

Dear Rabbi Fried,

In a recent column you made the statement that it is not synonymous with Orthodox Judaism to look down upon, or to judge, those who are not observant or have lesser observance than that which Orthodoxy espouses. I would tend to disagree, based upon many quotes I have seen in traditional literature which put down those who are not observant. Take, for example, the blessing in the daily Amidah prayer beginning “velemaalshinim”, ...”may you speedily uproot and smash and humble the sinners”. Statements like these are what gives the license to those in Orthodoxy who tend to judge others.

Morty W.

Dear Morty,

I would be curious to see the “many quotes” to which you refer, as I am unfamiliar with them. The one quote you mention from the prayer book (siddur) is a compelling one; let us examine it in context:

*“And for slanderers let there be no hope; and may all wickedness perish in an instant; and may all Your enemies be cut down speedily. May You uproot, smash, cast down and humble the wanton sinners speedily in our days. Blessed are You, G-d, Who breaks enemies and humbles wanton sinners.”* (Artscroll Siddur, pp 107)

This blessing is chronologically the last one to be written in the Amidah. The first 18 blessings were composed by the Men of the Great Assembly, upon the building of the second Temple. This blessing was added over 500 years later. The Jewish people were in great danger due to the destruction, its ensuing exile and the many groups out to destroy the Jews. It was composed in response to such heretical sects as the Sadducees and the early Christians, who imperiled the lives of the Jews by slandering them to the Roman government. They further sought to lead the Jews astray through persuasion and political power.

The blessing encompasses two distinct messages. Firstly, the Talmud relates the story of Rabbi Meir who was constantly bothered by a group of wicked men living nearby. He was going to pray that they should die, when his wife Beruriah challenged him. She claimed, based upon a verse, that one should pray that the *wickedness*, not the *wicked*, should be destroyed. R' Meir accepted his wife's rebuke, and prayed that their wickedness should disappear, and they repented and became righteous. (Talmud Berachos 10a).

The first section of the blessing is emphasizing the *wickedness* of the slanderers, praying that those people should return to the fold.

The second part of the blessing is referring to those who are so deeply hateful of the Jews and the Torah and their desire to destroy them, that they are beyond reproach. That is the emphasis on “*wanton sinners*”, those who do so with a high hand, knowing full well that they are in rebellion against the Jews and their Torah. It is mainly this part of the blessing that the Sages sought the most humble, unassuming and loving rabbi amongst their ranks to compose this blessing.

“Samuel the Small”, called by that name due to his profound humility, was chosen. (Talmud Berachos 28b) He would surely not mix in the slightest hint of haughtiness or self-righteousness in his composition, but out of deep pain that such a blessing need be enacted.

Rabbi Samson R. Hirsch asserts that we no longer have heretics among our nations like those referred to in this blessing. (Collected Writings iv p 207) Chofetz Chaim exhorts us not to judge even the most irreligious in our times, as their state stems from a lack of education, and “don't judge another person until you stand in their place”. (Maganisa Tava 17) Chazon Ish writes it is our obligation to embrace our secular brethren with bonds of love. (Yoreh De'ah 2:16) This is the ruling of these three giants of Orthodoxy, leaders of the past generations, and is mainstream Torah thought. Those who act or think otherwise, it is by their own volition, they have no place in our sources.