't disagree with that. And in his reading, Moses was a pal, an assistant of Akhenaten. And when Akhenaten was overthrown, he didn't know where to go. And so essentially he decided to set up his own religion, and he found this group of slaves in Egypt, the Israelites. And he managed to find a place in their lives as a leader who promised them freedom and led them out of Egypt. But this was of course at a time of great instability in the Middle East.

And in one sense, what Freud is saying does make sense indeed, because the Bible itself talks about the fact that there was one king who welcomed the Jews into Egypt, another Pharaoh who years later wanted to get rid of them. And this coincides with things we know from the Tell el-Hammam, letters from other archaeological evidence that this was a time of great instability in the land of Egypt. And that there were invading tribes, one of them was known as the Hapiru, which some people think are the Hebrews, and that's where the Israelites came down into Egypt with the Hapiru. And when the Hapiru overthrown and kicked out, that's when the Jews, the

Israelites were enslaved because it was feared that they would be allies with the Hapiru and cause all kinds of trouble. So the timing of the emergence from Egypt seemed to coincide with the Tell el-Hammam letters, even though we have no proof, no evidence, but it seems possible, if not probable. Well, in the event he takes them out, but they are such a rebellious lot, they're such a stiff neck people, they end up killing him. It's like says Freud killing their father, and then they feel excessive guilt because they've killed their leader, they killed their father.

And so they on their way out come to Midian, and in Midian, they find this fiery volcanic god called Yahweh. And this god appears on Sinai imposes all these rigid laws on them that they've been suffering ever since, and they've taken on their suffering because of their guilt 'cause they feel guilt towards the death that they caused of this great man, Moses. Now I'm not saying that didn't happen, we don't know what happened, but nobody really takes this, nobody in any area of scholarship academically takes this very seriously, but they see it as an example of Freud applying his theories to the Mosaic tradition. And so on this basis, I want to go back to look in greater detail at the Mosaic tradition and to see what it was really concerned with. Now we have no evidence, no objective evidence whatsoever that Moses existed. He might have done. And a lot of things in the Bible make sense, both in terms of his name and his background. A lot of things make sense, but we don't have any evidence.

And therefore, in a sense you could say that Moses is a myth. And Freud was fascinated with the idea of myths, and going on through various anthropologists afterwards we've come to realise that myths are very important in the way we convey values, in the way we convey ideas to society and to the people around us. So I don't discount myth as being valuable, but what I do say is we need to look at what myth is trying to achieve, what the myth stands for much more than the actual historical background. And so it's the myths of Moses that I really think are worthwhile exploring, as is the character of Moses, to see what was it that he was trying to do? Because it's clear that whereas Freud was concerned with the individual and how the individual could develop and succeed and thrive in life, Moses was concerned with a society, with creating a society. And not only was he interested in creating a society for a small group of people, he really thought in terms of society in the wider sense. And nobody has had a greater impact than this man or this name on our life, because for example, today we have billions of Muslims. Muslims accept Moses as a great teacher.

He's mentioned in the Quran something like 170 times. Even Christianity has adopted Moses as an early teacher. Don't mention him quite so often, only I think somewhere like 76 or something like that. So Christianity and Islam that have dominated the world over the past 1000, 2000 years, all of them take Moses as a great teacher. So what was so special about him? I think one of the most amazing things about him was that he came from a multicultural background. He was born an Israelite, he was brought up in the palace in Egypt. He grew to an aggressive, powerful young man in Egyptian society with all the sense of entitlement, and then he fell foul of society, had to escape from it, goes to Midian where he suddenly becomes passive. Maybe he becomes spiritual, wandering in the desert, having time to think. And there we see the influence of different societies on this man. And most of the great leaders are people who have

experienced different environments, different values, different ideas.

So we see him grow, not particularly religious, involved in I agree, supporting his nation who goes to look out and see what they're like, but he's a man with a temper, with anger, but also with a sense of morality, when he sees somebody suffering, he's prepared to step in and do something about it. But from there, his escape, he turns into a different kind of a person, and a person not so dynamic, doesn't want to get involved in anything else. He's not looking for a job, he's not looking to lead the Israelites out. He is being called. How he was called. We don't know, but he was, and he was prepared to go down to Egypt to try to do something about it. But again, we notice that he is a man of contradictions. He's had some experience, some spiritual experience, some illusion or maybe delusion with a burning bush, we don't know. But he isn't specifically Jewish or Israelite in a particular way. After all, Abraham initiated the idea of circumcision. And when Moses, by now married with two children is on his way down to Egypt, he doesn't seem to think that circumcision is important.

So the religious side of Moses at this moment is not formed. Its potential may be, but not there. And here's a man who accepts, he's not an orator, he's not a speaker, he's a man of action. To which God says, "Don't worry, we've got other people to do things, you've got to build up a team, you're not going to run this by yourself. This is a team effort." So here he is, somebody partnering with Aaron trying to get the children of Israel out of Egypt. And as the story tells, he tries various devices and maybe tricks to persuade. And he's fortunate that the circumstances are such that there's such instability in the Egyptian dynasty that this is an opportunity to escape from Egypt. And even Egyptian history, there's a monk called Manitou who had a whole history of talking about the Israelites who were really slaves and diseased people who were taken out of Egypt, thank goodness, 'cause otherwise they'd destroyed Egyptian culture.

But we have the image of somebody who not only is somebody conflicted, but somebody who is not perfect. We don't have this notion that Moses is perfect, he does lots of things that are unsatisfactory, he loses his temper, but he has to deal with a tremendous responsibility of large numbers. We don't know how many the numbers are with the Torah says 500,000 males between the ages of 18 and 40, or sometimes 50, and you had to double those for women and children. Whereas Ben-Gurion thought instead of 500,000, they were just 500 families. We don't know. But we do know that some sort of cultural development happened in Sinai, and it happened despite the travails of having to find food and water, constant rebellion, the golden calf, Moses saying, "I can't bear this anymore. I can't do this anymore." And God pushing him into to keeping things going. And so the mentality of a person that we have described to us is somebody who has a mission, a mission to hold a people together and decides that the way to keep a people together is to have, we'll call it a constitution.

Ideas aren't going to be helped, we've got to build up a behavioural system. And so Moses develops this idea of a behavioural system, we call it a constitution, we call it Torah. And the narrative is that something happened on Sinai, the fire and the lightning. And again, we don't know what happened. We don't know how God spoke to Moses, did he speak to Moses? What

language did he speak in? How did he convey? Was this a dictation or was it not? When he came off the mountain, did he come with two tablets of stone, or did he come with several cartloads of the whole of the Torah altogether? And how did it evolve and develop? Again, we don't know. And if I can turn to if you like, a very modern philosopher, the Frenchman, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Derrida developed the idea of what he called deconstruction. That is to say we can't know the circumstances of what was in a writer's mind when he wrote something. We don't know what mood he was in, we don't know what an artist actually thinks when he composed the art. All we do is we can see the painting, and all we do with Moses is we can see the texts, and see the texts that we have and that have developed.

But of course I want to go further than that. I want to tell you why I think Moses was such a genius in constructing the Torah in the way that he did. Because before Moses, there were other codes, not many, the Egyptians didn't have codes of law, they had a concept of , of doing the right thing, but everybody could judge what doing the right thing was in their own terms. The first code, which roughly speaking coincides with Abraham if he lived or about that time, is the code of Hammurabi in Babylon. And there's so much that's in the Torah that seems lifted from Hammurabi's code, all about injury and property and agriculture and rights and authority. But the amazing thing about the Hammurabi code is that the Hammurabi code differentiates between kings and aristocrats, male and female in a civil way. So if an aristocrat kills a peasant, no big deal. If a peasant kills an aristocrat, you kill him. If a woman kills a man, that is terrible, if a man kills a woman, no big deal. And so you have a system which is predicated on differences civilly between the citizens. The genius of the Torah as it developed, whenever it developed was to say, civilly speaking, everybody's in the same position, everybody is equal.

Not only that, but there's a law in the Torah against rape, which equates rape with murder. And even though there are things in the Torah that we don't like, such as maybe sometimes the rapist has the option of marrying the person he has raped. And there are many, many laws that are ancient that are still relatively new. If you look at the code Napoleon in the 18, 19th century, if you look even at laws in England in the 50s and 60s before women could open bank accounts in their own names, or when actually spousal rape wasn't off the books until barely 50 years ago. So that there are all kinds of laws that we must take as being typical of the time, but the Torah puts a different gloss on them. One of the classic ones is an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. And the question is, do we take this literally or not? And if you look at the text of the Torah, the law before eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth talks about financial compensation. The law after it talks about financial compensation. And that is why the idea developed that an eye for an eye and a tooth or tooth was symbolic, it wasn't meant literally, it was meant fair compensation as there was in a case of somebody being unemployed out of work, you don't make the other person who caused the unemployment out of work.

So they have these modifications within the text of the law which allow for innovation. The Torah itself has a law that if there's anything you don't understand, you go to the judges at the time and they'll look into it and they'll decide what it is and you'll have to do what they tell you to do. There was this idea of if you like progression in law rather than stasis in law, except of course

any law tends to be conservative and change is never that easy, you've got to go through structures and organisations. So you have on the one hand this legal structure, which is based on partially the idea of justice in law, but adds another notion of Cedek doing the right thing, which you might say was borrowed from Egypt. Doing the right thing is important, but sticking to the law is important. And so to give an illustration, somebody, a judge faced by somebody who was stolen, bred to feed a starving family, we don't say he didn't steal, we say you do steal and there is a punishment. But I the judge have a moral obligation to look after your family. That's where Cedek doing the right thing comes in over and above the letter of the law. So when one breaks the law, one breaks the law, one doesn't say there's no law, the law doesn't count. One says that one tries to mitigate it by adding this dimension of what we call Cedek.

The other innovation that he comes up with is in the idea that we need an oral law in order to balance and clarify what the written law is. And so you may be familiar with the idea that it says, "Don't do work on Shabbat", but what does work mean? How do we understand work? Does it vary from person to person? Or for example, when Moses comes off the mountain and he says, "On the festival of Sukkot, we want you to take the fruit of a nice tree." What was a nice tree? How did they understand the idea of a nice tree at that particular time? How do we know it wasn't a kumquat? And therefore we have the idea initiated by Moses, that law is a flexible thing, it's a developing thing. And so it's true that the law developed over time as text developed over time, as prophets borrowed texts from each other, and David borrowed texts, and others borrow from David and Solomon and so forth and so on.

But it was the idea of a dynamic culture, and a dynamic culture that also had within it a political structure, the Torah gives different examples of leadership. You've got the example of Moses who on the one hand is if you like the political and religious leader, but this is balanced by having a structure, what we call the priesthood. The structure of the priesthood was not just people who were involved in the sanctuary, in the tabernacle or in the temple, they were also people who had to service the community. They were the civil servants, they were the teachers, they were the doctors, the medical people offering their services for free to the poor because they subsisted on this kind of taxation. But like all such people, these people when they have a power structure, want to preserve it for themselves and their power structure can deteriorate and deteriorate into oligarchy and anarchy. And that's why to parallel the idea of the priest, you have the idea of the prophet. Whereas the priest was hereditary, the prophet was a meritocrat. That's why you have female prophets, 'cause when it comes to jobs for the boys, and men used to keep it for themselves, but when it came to prophets who were dependent on their own charisma, you could have women prophets too.

And then you have the idea of a king in which the Bible is not so keen on the idea of the king because they can show how he can corrupt power and they insist on limitations, that he is subject to the constitution and the law and can't overthrow it. So the Torah, Moses' idea, if you like, is that there are different models of leadership, and models can change from time to time, and we can borrow leadership models from other countries and other traditions, and we have this flexibility. So on the political level, we see how his initial system, which was based on

tribalism, on priesthood, on kingship, has developed a long way from the origins that he established in the foundation. What I find most interesting in our context is that he did not develop a theological system, whereas other religions that have come subsequently have gone into all credos, and you've got to believe this and got to believe that. And indeed we too, Judaism has borrowed so much from the non-Jewish world in terms of belief, but think there is no command in the Torah, you must believe. The first of the 10 commandments does not say, "You must believe in God." It says, , I'm God, there is a God there." You've got to try and find a way of relating to it, how you relate to it is entirely up to you.

But there is a God and this God is a spiritual force in the universe that can benefit you, can also set up standards, and these standards may be necessary for you to curb your egoism. And here in a sense, we come back because on the one hand Freud's argument was that Moses set up a system of such restrictive legislation that this if you like oppressed people, it suppressed them, it made them neurotic. And to some extent you can say it might well have, but then neuroticism isn't always a bad thing, caring about something is not always a bad thing, so long as you have a sense of proportion. So he realised, said Moses, that ideas are very personal. You can't get people around the world to think the same way, even if you can get them to behave the same way, which is why he put the emphasis on behaviour. And the behaviour has been in a sense that which has kept Judaism alive because it's something no matter where we are born or what our background is or what our intelligence is, or what our interests are, we all live physically a very similar life of getting up in the morning, of going to work, of eating and sleeping and procreating and these are all things that the Torah doesn't try to ban, but tries to get you to think about and to treat with respect. Now sadly, we know it doesn't work that way.

You look at the history of the kings after David and Solomon through the kingdom of Judea, through the northern kingdom of Israel, virtually in the northern kingdom of Israel, there wasn't one Jewish king who bothered with Judaism, they were all pagan. But even in the house of David, they were split about 50/50 between good kings who kept Jewish tradition and those that didn't. So we've always in a sense been rebelling against Moses, but somehow rather the constitution has survived through it all. And therefore my conclusion is that Moses struggled with human nature. He was faced with rebellion after rebellion. He was faced with dealing with different cultures and different people and different circumstances. He was no saint himself, he didn't treat his family very well, he didn't give enough respect to his wife, his sons became nobodies, had power obviously, had no influence on his sons 'cause he was so busy in the office all the time. And in the end God said, "I'm sorry you are not completing this process of coming out of Egypt because you lost your temper, you're not a perfect person and I don't want anybody to start worshipping you in any sense."

And that's why as the Torah says, nobody knows where he died because we couldn't turn him into a God, we couldn't turn him into a saint, we call Moses our teacher, we don't call him our God or anything of that kind. This genius was concerned with how we behave. Freud was concerned with how we think and feel. The two can support each other and should support each other. Our private lives are not our public lives, but there should be a connection between the

two of them. And so even though they are separated so far apart and by such different cultures, by such different experiences, different circumstances, in the end, the fact is that both of them wanted to help us be better people. And for that reason, I consider them to be the two most influential people in terms of their impact on the wider world coming from however loosely we define it, a Jewish background. Thank you. So now I'm ready for questions. What about Marx? Type an answer. I'll talk an answer. No, Marx was, if you like somebody who came up with a political theory about how to improve society. But people have been talking about improving society for ages, and after all, both the Judeo-Christian and the Islamic society being concerned with doing things well, with getting people to support each other. Marx was a political critic of society based on the idea of class warfare.

And we conceive, frankly, in my opinion, the dangers of that. We saw the dangers of its abuse in the past, and the dangers of it abuse I feel at this particular moment. And the sad fact is however much you can criticise religion going wrong and religion causing so much death, you can say exactly the same thing about Marxism. And I find that therefore I cannot see Marxist concerned with the individual. He's concerned with society. Moses was concerned both with society and the individual in the society, Freud was concerned with the individual. I don't like people telling us how we should behave in society in terms of dogma. I think it should be in terms of morality, which is based on our own decision making process. Was Moses the creator of the first democracy? Well, you know, democracy we think of as being a Greek convention, from Athens. What Moses did do was to involve more people in the process of government. He took advice from Jethro who was not Jewish from Midian, and he set up a system of the 70 elders. And these elders, their job was to interact with the masses to bring information back to present to Moses to help govern.

And so here you have somebody who is interested in the welfare of society, getting people to be involved, but in the end saying, I suppose we have to say, you know, we look to a combination of spiritual authority and political, physical authority, government, but government should be influenced by values. And I don't think democracy, if you like, conflicts with Judaism, but I don't think democracy is an ideal. I think as Winston Churchill said, "It's the best system we have." But we can see that in so many ways it's incompetent and not able to deal with government as well as we would like. Hence China can do things which America can't. Although not many people I know would willingly want to go and live in China. Freud thinks that the personality of Moses changes from the shy hard speech man to a confident leader. Therefore he had died and a new Moses took his place. Well, not necessarily because we all go through stages in our lives, we all change and we learn from our experiences.

And sometimes it is not the man that maketh the hour, it is the hour that maketh the man. We rise to the occasion. So I can't say for definite no, but it ain't necessarily so. So you know, maybe, right, but who knows? We have any more questions? Sure, we must do, but I can't see them. Or for some reason they're not coming up on my screen. Can I chat? I see what I need to do if I, no answered questions, or open all 14, but I don't get them. Something is going wrong here. Sure, now open question and answer. I did open for question and answer. Why is it not

opening? There must be something wrong I'm afraid with my, what about chat, will chat work? Maybe chat works. There's no question in chat. Okay, so it's not chat, so let's go back to question and answer. My computer is not responding. I don't know why there's something wrong with it. Can you help somehow or other? No, it's not.

- Okay, I'm going to read out the questions and then you can answer them. How about that?

- Oh great, thank you so much. Okay. Okay.

- I dunno what's on my computer. Sorry, go ahead.

Q&A and Comments:

Q: It's okay. Okay, so question says, "Didn't Freud in the last stages of his life", this is from Leila Levine, "Didn't Freud in the last stage of his life change his mind about his thoughts on Moses?"

A: Not that I'm aware of. He was prepared towards the end of his life to see Judaism in a more compelling way, and I think probably influenced by his experience of Nazism. So I think his attitude to religion modified a little bit. I'm not aware, I'm not saying he didn't, but all I can say is I'm not aware of it.

Q: [Female Speaker] This question comes from Mary and Jill Bregman, "Are you saying that Freud thought Moses and monotheism was repressive and that it was basically a form of control?"

A: Yes, I think so. And I think that's the answer of today's atheists, that it is a repressive form of control, to which my answer is any form of control you can say is repressive. It ain't necessarily so, it depends whether you can find a balance. So any kind of discipline you could argue is repressive. It doesn't have to turn you into a somebody who goes off the rails entirely. So it's interesting that the 10 commandments will give them as that of Moses, have still remained one of the best guides in loose terms to moral behaviour, and morality inevitably involve self-control. So I guess I plead guilty, but I would object to, and I do object to religion going too far. I object when religion becomes so repressive that it turns you into a zombie, or so repressive that it can't get you to think for yourself, or so repressive that it alienates other people.

I find this is not what Moses wanted. Moses didn't ask who's a good Jew and who's a bad Jew, he didn't ask who's a religious Jew, who is not a religious Jew. He wanted to give people a way to live and enable them to choose how much to keep, how little to keep, how much to believe, how little to believe. So anything can be turned into a repressive system. Marxism of course, I mean even, you know, you might even say that American society with its emphasis on materialism has become through the internet almost oppressive, if not repressive.

-Q: [Female Speaker] Helen is asking, "Is modern day analysis comparable with the Torah? It

seems they both create a balanced life."

A: They can do, and I think they should. And that's why I think the genius of Moses was because he did have an Egyptian education, he had a secular education, and many of the great Jews over time did. And therefore the need to balance, I think is one of the messages he gives. Unfortunately, we are in an era at the moment where I think post Holocaust trauma, we've become so over-emphasized, concerned with survival that we have turned in on ourselves to a large extent, certainly parts of the religious world have. But I think the combination of history and future very necessary. One of my favourite quotes once heard Lord Bullock say, biographer of Hitler, there's Russian proverb he says, "He who looks to the past is in danger of losing an eye, but he who ignores the past is in danger of losing both eyes." And so I think we need to have an eye on the past, I think that's what Judaism does, it looks back to Sinai, it looks back to Moses, but at the same time it looks forward to the future in a messianic sense of trying to produce a better world. And I think we need both.

Q: [Female Speaker] Username, "M Lake of Sticks" is asking, "What do you make of efforts to relate the archaic events of the Torah to the dilemmas of modern life?"

A: Well, I think if you use a bit of common sense, you can, for example, when Moses said, came off the mountain, said, "Guys, don't steal." He meant sheep and cows and goats. I don't think, because he said that, if he said it 3,500 years ago, you can't apply that to jets and cars and computers and modern technology. There are certain ideas, however all they are that can be adapted. The Shabbat. I think now in our technological world, the idea of a day where we don't turn on our computers, where we don't have our phones and our pads, they say that Steve Jobs insisted that his kids do have a day at least break from all these things. I think that's incredibly modern and incredibly relevant in our society of not being so busy, we have no time for anything else. So I think it is perfectly possible to take laws and ideas that are ancient and adapt them and apply them to modernity. What you have to do is you have to look beyond the letter of the law to the spirit of the law. And this is what was built into the original system. So it's all thanks to the original system that included this that has made us as a people so adaptable, having to be able to survive for so long in so many different countries and so many different circumstances. Despite all the persecution, it's been this adaptability, which was part of the original constitution. Now you can abuse any constitution.

I agree, and it has been abused and it is being abused, and there are things I would like to see changed. But if you know we change just at the drop of a finger, then we are in danger of, should we say, changing with the fashion. And therefore, one of the good things of religion and one of the bad things of religion is that it is conservative, it is reluctant to change. My argument is with many of the rabbis of our era is that the Torah offers tools for change that we're not taking advantage of. You could build into the Torah, there are the means of solving all the outstanding problems we have in the ultra orthodox world as well as elsewhere. So I do think you can go back in time, after all, all legal systems go back to precedent, go back to previous examples and then move from them forwards.

Q: [Female Speaker] Irene Mansfield is asking, "Are you suggesting that Moses codified the Torah or drew it up?"

A: Look, I don't know. Nobody knows for certain, we weren't there. People like to say, "The Torah says that the whole of the children of Israel were at Sinai." We don't know. I don't claim to know. All I claim to tell you is that I look at the text and the text speaks to me, and the text enables me to feel. And so I feel that this text that we have, the constitution, however it came about, in what stages it came about is a wonderful source book for my life, for my morality, for the way I cope. And so to use the language that Talmud uses, it is as if, as if I was standing at Sinai, as if the Torah was given to me. I don't know the actual mechanism of what happened. Indeed in the Torah itself, there are three different versions of what actually happened on Sinai. The rabbis disagree as to when the Torah was actually written down. Was it immediately written down? Written down in stages? We don't know. But we have a text and we've had this text for a very, very long time, and it's our constitution. And if other countries have constitutions that are merely a couple of 100 years old or even less, why can't we have a constitution that's much older and is much wiser in certain respects?

So yes, I do think it is possible to believe this is God communicating with me in the way I communicate with God. I communicate with God in trying to understand the universe, in trying to experience the universe. And I use the Torah as a tool for helping me live my life. And therefore, in a sense, I make the Torah my God. And so when I'm faced with a moral problem, I have to deal with it, I'm a human and it's my life. I start with Torah. I then see where Torah leads through the process to where we are today. And I try to resolve my problems that way. And sometimes my problems are influenced by the society I live in, how it changes me. And it always has been that time through Greek, through Roman period, through Christian period, we've always been influenced by society and we adapt. And that's the greatness of Torah.

Q: [Female Speaker] Betty Lowenstein is asking, "Why do you say Freud got it all wrong in terms of Mosaic law?"

A: Well, because I don't think that mosaic law is all bad. He thinks mosaic law restricts. I don't think the Shabbat restricts me, I think it frees me, it liberates me. I don't think having limit on one's sexual activity is a bad thing, on the contrary, I think it's very important. I think we live in a society where there's no such limitation. So it's interesting, the Torah, the rabbis of the Talmud comment on the fact that the Torah was engraved, engraved in stone. And the Hebrew word for engraved is . Engraved. is the same word for freedom, and it liberates you. At university, we used to argue who is freer, somebody living on a desert island where there's absolutely no limitation whatsoever, nobody telling you what to do, or somebody living in a modern city where your dress is controlled, your behaviour is controlled, traffic lights here, traffic lights there, taxation, oppression, limitation. Who is freer?" Well, it depends what you mean by free. The guy on the desert island can't do very much. Somebody living in a city has got lots of options. I'd rather live in a city, even if there are limitations, I prefer it. So having limitations is not

necessarily a bad thing. And therefore I don't think that Moses was wrong.

Q: [Female Speaker] This is from Vivian Freeman. She'd like to know, "In what sense is traditional Judaism still evolving?"

A: Well, it's evolving all the time, I'll give you one simple example. Until about 50 years ago, the only way that you could measure death in Judaism was by the heart stopping or stopping to breathe. We've moved on to that, to the idea of brain death. And the rabbis and the experts consulting have looked at the pros and the cons, the limitations and have come up with new ways of dealing with medical problems, with technological problems, with social problems, even issues of how one deals with business and how one deals commercially. So it is constantly moving forward. You look at any library of Jewish law, you see masses and masses of books and innovations every single year in Israel and other places too, but mainly in Israel, there was something like 600 publications on Jewish law each year of people who are debating, discussing, because the evolution of Jewish law doesn't go through a Supreme Court, it goes through a process known as . That's to say, you ask me a question and I give you an answer. Because Jewish law isn't like, shall we say papal authority? This is the law. It is each law has to be seen sometimes in the context of the person and the circumstances.

So you've given an opinion, you get asked a question, you give an opinion, you publish your opinion, your opinion is challenged, it's debated, and eventually you reach consensus. And sometimes you don't reach consensus, you have variety and you have rabbis who disagree and different rabbis giving different opinions. Now in one sense you could say, "Wow, this is a mess. We need to know what's the law, how's it work?" I prefer flexibility. I think flexibility is much more healthy and you can choose how much to obey and how much not to obey. So in that sense, again, I think it's healthier. I tell you quite frankly, I don't want to have the Sanhedrin again. I don't have a supreme court, 'cause frankly, I dunno that many rabbis I'd like to trust to sit on that supreme court. So yeah, I prefer it this way, even though it does have disadvantages. And you do have too many people saying, "No, no." instead of saying, "Yes, yes." When the Talmud says, "The ability to say yes is far greater than the ability to say no, 'cause any idiot can say no."

Q: [Female Speaker] Fred Beigel would like to know "Did Freud say anything sensible and or positive about Moses?"

A: Not that I'm aware of. Not that I'm aware of. He was a follower of Akhenaton, but not really.

Q: [Female Speaker] And finally, Irene Mansfield is asking, "If our law is evolving, could it evolve sufficiently to allow me to use my Kindle on Shabbat, please?"

A: Well, my dear, you make a decision of what your priority is and that's the freedom of choice we have. Thank God, I'm grateful for it. And on that happy note, I'm afraid I have to end. I look forward to being with you again shortly when we have to talk about Hanukkah. And I hope I get the question and answer thing right. I dunno why it hasn't worked, maybe I just have, I recently

changed my computer. There's something wrong with it. But anyway, I want to thank you, I want to thank Wendy for facilitating all this. Thank you for listening to me. Have a wonderful week and hope to see you again soon. And anybody who wants to contact me, please do by email, jeremyrosenmsn.com, or Jeremy at jeremyrosen.com.