

Jeremy Rosen - Moses Mendelssohn and the Separation of State and Religion

- So Jeremiah, I think I'm going to hand over to you and give you the full hour.

- Okay.

- Very good. Thanks everybody over to Jeremy.

- So I am going to speak about Moses Mendelssohn, one of my favourite guys, a remarkable guy, one of the most misunderstood and controversial in Jewish history. Because if you go back to the 18th century, the Jews in Europe, in certainly, in central Europe, not so much Eastern Europe in central Europe, had a pretty awful life. They couldn't settle in places without getting permission, and when they were given permission to settle, they were taxed heavily. They were limited in what sort of trades they could perform and carry out. Life was very harsh and they were subject to constant, constant pressure. This man, Moses Mendelssohn, was born in Dessau, part of what we now call Germany, but Germany then wasn't united under one German king or rife. It was a series of little states, and each state had a different attitude towards the Jews. One would accept some of them to come in and the other one wouldn't, and they'd change their mind every minute. He was born in Dessau in a very traditional family, and he was taught and educated by a famous Rabbi David Frankel, who was given permission to come to Berlin. He was given a pass to come to Berlin in order to be a tutor to one of the families who had official residency. And it managed-

- [Wendy] Jeremy, I don't mean to interrupt. Could you mind raising your volume a little bit? Some of the participants are having a little hard time hearing you.

- Oh, I'm sorry.

- Yeah, yeah.

- Is this any better? I don't know if this is any better, but my volume is on massive at the moment. Maybe I should come a little nearer to the speaker and that would be-

- [Wendy] Maybe a little closer, yes.

- Okay. So talking about Moses Mendelssohn being invited to join his teacher in Berlin. When he arrived, he was initially turned away at the gates, but finally they managed to get him in. He was not a prepossessing man, he was a small man. He had a slight hunched back, he had a very kind face, but people took to him. And in this home of his teacher, he found that people were able to engage him in a wide range of subjects and he achieved this sort of reputation of being a good teacher, and one of the wealthiest Jews in Berlin invited him both to become a teacher of his children and a partner in his business. He was born in 1729, and now we're talking about 1750, when he establishes himself with permission, but not yet permanent residency in Berlin.

And he begins to write articles and these articles around the place suddenly bring him to the fore of intellectual life of Berlin. At a time, remember when the enlightenment is beginning, when we are beginning to have people like Voltaire and others who are challenging the old ways of doing things and the emergence of important philosophers, following on as last time we spoke about Spinoza through Descartes.

Then at the same time you had the English philosophers, Hobbes and Locke who were challenging the old ways of looking at government and looking at rulers and looking at kings and the relationship between authority and people. But still Germany, the German states are locked into this battle between the Catholics and the Protestants and who can be stricter than the other. And as usual, when that happens, the Jews get caught in the middle. Now he started writing, people got to recognise him, and one of the important sponsors he had, was a man called Gotthold Lessing. And Lessing was a polymath, he was a dramatist and a poet and a writer. And he was the famous cultural icon in Berlin and in Germany at that particular moment in time. And he befriended Moses Mendelssohn and he got on extremely well with him. So much so that Lessing once wrote an amazing play called "Nathan the Wise" about a Jewish man who manages to travel around the world, gets to Jerusalem and his life story. And it seems, and he agreed that he modelled this "Nathan the Wise" on Moses Mendelssohn.

Now, Moses Mendelssohn wrote an essay for the Berlin Academy that won the top prize. In fact, he won the top prize over the famous Immanuel Kant, the greatest philosopher of his day. And Kant said this Jewish thinker, he is exceptional. And yet he could not get accepted into the academy because he was Jewish. That was the atmosphere that he had to live and work under. And finally he was given residence in Berlin as a famous person, even though he wasn't allowed into the academy, 'cause it was thought that he would benefit society. In his early philosophy lectures in which he drew on those who came before him and created his own philosophical system that many, many people admired, they admired it to the extent that he was often called the Jewish Socrates. And one of his early books was based on Plato's work, in which he called it "Phaedo" based on the book that Plato had written to show how important intellect and spirit was. And he was so innovative again that this drew him to the attention of a much wider audience around Europe.

So that it's fair to say that Moses Mendelssohn, was the most famous Jew, Jewish thinker, Jewish academic in the whole of central and western Europe in his time. Now, he was challenged by a famous Swiss author and theologian called Lavater who said, look, I can see that you are brilliant. So if you are so brilliant and if you can argue, why don't you convert to Christianity? And the two of them had this two and fro, which was quite controversial in which Mendelssohn held his ground and said, would anybody turn to Confucius and tell Confucius, he had to change to Christianity, or to any of the Greek philosophers and say that they had to, it doesn't make sense. One can have one's own independent views and ideas. He also wrote, and I'm going to come to this, this famous book "Jerusalem," in which he argues that there's a role for state and a role for religion. Up to now, everybody thinks that, to be a citizen of the state, you must adopt the religion of the state.

If you are in a Protestant state, you have to be Protestant. If you are in a Catholic state, you have to be Catholic wherever you are to be a genuine citizen, you have to have the religion of the state. And that continue right through the 19th, even 20th century in many parts of Europe. And he argued that you had to draw a distinction between the politics of the state and the religion of the state. In other words, the law, the behaviour on the one hand and the ideas on the other. And this was the first strong case to be made for the separation of state and religion. And this really put him on the map if he wasn't on the map Jewishly, because now for the first time, the enlightenment, the way of looking at the world through modernised and combining it with a Jewish identity was something that was gaining ground everywhere. And in Eastern Europe, the Eastern Europeans thought, no, this is too dangerous. We have to turn our back on secular modernity, otherwise we will all assimilate.

And the truth is that this new era that became known as the Haskalah enlightenment did indeed draw many, many Jews away from Jewish life altogether. And because Mendelssohn preached the idea of combining citizenship and secular knowledge with Jewish knowledge, the extremely religious were violently opposed to him. And to make matters worse, when he translated the first two books of the Bible from Hebrew into German so that anybody could read it, they were furious, 'cause they said, this is just going to facilitate people disappearing and marrying out, at the same time, he is intensely devout, passionately devoted by our standards, ultra Orthodox in many ways. And yet whereas the Enlightenment loved him, the established Eastern European ultra Orthodoxy hated him. And to this day, when Moses Mendelssohn is regarded as the cause of a lot of trouble. Sadly, he had six children, and every one of his children converted to Christianity except for one daughter who died young, because that was the only way they could possibly see being welcomed into secular society. Of course, you know his grandson, a famous musician, Mendelssohn, his children did well in business, in society, but they all of them converted. And so the right wing could say, see what happens when you give him a secular education? They're all marry out and disappear and become Christians.

And so whereas in a sense he was right, he was also wrong, and in a sense that he was wrong, he was also right, because we've seen today that it's perfectly possible to combine secular education and religion and still be committed and still fit in with secular and western society, but in his date, this was considered almost impossible. Remember these Jews in general were supposed to look different, behave differently, and were treated differently. And the only way to escape at that stage was to join another religion, because the idea of not belonging to any religion was not fashionable at all. Just think of the queen in England today, she represents the Church of England. So this divide that happened during the 18th century and the 19th century was one that challenged Judaism just as much as all the persecution and all the difficulties that they'd experienced simply from Christianity, or Islam for being who they were. And Moses Mendelssohn, argued fervently not only that it was possible to combine civil and religious, but it was healthy and it was necessary. And in his important book, "Jerusalem," this was in effect his important argument, His argument was this, it is the role of the state to lay down laws. Laws decide how we treat each other. Laws are not necessarily philosophy.

They're the regulations that different countries fix and they fix to maintain law and order, ideas are a different matter. You can't force people to think the same way, you can't impose religious ideas on anybody. You've got to be Christian, or you've got to be Muslim, or you've got to be Jewish, that simply doesn't work. So his argument was that I as a Jew can be as good a German citizen as any Christian, whether it's Catholic or whether it's Protestant, because so long as I abide by the law of the land, then I am entitled to have what works for me religiously. Because whereas law is a matter of compulsion, religion should be a matter of choice, it should be a matter of persuasion. And because he was such a great intellect and believed in the freedom of intellect and following on Plato, he believed that intellect and soul were interconnected and almost the same thing he said, and this is why Judaism does not impose thought. And so his major contribution was the idea that there is no such thing as dogma in Judaism.

And therefore unlike Christianity, which has dogma, we Jews are purer in the sense that we are freer to think the way we want to think because we don't have dogma, which true, we are constrained by idea, by laws, and by rituals, and by disciplines that try to make us better people. But we are not in a sense obliged and obligated to think in a particular way. And of course, he drew on the fact that in the Torah itself, in the Torah, there is no command which says you must believe. The first of the 10 commandments simply says, I'm the Lord your God. I'm here, I'm out there. It's up to you if you want to relate to me and each one of you will relate to me in a different way. It's not until much later under the Greeks and then under Christianity that you have these dogmas. You must believe this, otherwise you're not a good Christian. If you don't have a crater, you can't say you believe. Now, it's not to say Judaism didn't have ideas. It had important ideas about revelation, about life after death, about messianism, that they were all expressed not as dogma, but as ideas that you couldn't wrestle with, you could argue with, you couldn't challenge, you can debate.

And this was again a problem to those Eastern Jewish communities who were concerned with what we would call socialisation, keeping their communities together, which means keeping them under control. And to keep them under control, you've got to keep them under full control, and under full control, you've got to fit the right things. And if you don't, we don't like you. And that was one of the tension points that existed over his theory of dogma. Now it depends how you define dogma. If you define dogma as a religious obligation that if you don't have, you are not a Christian, that is only if you like a Christian construct. But if you have a situation in which you can be Jewish in a behavioural way, in other socialised ways, then you don't have to have those same constraints. And this debate has continued and does continue, but he was the man very much in favour of reason of faith, of faith being accessible, and faith being something that one could choose and one ought not to compel. Now the question of plurality of truths, can there be different truths? Also depends on how you understand truth.

Because truth can mean there is only one truth and no other. Whereas Judaism accepts that you can be a good person and not be a Jew. You could be a good person and not be a Muslim.

You don't have to be a Muslim too or a Christian too, and that's why we were not involved in trying to compel people to convert. But in the Christian world, evangelical Christianity always wanted to instill, does want people to convert and tell 'em that if they don't convert, they won't get into the world to come. Now, not all Christians think that way, fortunately, just as not all Jews think the same way. But that's still an element in religious thought that Maimonides, that Mendelssohn rather had great difficulty with. And I should say that he was a strong advocate of Maimonides. He was also a strong advocate of Spinoza. He loved the ideas of Spinoza even though he disagreed with him on whether there was a guard over and above nature, or just God, and he thought that was a reasonable position to have.

Now years and years have passed, and the question is what is his contribution, the nature of his contribution to Jewish life today? And that is the part that I want to turn to in part two here, and that is the nature of Jewish governance, the nature of the Jewish polity. When the Israelites started, it's clear that they started with what we would call a theocratic state. That is to say a state ruled entirely by Moses as the voice peace of God. Up until this moment throughout the so-called civilised world, there was an alliance between God and the king. The king was the representative of God on earth, but he was the representative of God on earth, interconnected the two of them. And that gave him the divine right, the right of God to rule. Now this began to change after the death of Moses, after the death of Joshua. And we have the emergence of a situation in which the Jewish tradition is bifurcated into two areas. One area is the area of the priesthood and it is their job to carry out all the functions in the tabernacle and the temple. They are, if you like, the paid officials of religion of the state, always in alliance with the king.

Their temple, their chambers, were always next to the royal palace. And the king, whether he would come or go, would be the representative of God, and their job was to serve him. Religion therefore seemed to be essentially in the hands of the priesthood working with a king. On the other hand, you had the prophets and the popular people, and occasionally they were ruled over politically by different judges, but the 12 tribes often argued amongst themselves, there was never any coherence. And so eventually under Samuel, they decided we need to have a king to be like everybody else. So having to have this position of kingship, now introduces a new dimension, is the king the religious authority or not? And as you all know from the fact, when King David misbehaved, the prophet Nathan came in and told him off, you are beginning to see a kind of a division between the government and the ruling power on the one hand, which was supposed to adhere to the tradition, but they were no longer the ultimate authority that was either the priesthood or it was the prophecy.

So we are beginning to see the cracks in this idea of what we call theocracy in the mosaic sense, where Moses and his law controlled every aspect. Now all of a sudden you have an area of what we might call secular governance. And this became more problematic when in 586, barely a thousand years after their origin, the Jews are in exile. Most of them are in Babylon, where they're living under Babylonian then Persian rule. And some of them in Egypt under Egyptian rule, and some of them under Rome and eventually under Roman rule, they are no longer controlling their total governmental structure. And it's in Babylon that you have this

famous Rabbi Shmuel Samuel, who says, for the first time 2000 years ago, we've now reached a stage where we must say *dina de-malkhuta dina*, the law of the land is the law that we have to accept. Now he didn't mean we should change to Friday and Sunday. He meant in civil matters, in civil matters, where the law is being applied equally to all residents of an empire, we in this situation have to accept their civil laws and that has in effect become the situation that we have lived under for the last 2000 years.

And so although we adhere to our own laws on ritual matters, on civil matters, we find that we are, if you like, bound to follow the law of the land we live in, and if we don't like it, we can go somewhere else. The exceptions that were made, particularly under Christianity, under Islam, were that this only applied where the law treated everybody equally and fairly. But if the law in some way, if you like, was prejudiced against the Jews, then although they had a practical obligation to abide by the law, they didn't have a moral obligation to abide by the law. Now this was a problem and will become a problem as we advance to some extent into modernity. But from that period of Samuel on, the Jews whether they were under Christianity, or whether they were under Islam, were running their own affairs internally. There were a couple of occasions under the Persians where Jews broke away and established their own kingdom for a period of time when they combined both together.

But in general, this is how it worked. And throughout Europe there was what was called the *kahal*, the community. But it's interesting that the community was in very many ways democratic, that anybody could, if you like, vote for who would be on the community, the community was made up both of rich people and of scholars. You didn't necessarily have to have as you did in England, a property in order to become a member of parliament, or a voter, or anything like that, you had a say. Of course, it never worked quite that way. People with power always find a way of exercising power. And particularly because the rabbis often married into the rich families of the exile and were in league together, they often made decisions that we would say are not very democratic. For example, how do you pay your communal taxes? Do you pay your communal taxes with a poll tax that is to say a tax on every person equally?

And people will justify that by going back to the Shechem in the Bible, rich and poor, or do you have what we would call an income tax? In other words, you charge according to whether somebody can actually pay or not. And very often you found that the rabbis ally with the rich members of the community favoured the poll tax, because they wouldn't have to pay so much, and the others who were poorer wanted an income tax. But they, in principle, there was the opportunity for people to get involved in the process and have a say. Originally at the time of the second temple, there was in addition the Sanhedrin the gathering of elders, and they were 70 elders, sometimes 71 with an appointed person to go over the top and sometimes more who took decisions both religiously and civilly when they were able to and did so on the basis of a majority decision, but a majority of people who had the scholarship and the knowledge in order to make the decisions.

But that Sanhedrin period disappeared with the rise of Christianity under Islam, there was no

such established council. And for 2000 years, more or less, we managed on this ad hoc basis. Sometimes as in Europe, there was a famous, the Council of the four lands, which met in parliament several times a year at the Great Fairs where everybody came together and voted and made legislations about commercial and other areas, all of which included in Jewish law. And they were allowed to make their internal organisations and laws and rules, but they came under superior authority. This remained the case during the enlightenment, during the 19th century, during the 20th century, and in fact remains the case today for those Jews living in the diaspora. So then what happens? We get a land of our own. And now in a land of our own, surely we can return to the old system where we have a Sanhedrin, which controls everything. Admittedly, it would bring in advisors from different areas to advise it on its decisions, but it would be rather like in Iran, there's sit elders making the decision for everybody.

And if you don't like it, it's too bad. We have now entered a democratic world. And the question is, what should the Jewish position on this be? Now, from a purely religious point of view, it is true that the design of the Torah originally was to encompass the whole of the nation. It was a national constitution that covered every aspect of life, foreign affairs, other affairs, whatever it was, and like the Sanhedrin, it ran the affairs with consultancy, with advice. We now live in a situation where democracy simply doesn't accept that. So the question then becomes what should be the policy of the state of Israel? Now, the state of Israel, as you know, was set up by people who were overwhelmingly secular and overwhelmingly democratic. And there was no way that they were going to accept rabbis telling them what to do. And the question therefore was, in what way should religious law get involved with the state?

And so for the first time, you had this dramatic split between those people who believe that the state should be run along Orthodox Jewish religious lines only, that this is how the Messiah would do it and this is how we should do it. And others would say, look, there's a place for religion in the States, but we're not going to compel anybody, we're not going to impose it on anybody, let people make their own choices. And of course, Moses Mendelssohn would've agreed with that position. Now, the problem we have now is because religion has entered into the political system of the state of Israel, this has now created a situation in which religion is being imposed on other people in a civil state. And the question is, is this legitimate and is it legitimate, in what way is it legitimate? Religious parties essentially exist in order to further their own specific interests, which are in the main religious interests.

Civil parties contain and are included with that group which maintains their own interests, whether it's left wing or whether it's right wing. And these discussions are discussions how to run the state in general. When the state of Israel was founded, the extreme right wing, the ultra Orthodox you would call 'em the black hats for want of a better expression, most of them were opposed to the idea of a Zionist secular civil state. They wanted to remain in a situation of limbo until the Messiah would come and set up a theocratic state. On the other hand, you had what we'd call the modern religious of different kinds who said, no, we're living in a modern state, we just want to ensure that the state makes certain concessions to being a Jewish state as opposed to a state of Jews. And therefore we want certain things like, Shabbat and festivals to

be acknowledged. And they also ask for matters of status, definition, who decides, who gets married? These issues, they wanted them to be fixed in accordance with Jewish law. And when Ben-Gurion, after 1948, established the state, he realised that he would have to make certain concessions to the Orthodox much as he didn't want to.

And the extent of the feeling against making any concessions to the Orthodox was very, very powerful, very, very strong. In fact, the story is told that when it came to the Declaration of Independence, the secular left, left-wing, non-religious Jews said, we don't want any mention of God in this. We want this to be a secular ideally left-wing state. And on the other hand, the religious people said, listen, if we don't have something Jewish in it, then what is it? Why are we any different to the Serbs, or the Croats, or anybody else? In the end, the few religious members of the close inner circle managed to persuade Ben-Gurion to make the statement of Tsur Israel, we look to the rock of Israel to help us as a country survive. And when this declaration was read out, the secular were furious. They said, Ben-Gurion, you've betrayed us. You've mentioned guard, you've mentioned Tsur Israel, the Rock of Israel. And Ben turned around and says, you crazy?

When I talk about the Rock of Israel, I mean the army, I mean the Haggadah, you want to interpret another day, that's your business. Now, nevertheless, he made concessions, and the concessions he made are what we call the status quo in Israeli society. In Israeli society, the law is civil law is made up of Ottoman law of mandate British law, and of Jewish law in the civil area. But he agreed that in addition to civil courts, there would be religious courts which would run only according to Jewish law doubling up in certain areas. And he also agreed that matters of personal status, marriage, death, definition of who is a Jew, should also be accepted by them, which at the time didn't seem such a bad idea, because the fact was that the religious at that moment were a small minority in the state of Israel. So in Israel to this very day, you can only get married if you're a Christian, as a Christian. You can only get married as a Jew if you are a Jew, and you can only get married as a Muslim, if you are a Muslim, there's no such thing as civil marriage. Now, it doesn't mean to say that somebody who's not Jewish can't get married, you can, but as in Europe, in the old days, it was all in the control of the church.

And so Israel civilly will recognise a marriage contracted outside of Israel. Like say, if you take a quick cruise to Cyprus and get married there, you come back and civilly you are recognised as a Jew. But on the other hand, the Rabbinic will say, we don't recognise you as a Jew and therefore we won't marry you. And this has become a massive problem, particularly with a large number of Russian immigrants who have come into Israel, but not only the Russians or different groups that come in from a non-rabbinic background have a problem. The question then is, how do you define a Jew in Israel? And here we have two different systems, because when the state of Israel was set up, the first thing it did was to say, look, we've just experienced a situation in which the whole of the world has virtually turned its back on anybody who is Jewish, but on anybody who is Jewish, is defined by Hitler, not defined by us. Even somebody who we would say is not Jewish, is still treated as Jewish, and therefore if we are a state which is a refuge for Jews, we should allow everybody who other people think is a Jew to come and seek refuge

here.

And so they created what is called the law of return. And the law of return means is defined that anybody who would be sated as a Jew, even by Hitler's definition, is welcome to come. Even if only one grandparent is a Jew is welcome to come and will give them citizenship. Otherwise, citizenship can be given, but you have to apply for it. And if you apply for it, you have to show you are a law abiding citizen and you conform to certain religious standards. On the other hand, the religious said, look, we are not a civil organisation, we are a religious organisation. And religiously we're going to only going to accept our definition of who is a Jew, no other one. And so you have two definitions of a Jew, the civil and the religious. There was a time in the past when the religious were such a small minority and their impact was only felt in certain small areas in Jerusalem and in Bnei Brak. But over the years they've grown more and more powerful. The first of the Ultra Orthodox in the early years didn't want to come into government. They were not interested in government, they were only interested in government funding their schools, and their synagogues, and the Rabbinic and the religious courts, that's all they wanted, just enable us to carry on.

But because there were other parties who went into government, with the intent of trying to change policies, you had this difference between religious who want to change, who want to impose, and religious who don't want to change, don't want to oppose, just want to be left alone. And originally the ultra Orthodox didn't get involved in religious life in the state and the state therefore was controlled by rabbis, by and large who were in the centre. Rabbis I think of like Rabbi Goren, or the first Chief Rabbi Hertz, or the first Sephardi Chief Rabbis Uziel. They were much more balanced, open-minded, and tolerant. But over the years, as political parties began to vie for more money, for more support and got people to come and vote, the Ultra Orthodox slowly infiltrated more and more of Israeli society and Israeli government to the point where we now see in these elections, we have a situation in which, Israel simply can't agree on almost anything because there are at least three different major blocks and lots of minor blocks. You've got the left wing who want to be left alone and don't want any religious involvement. You've got the right wing who want to totally control Jewish life in the state.

You have people in the middle who want to moderate in between these two. And on both sides you have lunatic crazies and they can't agree on anything. They are so culturally different and the fact that they can survive in one state together in itself to me is a miracle. Now, I strongly believe in the separation of religion and state, which is the position of Moses Mendelssohn. I believe that in the diaspora, we are free either to be religious or not religious. If we want to support our religious institutions, we support our religious institutions. If we don't, we don't. There's nothing wrong with asking the state to contribute, but we don't need to have a religious party. I often give the example of England, where the Catholic minority is a minority in England, which is a Protestant country or was once upon a time, but they get state support for their schools and for their churches, and for their charities. But they don't have a political party, they don't have to get into government. So you've got Catholics who are conservatives and Catholics who are labour and liberal and anybody else. You don't need to have religious parties to ensure

that a state takes care of its religious constituency. Because in a way it makes sense, if you have such a big minority. And if you only have two major parties, both parties are going to want to court those religious votes. But where you have, as you do in the state of Israel, religious parties, the religious vote the religious, non-religious and non-religious, although increasingly more and more religious are getting fed up with the religious parties and their attempt to bully the state and not contribute enough to the state in other areas in order to balance the budget. So there is this tension, and I personally feel the best way to deal with it, is to separate religion and state in the sense that, the state will continue to be a Jewish state in the sense of recognising the Jewish calendar, the Jewish holidays, maintaining its allegiance to the Jewish religious tradition, But at the same time, anybody who wishes to lead their own religious life in whichever way they do, and we see in Israel, there's so many variations in religious life, they should be allowed to do it. And if you want to have a religious marriage, have a religious marriage, if you want a black hat marriage, or marriage, have it, choose, do what you like. Don't be regulated by bureaucracies. Bureaucracies are always inefficient, bureaucratic, slow moving, and in a sense insensitive and concerned with power. And I don't see any reason why if there is a separation of the state from religion, the other parties couldn't steal and wouldn't want to steal to court the religious vote if there weren't religious parties. And that way they would be able to ensure that they got their social welfare and their educational support that they need. So to put it in a nutshell, I don't hear the argument that says, we need to have these interlocking religion and state, because otherwise Israel won't be a Jewish state, That's not true. It will be on the basis of majority decision and commitment and involvement. And there are many, many, probably even the majority of religious people who are not identified with any one religious party or the other. I would not like to see a theocratic state. And frankly this is going to sound very heretical from me. The main reason I wouldn't like to see a theocratic state is, I'm not certain I could find 10 rabbis I'd want to control my life, let alone over 70 and have a Sanhedrin of them. Apart from the fact that, I can't see how the different Hasidic sects would agree with each other, they can't agree with each other, they're on policy most of the time anyway, and certainly not on religious standards. So I just don't see it as practical, which is one of the reasons why I say don't worry folks. The Messiah is not coming just yet because we won't be able to agree on who the architect is, let alone who the priests and the temple are going to be. So I dislike the idea of coercion of religious coercion, which is precisely the point that Moses Maimonides is raised. And so on the basis of that, I rest my case. And so now over to you for questions.

Q&A and Comments:

Q: So the first question, first question I have comes from Elliot Wilner, with all due respect to Moses Mendelssohn, and that's considerably indeed. Roger Williams championed a separation of religion a century before Mendelssohn, and he was actually able to implement that principle when he founded the colony of Rhode Island and Providence plantations in North America.

A: Yes, you are absolutely right. However, sorry, Moses Mendelssohn is the first person to actually propagate it within the Jewish community. So I meant as a Jewish thinker, but thanks for that point.

Q: Anita asked me, what about Spinoza? What about Spinoza?

A: Spinoza also, Spinoza didn't like religion altogether. So Moses Maimonides steps back from Spinoza's absolutism and he sees a place for religion and thinks you have to have religion. And he disagrees with Spinoza on the idea that religion should be a matter of spirit and idea, which is why Spinoza preferred the Christian revelation to Jesus, to the Jewish revelation to Moses. Moses was concerned with behaviour, where Spinoza was concerned with ideas, and Mendelssohn wanted ideas to be freed from this idea and to be able to influence both religion and non-religion if that was possible.

I just discovered the talk by Rabbi Sacks only long view of Jewish history.

Fine, you've given a reference for that. So anybody who's interested in follow it.

So the 10 Commandments aren't saliva, not dogma.

Well, no, it depends how you understand dogma. If you take dogma, which is a word which comes from the Greek and adopted by the Christian, the Christianity from Constantine had what's called the Nicene faith. The faith of Nicene, the credo and the credo says, if you don't believe in these things, you cannot be a Christian. If you don't believe in the father of the Son and the Holy Ghost, you cannot be a Christian. Nowhere do the 10 Commandments say you must believe. The 10 commandments say, these are the 10 fundamental principles. They're not the 10 mitzvot, they are the 10 dibrot, the 10 statements of ideals. This is an ideal to get to an ideal takes time. So it's true that you have from Maimonides, the idea of principles of faith that you have to believe. But then, well remember one occasion when I was in yeshiva and I went to the head of my yeshiva and I said, look, one of the principles of faith is, you must believe that God is a perfect unity and I don't understand what it means by a perfect unity. What's the difference between a unity and a perfect unity?

To which the issue said, don't worry child, either you'll get it or you won't. Either you'll work it out or you won't. He didn't say you are stopping to be Jewish because you don't accept or you can't work out. One of the 10 principles of faith are that whole idea went into Judaism after Christianity, 'cause Christianity turned around and said, what kind of religion are you if you don't have principles of faith? And so same as Islam, and that's when Maimonides had to come up with these 10 principle principles of faith, which a lot of people at the time were not happy with because how can you force people to think, you can encourage people to act and to behave. But when it comes to thinking, we think differently. Some of us intelligent, some of us less intelligent, some of us are rationalists, some of us are mystics. We've got different ways of thinking. And that's precisely what Mendelssohn said. We've got to enable and empower people to think in their own ways.

Q: Now, we come to Allegra in Judaism, is not action more important belief?

A: If so, this might require some degree of state recognition and support. Well yes, absolutely. It is actions, it's deeds that really count. You can say the nicest things in the world, but if you're not behaving properly, then so what? So in that sense is more important.

Q: But what do you mean by state recognition?

A: State recognition should simply be that we enable you to do what you want to do. You want to educate your children this way, we'll enable you to do that maybe, but you can't get the state to impose actions honour of a purely religious nature in my view.

Q: Did your slaves have any choice in getting married?

A: You are talking about 3000 years ago, you're talking about the Bible, 3000 years. Hello? Does any religion still live 3000 years ago? So probably being a slave then wasn't much fun. But of course there were differences in slaves, there were different slave rules. But if you're talking about choice, how much choice did women have in England in the 19th century?

Q: Ted Shapiro, to what degree does Israel fail to subject church and state? If so, why does such a regression take place?

A: Yes, it has failed to separate state and religion and it was intended originally as a compromise and probably a wise political compromise. The trouble was that it went tens in glove with an electoral system of proportional representation that encouraged minor parties. And once you encourage minor parties, the parties in charge want their votes and so they support them and encourage them. If we'd have had a different electoral system, a system as in England for argument's sake and it's not perfect by any means, but no system is perfect, then you would've had two or three major parties and you wouldn't have had all these parties holding everybody up to ransom. And that would've made life much, much easier. The regression therefore came precisely because of the electoral system that encourages there being too many parties both, on the religious and on the non-religious side. And I blame Ben-Gurion and I blame an for it, because they could have changed the electoral system if they wanted to, but they didn't because they were so desperate for power, they wanted the votes of these small little parties. So everybody's to blame in one sentence for the situation that we have today.

Q: Why do you not see Rambam's 13 peace faith as as dogma?

A: Well, he didn't see them as dogma because he saw them as guides, and he saw and understood the term emunah, as being something that you should strive to understand rather than something compulsory. And so in the Talmud, nobody gets kicked out for not believing the right thing. What they do say you don't believe in life after death, okay, you don't get a life after death. But they didn't kick you out of the Jewish community simply because you didn't believe something. Now we have a situation where we've become so influenced by the concept of belief

in the Christian sense that this is what people try to do, but it's not what it was originally.

Q: During the period when there was democracy, isn't it true that only men had to say just as today in Orthodox that still applies?

A: Yes, that is quite true. That we've been living in a male dominated society for thousands of years as much under Christianity and in Islam and as anywhere else. And it still is male dominated in many parts of the world. Just look at what poor women in India have to go through. And so yes, there's always been a bias against women. That's something that I hope to deal with in an upcoming lecture in due course within the next couple of weeks, I hope we'll be dealing with something of that kind. My problem is that Orthodox in Israel don't always accept Orthodox conversion in the US. Yes, that's a pure political bureaucratic problem. Typical of the sort of things. They don't even recognise some Orthodox conversions done in all Israel by Orthodox people, 'cause they don't agree with their politics and I don't see what right they have to start making these statements. It never happened in the past. In the past, whether in the Sephardi Ashkenazi world, wherever it was, it was the local rabbi who made the decision and who accepted conversions and they were accepted if the people were legitimate.

We've now had a problem unfortunately, that there are many people who want to convert for non-religious reasons in order to benefit from certain state benefits, or for marriage or for whatever it is. And the Orthodox have become very suspicious of conversion. We've always is another subject for another time, favoured conversion where it was genuine. And that's why you've got black converts of all kinds, white converts, pink ones from all countries of all part of the world. And you see them in Israel and indeed in America to this day. But this idea of one bureaucratic office deciding is, anti, it's what you call it's a, I'm forgetting the word that I want to say. Where you have a monopoly. It's a monopoly. And I don't like monopolies. I think monopoly is very unhealthy and therefore I wish there was a different system and we've been trying to get it for years. Israel, the Knesset, and ministries, have tried to solve this problem and they keep on going round and round in circles like the Israeli political system when no doubt there's going to be another wasted election, another wasted millions, in another four months time off, six months time, money that could be better spent on the poor instead of this ridiculous situation.

Q: Was MMS's view of the children simulation and amount of Jewish survival in general?

A: Yeah, it was a source of great pain. He already saw the way things were going, but they waited until he was dead before they went ahead with their conversion.

Isn't the situation in Israel exacerbated by the fact that, I can't see the rest of this one. I can't see the rest of that question. Sorry. Wow. Brave to take on this topic, thank you. Early, thank you.

Q: Mike, what about the many women who are in limbo because of their husbands won't give them yet.

A: Yes, exactly. I think this is a very bad situation, a situation that you could, there's all the tools in Jewish law exists to deal with this. And it's ridiculous that we have to rely on civil courts in England and in America, to make sure that a man gives away a forget instead of dealing with ourselves. The tools are there, but when you have only one voice, that one voice in Judaism shuts out all the others. And that's again, another argument for separating the state from religion. And then if a religious group doesn't want to accept as it is, there are certain Hasidic groups that won't accept children from the other groups to marry into their group. Not all of them, I'm glad to say. But there are, it's a matter of choice. Just as people choose, I'm not going to allow my daughter to marry somebody who's poor, or I'm not going to allow my son to marry somebody who's a career woman. People make restrictions all the time. That's free choice. But it's bad when it comes from a governmental institution. Villages don't even have a majority. That's true, they don't. But it's all bargaining, if they team up, and that's what this negotiation is doing.

Q: Does celebration of Christmas a simply holiday translate separation of state and church? Should the state support religious institutions should be totally self-supporting?

A: It's interesting, yes. If you can have, the state can recognise if you like symbolically, all religious holidays, whether it's Yom Kippur, or Rosh Hashanah, or Kwanzaa, or Christmas, or Easter, so long as you're not compelling people to adhere to it, they can even shut down offices, it's their choice. They can do it for civil events like Mayday and others. And should state support religious institutions is a very difficult question. It's a difficult question because in theory this means that if they do, they should be able to impose their curriculum, which is a problem in many countries where they want to impose a more liberal curriculum, and religious parties, religious people don't want to accept it. And my position is fine if you don't want to accept, don't take state money. If you want to take state money, you may have to agree to certain state standards, but contributing to me to something that is not antisocial, and I believe that if a religious institution is antisocial and undermines the social wellbeing of a state and sets one group about another, then the state should intervene to stop that as much as it would intervene to stop two human beings killing each other.

Q: Do you think Jewish groups who refuse to let their children go into the Israeli for should allow to vote in elections?

A: That's a good question. Honestly, no, no, I think if you are not prepared to support the state and support its institutions, and get your children either to go into the army, or to offer some sort of social service instead, I think you should allow conscientious objectives and others and alternative, but if you're not prepared to accept over those, no, in Jewish law shouldn't be voting. Reformed Jews in those converge Jews in reform. I still have , yes they do. They do indeed. And I, you know, sort of this is a matter of opinion.

Q: Should conversion be made easy or should it not?

A: And therefore it is a matter of choice. And those like me who would like religion to be only a matter of religious conviction, not of convenience, should be able to make our decisions and those who make it as no, we want to open up so we can keep as many people in as we possibly can, should be allowed their positions. And I'm in favour of a free market. Political situations still managed to impose their views, I'm afraid they do.

Q: How does one explain Orthodox Jew in the 18th century?

A: Moses Mendelssohn is insane. The fact is that in those days you couldn't get a job if you weren't a Christian. You couldn't become, you know, sort of the leader of an orchestra. You couldn't become a lawyer, you couldn't practise. That began to change slowly and only change really halfway through the 20th century in many countries. It was only relatively recently that Jews could. So if you wanted to have a job, or you wanted to succeed in your job, either you change your name and you change your religion, or you had a problem, I had an uncle who was living in Ireland in the 1920s, and he couldn't get a job as a social worker with a name Rosen. So he changed his name to Shaun. He didn't have to convert, but he changed his name, and it was a bit like that. In those days, if you wanted to get on in society, whether it was English society, or German society, or French society, I mean, just look at the Dreyfus case at the end of the 19th century, that's not so long ago. If you are Jew with a Jewish name, they were out to get you. So many people fed the hell with it. You know, I want a peaceful mind. In the same way that many people who survived the Holocaust, many people decided not to give their children any kind of Jewish education, 'cause they didn't want them to suffer what they suffered.

Ralph Friedman, partisan politicians don't like to give up power. You recently say religious party give up power until they president held.

No, I don't. Either, I've got to wait for the Messiah to come, or I can't see any change in Israel at the moment. I'm just as, I can't see, you know, sort of peace, much as I want to see peace, I hope a miracle will happen.

Okay, so I think I'm afraid I'm going to stop now. Once again, if anybody would like to continue the discussion with me by email, I'm happy to do so. Otherwise there'll be other lectures in the future and we can take up some of these issues again then. So thank you very much everybody.

- Thanks everybody, . We'll see you tomorrow.

- Thank you, Wendy.