

Harsh Shunning Practices

by Donald Alderman

Harsh shunning practices are part of many religions.

For instance, for thousands of years, the people of India were separated into four main hereditary classes or castes into which Hindu society was divided. The lowest of these castes were the "Untouchables" and were viewed as a contaminating influence and thus members of the higher castes would not associate with them. The mere touch, even of the shadow of one of these Untouchables was considered polluting. The Untouchables had to be avoided at all costs. Although India banned treatment of persons as Untouchables since the 1950's, human rights abuse of these people continue in some areas.⁸

Abusive treatment as well as shunning occurred in a political system in South Africa known as Apartheid which generated international concern because one group of humans were segregated and treated as if they were sub-humans.⁸

If a member of Jehovah's Witnesses decides to officially leave their faith, that person is subjected to ex-communication, or using a Witness term, "disfellowshipping," and is cut off by all members of the faith. This includes family and close friends who view them as if they were dead, or at least as "Untouchable."

The Witnesses are not alone in these extreme and harmful shunning practices. The Mormons, Scientologists, Amish, Mennonites, and Hutterites (Moravian Anabaptists) also shun members who break the rules of their religion.

In non-Christian religions, as has been shown, extreme shunning is practiced by Hinduism, but also by the Bahai faith, and the Jews in days of long ago. There are many more groups that shun; nonetheless, the point is made.⁸

Justification for shunning

Undoubtedly, most of these organizations feel justified in their shunning methods. However, if outsiders express their disapproval when they learn that families, long-time friends, and businesses are torn apart because of shunning, those that do the shunning feel persecuted.

Furthermore, suicides are not uncommon due to shunning, especially if shunned by family. Incidentally, religions such as Jehovah's Witnesses allege "persecution" because some countries in the Russian Federation refuse to grant them legal standing on the grounds that they endanger Russian families because of their system of shunning.

Jehovah's Witnesses claim that they are loving and merciful and don't preach or teach 'hate' because theirs is a message of "love!" Yet, back in 1995, Jehovah's Witnesses leaders stated in the *Watchtower* magazine in the article, "Will Hatred Ever End," this statement:

"It was the oral tradition of the Jews that held that 'hating an enemy' was the right thing to do. Jesus, however, said **we must love our enemy**, not just our friend. This is difficult but not impossible." (*The Watchtower*, June 15, 1995, p. 5)

The Jews at the time of Jesus had a favorite hate object -- the Samaritans.

"So strong was anti-Samaritan sentiment that some Jews even cursed Samaritans publicly in the synagogues and prayed daily that the Samaritans would not be granted everlasting life." (*The Watchtower*, September 15, 1993, p. 4)

This unjust treatment was used as an example by *The Watchtower* of the horrible prejudice and discrimination that Jews showed towards the Samaritans. Of course, no Jehovah's Witness would like to be treated similarly. But, nevertheless, Jehovah's Witnesses do not object to being told to show exactly that same kind of attitude towards those they call, "apostates":

"The obligation to hate lawlessness also applies to all activity by apostates. Our attitude toward apostates should be that of David, who declared: 'Do I not hate those who are intensely hating you, O Jehovah, and do I not feel a loathing for those revolting against you? With a complete hatred I do hate them. They have become to me real enemies.'" (Psalm 139:21, 22)(*The Watchtower*, July 15, 1992, p. 12, 19)

"We must hate in the truest sense, which is to regard with extreme and active aversion, to consider as loathsome, odious, filthy, to detest. Surely any haters of God are not fit to live on his beautiful earth." (*The Watchtower*, October 1, 1952, par. 11, p. 599, "A Strong Refuge Today")

As we can observe from these quotes, the old Jewish tradition of hating anything not Jewish is alive and well among Jehovah's Witnesses. Their leaders in Brooklyn consider it an "obligation" to hate "apostates." Take a look at the next quote from *The Watchtower* and notice how well it fits the leaders of Jehovah's Witnesses:

"*The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states: 'We find, in N[ew] T[estament] times, the most extreme aversion, scorn and hatred. They [Gentiles] were regarded as unclean, **with whom it was unlawful to have any friendly intercourse**. They were the enemies of God and His people, to whom the knowledge of God was denied unless they became proselytes, and even then they could not, as in ancient times, be admitted to full fellowship. Jews were forbidden to counsel them, and if they asked about Divine things they were to be cursed.'" (*The Watchtower*, September 15, 1993, p. 5)

Now take a look at the next quote and compare it to the one immediately above:

"We want to have the loyalty that King David evidenced when he said: 'Do I not hate those who are intensely hating you, O Jehovah, and do I not feel a loathing for those revolting against you? With a complete hatred I do hate them. They have become to me real enemies.' (Psalm 139:21, 22) We do not want to fraternize with any willful sinners, for we have nothing in common with them. Would not loyalty to God keep us from socializing with any such enemies of Jehovah, whether in person or through the medium of television?" (*The Watchtower*, March 15, 1996, p. 16)

The Watchtower is quite fond of going back into the Hebrew Scriptures such as to Psalms 139:21, 22 and use these texts as justification for their hateful shunning policies. When they do this, though, they completely sidestep the teachings of Jesus about love such as:

"YOU heard that it was said, 'You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'"

(Please note: The Jews did this through their shunning and Jehovah's Witnesses want you to do the same thing through their shunning.)

Now listen to Jesus next words:

"However, I say to you, continue to love your enemies and to pray for those persecuting you. 'But I say to you who are listening, continue to love your enemies, to do good to those hating you bless those cursing you, to pray for those who are insulting you. To him that strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also; and from him that takes away your outer garment, do not withhold even the undergarment. Give to everyone asking you, and from the one taking your things away do not ask [them] back. Moreover, stop judging, and YOU will by no means be judged; and stop condemning, and YOU will by no means be condemned. Keep on releasing, and YOU will be released. Practice giving, and people will give to YOU. They will pour into YOUR laps a fine measure, pressed down, shaken together and overflowing. For with the measure that YOU are measuring out, they will measure out to you in return.'"

History of shunning

When Jehovah's witnesses shun, they fail to look into the history of where and when shunning began. Briefly, shunning did not start in Christian times by Jesus, his apostles, or by any Christian.

In the January 8, 1947 *Awake!* about excommunication and shunning, it is interesting to read the pagan history of it according to the Witnesses, and how it was adopted by the Catholic Church from the Druids. Found on the Internet is this interesting comment about the Druids:

"Druids, according to Julius Caesar, were trained in 'international' law. The judgment of a Druid could stop a potential war between tribes, because the judgment and moral authority of the druid was greater than the tribal chieftain. The druids had the authority to render legal decisions, which were binding on all parties. They decided boundary disputes, inheritance questions, sentences for murder. If their decisions were not followed by one party or the other, then that person was excluded from the activities of the tribe and society. According to Caesar, 'All people leave their company, avoid their presence and speech, lest they should be involved in some of the ill consequences of the situation. They can get no redress for injury, and hold no post of honor.' Such acts of exclusion and shunning in a society noted for its interdependence on people could be close to a death sentence on such a person." 7

The 1947 *Awake!* article was well before the Society adopted shunning as its own in 1952. Interestingly, in the article, an important statement is made that the Catholic Church's use of 1 Cor. 5:3-5 for support of their excommunication practice was foreign to Bible teachings. Now Jehovah's Witnesses Governing Body has permitted the use of the very same text, 1 Cor. 5:3-5 as one of its main scriptures to support their own shunning practice.

Furthermore, there was the Babylonian Talmud which is most commonly referred to, and there is the Jerusalem Talmud which is much shorter and incomplete, and has not been preserved entirely. The Babylonian Talmud contains over 2,500,000 words, over three times the Jerusalem Talmud. The Babylonian Talmud is usually at least thirty-five volumes, and is not a "book," but an immense record of questions, answers, and arguments similar to a record of the minutes of a court or board of directors, taken over a period of 1200 years (from the 5th century before, to the 8th century after the Christian common era).

It is a monumental seminar of decisions based on the *opinions* of over 2000 scholar/rabbis. It comprises much of what was referred to as the "oral law" or "traditions of the elders/fathers" as it

was called in Jesus day. *Found in the Babylonian Talmud is the record where the Jews were shunning for hundreds of years before Jesus was born. The Babylonian Talmud is full of examples of Jews being shunned by the different rabbis of that time period.*

During his time on earth, Jesus always kept the laws of the "Torah" which covered the first five books of the Bible, but as respects the added oral law of the Jews called the "Talmud," he loathed it and broke as many of its laws as he could on any occasion that presented itself.

An example of this was when Jesus healed a man born blind on the Sabbath. In healing him on the Sabbath, Jesus broke one of the most sacred of all Israel's fence laws as the tradition of the elders forbade one to heal on the Sabbath. The Mishna (part of the Talmud) states, "To heal a blind man on the Sabbath it is prohibited to inject wine into his eyes. It is also prohibited to make mud from spittle and smear it on his eyes." With this miracle, Jesus not only healed a man at a forbidden time, but he also did so in a forbidden way. 4

What then did Jesus do?

"After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. 'Follow me,' Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?' Jesus answered them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'" Luke 5:27-32

The Pharisees and teachers of the law were shocked to see Jesus at a tax collector's house sharing a meal with some of the most hated and shunned people of the Jews. Did Jesus show respect for the Jews laws on shunning? No, he did not.

Jesus uses opportunity after opportunity to bring these unbiblical traditions and teachings into complete and utter disrepute by doing everything he can to publicly go against them, showing them up for the hypocritical nonsense that they were: 5

"Then some (Pharisees and teachers of the law) came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!"

Why did they object to eating without hand washing? The Mishna states,

"One should be willing to walk four miles to water in order to wash your hands rather than to eat with unwashed hands..." "He who neglects hand washing is as he who is a murderer."

This is ridiculous in the extreme but had nevertheless become more important to many of the Jews than the actual teaching of scripture, and even the very presence of their Messiah in their midst. This rule was a shunning offence, but Jesus showed no respect at all for their oral law.

What Jesus was doing was showing the people that these traditions were not to be found in the scriptures and that they were actually anti-biblical. The traditions of the elders conflicted again and again with scriptures, and Jesus would have none of it.

The scriptures, rather than advocating the existing Jewish system, showed that its effects were terroristic, instilling an extreme fear of authority. Instead of improving peoples' character by discipline, it actually had a corrupting, debilitating effect on them. It is most notable in how their shunning system exerted a damaging effect on the consciences of the Jewish people, hindering their expressions of faith.

Examples of this effect

(John 7:13) . . . No one, of course, would speak about him publicly because of the fear of the Jews.

(John 9:22) His parents said these things because they were in fear of the Jews, for the Jews had already come to an agreement that, if anyone confessed him as Christ, he should get expelled from the synagogue.

(John 12:42) . . . All the same, many even of the rulers actually put faith in him, but because of the Pharisees they would not confess [him], in order not to be expelled from the synagogue;

(John 19:38) . . . Now after these things Joseph from Ar·i·ma·the·a, who was a disciple of Jesus but a secret one out of [his] fear of the Jews, requested Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. Therefore he came and took his body away.

(1 John 4:18) . . . There is no fear in love, but perfect love throws fear outside, because fear exercises a restraint. Indeed, he that is under fear has not been made perfect in love.

Typifying the intimidation felt, Nicodemus, though believing Jesus to have "come from God," nevertheless waited till night to visit him, incognito.

Many Jehovah's Witnesses when having questions about things that make them doubt the organization (not Jehovah or Jesus), are filled with same kind of fear, fear of discovery and punitive action by religious authority. In Nicodemus case and found in the examples above, it was fear of the Jews and the threat of expulsion from the synagogue and being shunned. In the case of Jehovah's Witnesses, it's fear of being disfellowshipped and shunned by their leaders.

The September 15, 1981 *Watchtower* draws heavily on historical material about traditional Pharisaic behavior in Jesus' day and then imposes this as a pattern for its own modern policy.

The Jews shunning system had stages of punishment

1. **Nidduy**-restricted social intercourse- lasted 30, 60, 90 days
2. **Herem**- shut out social life
3. **Shammatha** - Put out of the synagogue John 9:22, 12:42, 16:2

The Witness shunning, though not necessarily parallel, have the same formalistic approach.

1. **Marking**- members are to limit social fellowship
2. **Reproof**- linked with a probationary period
3. **Disfellowshipping**- total rejection, a complete cutting off.

The end result of these shunning approaches are all the same.

Attitude of those that shun

Why would Jehovah's Witnesses comply with orders to shun someone in their own family and knowingly tear their own family apart? Their answer is usually, "We're keeping Jehovah's organization clean," or "It's not our fault, they brought it on themselves." Is this the kind of response that Jesus would make? Was that his response to the prostitute the Jews were going to stone? Did Jesus tell her "she had it coming" or that by stoning her it would "keep the Jewish religion clean?" He stopped the Jews dead in their tracks by telling them, "Let he that is without sin cast the first stone," and then told the woman to go and sin no more. Is that how you feel about disfellowshipped ones or is it more like the Jews who wanted the woman stoned?

The mental attitude cultivated in the minds of all Witnesses is to apply whatever organizational policy that may be current, and they will disfellowship anyone who does not adhere to that policy. The main concern is to be obedient to organizational policy. This is exactly how the Pharisees reasoned. Jesus showed time and time again that he would not be a slave to man-made rules and regulations which the religious leaders of his time forced upon people.

Blaine Pascal once said, "Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction."

It really doesn't matter who is doing it, whether it is the castes of India, South African Apartheid, the Mormons, Scientologists, Amish, or Jehovah's Witnesses. All these people claim they are right and in some cases say they are doing God's will. Shunning and its many adverse effects affect untold numbers of people world wide, causing broken marriages, families torn in shreds, businesses destroyed, lives crippled, and cases of suicide because of being abandoned by their families. In the case of the Witnesses, shunning is "all done out of love," and assurance is given that it's "even beneficial" for those being shunned.

Basis for shunning is hate

These kinds of statements are untrue and insulting to anybody of any intelligence. No matter who's responsible for shunning, it still has as its basis "hate." And countries, organizations, religions, or people that condone or in some way rationalize that it is just "Righteous Indignation" that somehow gives them a clean conscience to hurt, isolate, and in some cases be responsible for the death of people they once called their Christian brothers is shameful.

Christ Jesus did not tolerate or Christianize the Jewish practice of shunning and he would not condone the shunning practiced by Jehovah's Witnesses today, no matter how much they "sugar coat" it. Hateful things are done by hateful people. Christianity on the other hand is a religion of love! Can those calling themselves Christians shun family members, treat them as an "Untouchable" and reason that they are doing it to show how much they love them? Is this what we learned from Jesus? Is that how he taught us? If that was what his message was about, then why were people drawn to him. The people in Jesus time lived in a world of cruelty and hatred. Loving your enemies was completely foreign to them but that was his message to us.

Love vs. legalism

In the case of the Pharisees, their thinking was dominated by legalism. They had a noble goal, to encourage religious devotion, and obedience to God's law. Their concern for demonstrating loyalty to God turned into legalism, a legalism that caused them to become narrow and rigid and lose sight of justice, mercy, and love of neighbor. They set out to analyze and interpret the "Torah," to meet every contingency of life. The result of their efforts became a terrible drag on ordinary people. Note in Matthew 23:1-5:

"Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, saying: 'The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the seat of Moses. Therefore all the things they tell YOU, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds, for they say but do not perform. They bind up heavy loads and put them upon the shoulders of men, but they themselves are not willing to budge them with their finger. All the works they do they do to be viewed by men; for they broaden the [scripture-containing] cases that they wear as safeguards, and enlarge the fringes [of their garments].'"

The rules and regulations of the "Talmud" or "Oral Law" governed almost every possible action of life of the Jews. These rules were blended into God's law and enslaved the people. Although *The Watchtower* speaks negatively of the "Talmud," the leaders of Jehovah's Witnesses has developed its own body of law, all in the name of keeping the organization clean and separate from the world, thereby assuring righteousness before God. 9

In conclusion

In the May 15, 1963 *Watchtower* article, p. 300, par. 25, "Do You Belittle Discipline?", note what it states:

"In our progress toward maturity of understanding and conduct in harmony with Jehovah's Word, we are assisted by the invaluable disciplinary provisions of the New World society. The Bible contains commandments of God, his prophecies, and the revelation of himself and of his principles. Such are a guide for the New World society and all who are in it. So it is that by the New World society's application of the stated Scriptural commands, examples, rules and principles to the issues and problems of life, a great body of theocratic law is being built up. We should benefit by this. It is theocratic because it is in harmony with the Bible law of the Great Theocrat, Jehovah God, and is based upon it. We need to understand Jehovah's Bible and also respect the judgment, authority and instructions of the New World society. They will discipline us, guiding us in all the issues and problems of life to take a course that will be in accordance with and not in violation of the Word of God."

Virtually every area of life: family, marital, employment, social, and community, are covered by the Witness leaders policies. All are spelled out in great detail. All can be described as "Talmudic." These policies are treated with the same respect as if taken directly from the Scriptures as divine law. Witnesses, always say "What does *The Watchtower* say?" because they accept what *The Watchtower* states as law, and never check to see what the Bible states.

Is this an exaggeration? Take a look for yourself from the December 15, 2008 *Watchtower* article, "Highlights From the Letters of John and of Jude:

"Our coming to know "'The truth'—the entire body of Christian teachings that has become part of the Bible—and adhering to it are essential for our salvation.—3 John 3, 4."

Do you find the above statement acceptable to you? According to the scriptures, adding to the Bible is forbidden. That's what the "Talmud" was all about and why Jesus so strongly rejected it. We owe our salvation to Jesus. He is the one that gave his life for us, not some man-made organization with their "Great body of theocratic laws" like the Pharisees and their "Oral Law."

When you practice shunning, you are not following God's law, you are enforcing the Watchtower organization's great body of laws that have been built up by men and which is now ripping families apart.

No way can anyone say that shunning in India is wrong and hateful; shunning in South Africa is all wrong and unloving; shunning among the Mormons, Scientologists, Amish, are all cruel and hurtful, but the shunning done by the Jehovah's Witnesses is the righteous kind and somehow loving and beneficial.

If following the lead of Jesus Christ is really important to you, then stop practicing what he completely rejected. Shunning is hurtful to everything it touches. It should not be a part of a Christian's life, and it should not be a part of yours.

Reference Sources:

1. "Double Talk of Hate" by Norman Hovland
2. "The Yeast of the Pharisees"
3. (See Mishnah Yadayim 2:1)
4. Shabbat 108:20
5. Chapter three- Jesus and the Traditions of the Elders- part two
6. Chailah (j) 58:3
7. The Druids
8. "The Untouchables" an essay on the effects of shunning
9. In Search of Christian Freedom by Raymond Franz

