

When Power Overshadows Truth

by Guardian in Chief Richard A. London

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As we endeavor to bring more Light into our daily lives, I find that I am nourished by an ever-evolving and unsevered connection with my religious upbringing. While the “refreshing green of Nature” and the “beauty, fragrance, and form in the flower world” light up my life, it is not surprising that for many of us living north of the Equator, both Passover and Easter bring forth a synergy along with the cycle of Springtime. Viewed as a tapestry, the larger patterns of rebirth, renewal, and redemption are bursting at the seams, while the threads of devotion and betrayal are less obvious and well-stitched. A paradox to be sure, these are the threads that challenge the fabric of our lives, the durability of ourselves, our families, and our communities through an alchemical process meant to eventually dress up our behavior with ethics, integrity, and loyalty in our hearts. With stronger aspiration, gratitude, and devotion, imagine the potential for intentionally and mindfully weaving together a nurturing fabric for sheltering humanity under the tent of the Golden Rule.

Even with Easter happening to precede Passover this year, I’m reminded of my deep enthusiasm for springtime, perhaps because I so delighted in time off from school. Although it was never long enough, during breaks from school I found relief from the secular instructions about outer laws and orders of life and was able to connect more deeply with inner laws and orders — and especially with my inner need for fun and play.

I was raised under the influence of the Old Testament and indoctrinated with two core beliefs. One was that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And God said, Let there be Light.” The second understanding from my youth was the distinction afforded to the firstborn son, who automatically received accolades and privilege.

I happen to be the firstborn son, the first of four boys, with some seven years between me and the youngest. I was nearly four when the third in line was born, and it wasn’t long before I was eased into looking after my younger brothers as I went, in a sense, from being one of the sheep to one of the shepherds.

I was 20 when that third brother was taken from us by a drunk driver. He was just 17, and my parents never recovered; in a way, neither did I. It was years later when I came to realize that being older and being responsible for looking after the younger ones had shielded me more from sibling rivalry than it did from the devastation of a parent losing a child. I share this experience as a way of noting that order of birth as well as gender have an impact on how we experience our lives. To be sure, had I been born a girl, I most likely would have come into this lifetime with the instinct to shepherd my younger sibling's health and safety, but with far more expectations and none of the accolades accorded the firstborn son.

I grew up in a faith that was primarily led by men. I knew you needed at least ten bar mitzvahed men — a minyan — to hold a religious service. I knew only men could be rabbis, and that I was born Jewish because my mother was Jewish.

Today, some 1,700 women are known to be ordained rabbis. Regina Jonas, who was ordained privately in Berlin, Germany, in 1935 (the birthplace of my mother) is known to be the world's first female rabbi. Unable to find a synagogue willing to hire her, she served as a chaplain and teacher until she died in the Holocaust in 1944. In Rabbi Jonas's words, "God planted in our hearts skills and a vocation without asking about gender."

In contrast to the patriarchal nature of many historical traditions, some societies of old, like the Haudenosaunee, acknowledged the uniqueness between the feminine and masculine roles in life, and continue to hold both the matriarchal and patriarchal forces as balancing forces, neither being dominated nor subordinated to the other.

While men and women have much in common, it is their differences that have deeply influenced the structures of our societal dynamics. For the sake of argument, let us assume that males were more adept at hunting while women were more proficient at gathering, and perhaps those roles evolved through being more or less synergistically complementary into the more instinctual hierarchical characteristics of survival of the fittest. For creatures who gradually became conscious of their consciousness, I can only imagine the laborious nature of the learning process that has brought us to where we are today.

Judaism and Christianity are Western ways of believing, but their geographical origins are nearer to the roots of Buddhism and Hinduism

than to the Indigenous Peoples of North America. And yet from Islam to Theosophy, there are no bounds to the ways and means humanity interprets the “why” behind the “how” we need to live our separate lives while living together, and getting along with each other.

Perhaps the following five Temple precepts can shed some light on how to bring us closer to our inner and outer insights, and to the challenges humanity faces in coming to terms with the reality of Universal Laws and Orders of Life.

First is the Triple Key, the evolution of Matter, Force, and Consciousness.

Second is the 2nd Rule of Discipleship, which states: “Thou shalt obey the laws of Life. The Higher Law will hold thee accountable for the breaking of every lesser law.”

Third is the Law of Polarity as it relates to the different, yet equal values attributed to both the feminine and masculine principles of existence.

Fourth is the Law of Karma, which is synonymous with the Law of Love, and that Love is synonymous with God.

The fifth Temple precept is the Law of Centralization.

I imagine that most of us prefer order over chaos. Avoiding chaos would seem to be in everyone’s best interests, but the challenges of which laws and whose laws to obey, not to mention processing the inner desire and will to be obedient to them — or not — is why chaos is always lurking around the corner.

“Parents can tell but never teach unless they practice what they preach,” is a favorite quote of mine, from Arnold H. Glasow. Thanks to Mother Nature, most offspring learn the art of survival by following in their parent’s footsteps. Instinctually, they are for the most part programmed to follow the rules and live by the laws. More importantly, rarely if ever are our fellow creatures able to circumvent these rules and laws at their convenience.

Although there are various interpretations of the Bible, within the Temple Teachings it is plainly stated that the Holy Scriptures cannot be studied too much. Having said that, I have found a number of exceptions within the Old Testament that, from my point of view and without disrespect, I

believe are not exempt from the Laws of Karma, despite being sanctioned by God.

My core beliefs began with the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with Abraham even today being accepted by most as the Father — if not the founder — of Judaism and by extension, Christianity, and Islam. While there are volumes of scholarly interpretations of how these three men lived their lives, I would like to share how I interpret four exceptions that may have been the cause and effect contributing to the celebration of Passover and eventually of Easter. They are quite possibly the reasons for the general unrest, if not chaos, our children's children may be wrestling with for some time to come. Of course, these exceptions can be interpreted to be intentional or necessary, enlightening, or hypocritical, or possibly viewed as devotion or betrayal.

Before I look deeper into the pervading historical patriarchal advantages afforded to the firstborn son, I would like to take a broader view into the five Temple Precepts mentioned above.

Many are familiar with the Temple Square, used most often as a structure for our weekly study classes. Our minimum meeting number requires the attendance of at least two adult males and two adult females, who are usually the four Temple Officers. The four Temple Officers meet regularly with the Guardian in Chief on matters concerning the Temple and its true work, that of trying to embody here on the physical plane the truths of the inner planes — our real home. These officers are Inner Guard, Outer Guard, Scribe, and Treasurer. Each office symbolizes a certain aspect or facet of the Temple work. The office of Inner Guard symbolizes the responsibility to the feminine aspect of manifestation, the nurturing, connecting, indwelling spiritual force expressed through compassion, sensitivity, and reverence for all life. The position of Outer Guard symbolizes the responsibility to the masculine aspect, the protecting, questing, balancing force, which is expressed through the powers of will, order, logic, and strength. The position of Treasurer symbolizes the responsibility to our storehouse of spiritual treasure filled with the jewels we have been given to use, to care for and enhance. The position of Scribe symbolizes the responsibility to the records of our aspirations, hopes, and faith and the flow of these to and from all human hearts and minds. These four positions represent the human roles we have come to know as Mother, Father, Sister, and Brother. All four include varying degrees of the active

and passive, the positive and negative aspects and forces of Air, Fire, Water, and Earth. All four are always dynamic and never stagnant, although their appearances can be deceiving. None of the Four ever stand still, as the Law of Polarity perpetuates their ebb and flow until the time of Pralaya, or rest. This becomes evident when learning to use the Triple Key, the Evolution of Matter, Force, and Consciousness, as a means for moving through the known into the unknown with an open mind and a pure heart. Eventually we begin to make sense of where we came from and where we may be headed, when we come to know the Law of Karma, which is also known as the Law of Cause and Effect, Divine Justice, and the Law of Love. This is the explicit reason for the Higher Law holding us accountable for the breaking of every lesser law, whether or not we eventually acknowledge our accountability and become obedient to that Law. Finally, it is the Law of Centralization which requires equilibrium, a form of balanced unified action that always coalesces around a central point.

Taking the Temple precepts and the Higher Law into account, my personal assertion is that those exceptions lead to Power overshadowing Truth, to Dogma overshadowing Honesty, to Suspicion overshadowing Trust, and to Discord overshadowing Unity. All lead us deeper into darkness and further from the Light, yet paradoxically leave within us the embers for rekindling our future aspirations to be One with the Light.

The first of these exceptions begins with the historical concept of the firstborn son essentially becoming the *de facto* central point or leader of the tribe. At some point after learning my childhood religious school lessons, I would come to understand that Isaac was not Abraham's firstborn son. *Say what???*

So that we have some historical common ground, I am now going to read this from LearnReligions.com:

“At this point, Abraham did not have an heir and believed Sarah was past the age of child-bearing. In those days, it was common practice for wives who were past child-bearing age to offer their slaves to their husbands to bear children. Sarah gave her slave Hagar to Abraham, and Hagar bore Abraham a son, Ishmael.

“Although Abraham (still called Abram at that time) was 100 and Sarah was 90, God came to Abraham in the form of three men and promised him a son by Sarah. It was at that point that God changed Abram's name to

Abraham, which means “father to many.” Sarah laughed at the prediction but ultimately became pregnant and gave birth to Abraham's son, Isaac.

“Once Isaac was born, Sarah asked Abraham to banish Hagar and Ishmael, saying that her son Isaac shouldn't share his inheritance with Ishmael, the son of a slave woman. Abraham was reluctant but ultimately agreed to send Hagar and Ishmael away when God promised to make Ishmael the founder of a nation. Ishmael ultimately married a woman from Egypt and became the father of all Arabs.”

This series of choices made is my first exception, an example of Power overshadowing Truth, and Dogma overshadowing Honesty.

Continuing with LearnReligions.com, this is background for my second exception:

“Rebekah was assertive in a time when women were expected to be submissive. This quality helped her become Isaac's wife but caused trouble when she pushed one of her sons ahead of the other.

“Abraham, father of the Jewish nation, did not want his son Isaac to marry one of the pagan Canaanite women in the area, so he sent his servant Eliezer to his homeland to find a wife for Isaac. When the servant arrived, he prayed that the right girl would not only offer him a drink of water from the well but offer to water his ten camels too.

“Rebekah came out with her water jar and did exactly that! She agreed to go back with the servant and became Isaac's wife.

“In time, Abraham died. Like her mother-in-law Sarah, Rebekah was also barren. Isaac prayed to God for her, and Rebekah conceived twins. The Lord told Rebekah what would happen to her sons: ‘two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.’ [From the book of Genesis]

“They named the twins Esau and Jacob. Esau was born first, but Jacob became Rebekah's favorite. When the boys grew up, Jacob tricked his older brother into selling his birthright for a bowl of stew. Later, as Isaac was dying and his eyesight had failed, Rebekah helped Jacob deceive Isaac into blessing him instead of Esau. She put goatskins on Jacob's hands and neck

to imitate Esau's hairy skin. When Isaac touched it, he blessed Jacob, thinking it was really Esau.

"Rebekah's deception caused strife between Esau and Jacob. Many years later, however, Esau forgave Jacob. When Rebekah died, she was buried in the family tomb, a cave near Mamre in Canaan, the resting place of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and her daughter-in-law Leah."

The choices made for my second exception offer examples of Suspicion overshadowing Trust, and Discord overshadowing Unity.

The next passage from LearnReligions.com illustrates my third exception:

"Joseph in the Bible is one of the greatest heroes of the Old Testament, second perhaps, only to Moses. His life had many twists and turns, spiritually as well as practically, having the various occupations of shepherd, household slave, convict and prison administrator, and prime minister of Egypt.

"What separated him from others was his absolute trust in God, regardless of what happened to him. He is a shining example of what can happen when a person surrenders to God and obeys completely.

"In his youth, Joseph was from the town of Canaan. Joseph was Jacob's 11th Son, and coincidentally Jacob's wife Rachel's firstborn son. Joseph was proud, enjoying his status as his father's favorite. Joseph bragged, giving no thought to how it hurt his brothers. They became so angry with his arrogance that they threw him down a dry well, then sold him into slavery to a passing caravan.

"Taken to Egypt, Joseph was sold again to Potiphar, an official in Pharaoh's household. Through hard work and humility, Joseph rose to the position of overseer of Potiphar's entire estate. But Potiphar's wife lusted after Joseph. When Joseph rejected her sinful advance, she lied and said Joseph tried to rape her. Potiphar had Joseph thrown into prison.

"Joseph must have wondered why he was being punished for doing the right thing. Even so, he worked hard again and was put in charge of all the prisoners. Two of Pharaoh's servants were hauled in. Each told Joseph about their dreams. God had given Joseph the gift of interpreting dreams. He told the cupbearer his dream meant he would be freed and returned to

his former position. Joseph told the baker his dream meant he would be hanged. Both interpretations proved true.

“Two years later, Pharaoh had a dream. Only then did the cupbearer remember Joseph’s gift. Joseph interpreted that dream, and his God-given wisdom was so great that Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of all of Egypt. Joseph stockpiled grain to avoid a terrible famine.

“Joseph’s brothers came to Egypt to buy food, and after many tests, Joseph revealed himself to them. He forgave them, then sent for their father, Jacob, and the rest of his people starving from the severe famine in their homeland of Canaan. They all came to Egypt and settled in the land that Pharaoh had given them. Out of much adversity, Joseph saved the 12 Tribes of Israel, God’s chosen people. Joseph is a ‘type’ of Christ, a character in the Bible with godly qualities who foreshadows the Messiah, savior of his people.”

This series of choices made is my third exception, which offers examples of Power overshadowing Truth, Dogma overshadowing Honesty, Suspicion overshadowing Trust, and Discord overshadowing Unity. Yet, in the end it is the Light of Truth, Honesty, Trust, and Unity that drives the shadows into the blackness of the Great Abyss and, at least for a cycle of time, leads to a period of security and gratefulness.

These three separate but linked stories from the Old Testament — whether you believe them in principle or not — reveal varying degrees of devotion and betrayal over several generations. Karmically, they offer a glimpse into the evolution of consciousness, the ebb and flow of both male and female roles and influences, and the possible breaking of lesser Laws, especially with regard to the Law of Unity. These behavior patterns and choices seem to persist to this very day. While many factors and claims that bear consideration are not mentioned here, this path eventually led the Jewish Nation into 400 years of bondage and slavery, which seems to have been inevitable and yet preventable as well. The same could be said for many of the circumstances testing us during our own trying times.

Understanding Passover is essential to my fourth exception. I will now read the Real Short Version of the Passover Story from Rabbi-Mercy.com:

“Passover or Pesach is the second most important holy day of the Jewish year, and the Seder is the most commonly celebrated Jewish ritual, performed by Jews all over the world.

“Passover commemorates the Hebrews’ liberation from slavery in Egypt and the ‘passing over’ of the forces of destruction, or the sparing of the firstborn of the Israelites, when the Lord ‘smote the land of Egypt’ on the eve of the Exodus. It’s the central story of the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament). The Passover story begins, after the death of Joseph and his brothers, when the Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, starts worrying that the Jews living in Egypt will outnumber his own people. His response: forcing them into slavery and decreeing that every firstborn son to the Hebrews should be drowned in the Nile. Baby Moses is saved by his mother, who floats him in a basket down the Nile river and is later found and adopted by Pharaoh’s own daughter. While growing up in the royal court, Moses kills a cruel slave master and flees into the desert. Here he encounters a burning bush of God revealing himself to Moses. God tells Moses to go to Pharaoh and lead the Jews out of slavery.

“When Moses returns and asks the Pharaoh to let the Jews go, he refuses, and God casts 10 plagues, frogs, boils, and hail, among others, on the Egyptians so they would release them from his reign. After each plague the Pharaoh continued to refuse to let the Jews go. God then sends the tenth and final plague and passes through the land of Egypt and strikes down the firstborn of every household. The Jews have been forewarned and told to mark their doors with the blood of a lamb they have sacrificed — the Passover offering — and so God ‘passes over’ their homes. The Pharaoh’s own son, however, is killed during this final plague, and as a result, Pharaoh finally lets the Jews go free.

“The Pharaoh, however, has a change of heart and decides to chase the Jews. The ensuing chase ends up with Moses being trapped in front of the Red Sea before it is parted by God for the Jews to cross — and then subsequently drowning the Pharaoh’s men. It is this act of divine intervention that finally leads them to freedom, and to the forty years of wandering in the desert to the land of Israel.

“The main event of Passover is the Seder — a home ritual blending religious rituals, food, song, prayer, and storytelling. Families hold a seder on the first and sometimes the second night of Passover. The seder has a number of biblical origins for its customs. Exodus describes the meal of

lamb, unleavened bread or matzo, and bitter herbs which the Israelites ate just prior to the Exodus. In addition, three separate passages in Exodus and one in Deuteronomy enunciate the duty of parents to tell the story of the Exodus to their children.

“The Hebrew word ‘seder’ translates to ‘order,’ and the evening is organized as laid out by a central book called the Haggadah which explains many key elements and symbols as you read along. The Passover seder has 15 separate steps in its traditional order. There is even a specific section of the seder called the four questions, where the youngest person at the table asks about the different Passover symbols and the elders explain.”

For me, one particular aspect of the Passover is the reason for those 40 extra years of wandering the desert after the crossing of the Red Sea. After they were safely settled, Moses left the people for 40 days as he was drawn back to the top of Mount Sinai, where he first encountered the Burning Bush. Upon his return with the Ten Commandments, Moses was profoundly disappointed when he found the people worshipping a golden calf, they had fabricated from the precious metals brought out of the land of Egypt. The people had lost faith in the God of Abraham, while waiting and doubting that Moses would ever return.

This event was so important that it has been memorialized year after year by the Jewish People during Passover. The Last Supper was a Passover Seder, and I think of it as my fourth exception to choices made, since Jesus was considered a firstborn son. Nevertheless, He was judged by those who remained faithful to the heritage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as not having the necessary qualifications for revealing the word of God.

While I believe that God is Love, I also believe that God is Law. It makes sense to me that when Truth, Honesty, Trust, and Unity are overshadowed by power, dogma, suspicion, and discord, we may find ourselves being misled by those who claim to be right, rather than by living by what is actually right.

I do not mean to sound like a heretic or even blasphemous, but when I think about “the Higher Law holding me accountable for the breaking of every lesser law,” my four exceptions could be thought of as making excuses or giving a pass to power, dogma, suspicion, and discord as a means to justifying the ends.

Ishmael was Abraham's firstborn son. Esau was Isaac's firstborn son. Joseph was Rachel's firstborn son. Jesus was Mary's firstborn son. Were these exceptions to how firstborn sons were treated due to necessity, enlightenment, hypocrisy, or selfishness? Were they simply a matter of devotion to God? Were they an act of betrayal? What was the ultimate motive or purpose behind these portrayals of the Higher Law, the Law so many of us rely on for how to live life in ways that nurture our spiritual sustenance?

I cannot say for sure. Yet, I am certain that no matter how the stories may be told or interpreted, we are currently living out the karmic consequences of eons of past choices and behaviors, when power has overshadowed Truth.

In the spirit of the Easter season just passed, and with Passover just ahead, I will close with "Faith In Christ, A Spiritual Guidepost" from Temple Teachings Vol. II:

"If there were no proof that such a man as Jesus had ever lived upon the earth, and the world of men had only possessed a legend, a myth of such wonderful beauty and power as sacred history has revealed in the life, death and teachings of Jesus, it would not alter the fact which even profane science is daily proving to the observer, that by no other method or means than those compiled and embodied in the teachings of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount, for instance, can man possibly raise himself in the evolutionary scale of life.

"Someone has given those teachings to the world, therefore the world is indebted beyond all possibility of repaying to that someone. There is something at the bottom of every human heart that proclaims the truth embodied in those teachings. If there were not another scrap of writing in the world, if man had no other exterior guide to right conduct in the whole universe than just that Sermon on the Mount, it would be sufficient to carry him from the depths of ignorance and vice to the heights of divinity, if he would abide by the rules therein voiced."

May power never overshadow Truth. May freedom and respect, the inner meaning of the celebration of Passover, be known by all in the days to come. Amen.

— *Guardian in Chief Richard A. London*
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