



The Power to Protect Relationships and Change Global Realities

By Jim Myers

A story in Douglas Ruskoff's book, *Nothing Sacred: The Truth About Judaism* (pp. 13-15) reminded me of similar stories I use to teach people about how to develop Reality Transparency Skills. Things like this happen all of the time without people being aware of the role unknown belief models play in the situation. This story is about a man named Eric.

Not that long ago, I had lunch with an old friend from the dot-com world, a young Jewish man named Eric who hadn't been to temple in years. A full year into a relationship with a similarly lapsed Christian woman, he found himself yanked back into a state of mind he thought he had abandoned for good. Although Eric claims he has no religious beliefs whatsoever, he felt oddly repulsed by the idea of decorating the Christmas tree that his girlfriend had erected in their apartment.

Let's review what we have learned about Eric so far.

1. He is a young Jewish man.
2. He hasn't attended a synagogue for years.
3. He says he has no religious beliefs.
4. He is involved in the "dot-com world."
5. He has been in a relationship for a year with a woman with a Christian background who isn't active in her religion.
6. The woman put up a Christmas tree in their apartment.
7. Eric felt oddly repulsed by the idea of decorating the Christmas tree.

Now let's continue with the story and see what happens next.

*Eric agreed to let her keep the tree,
but he refused to help her apply the tinsel and ornaments.*

How do you think she reacted to “Eric letting her keep the tree”? Has Eric flipped a switch and gone into an *authoritarian* mode? She didn't ask for his permission to put up the Christmas tree. Now Eric wants to control the situation, she isn't going to give it to him. So, what would cause Eric to suddenly start acting this way?

*Eric said it had nothing to do with his religious beliefs --
“I have no religious beliefs.
Because I have no religious beliefs -- that's why I won't take part.
It's your thing.”*

What “*non-religious beliefs*” were keeping Eric from helping to decorate the tree? Was he an advocate for “protecting trees from being decorated”? She didn't buy his argument about religion. Why? Notice how many times Eric used the word “religion” – *even accusing her of being the one doing religious things*.

*“But that's a religion, too!” she scolded him.
“Your refusal to help is a religion, too.”*

What began as a conversation was now a full-blow verbal fight between a Jewish man with no religious beliefs and a woman who was a lapsed Christian over religion! Does that even make sense?

*They fought well into the night, and Eric finally had to concede her point.
His refusal to partake of Christmas decorating was a question not of time or taste,
but a deeply felt aversion.*

So we know what actually started the whole thing – a *deeply felt aversion*. Just thinking about decorating the Christmas tree produced these feelings in Eric:

1. a feeling of repugnance
2. a desire to avoid or turn away
3. a general feeling of dislike
4. a desire to extinguish the behavior

Were Eric's feelings directed at the tree or his girlfriend? This situation clearly affected their relationship. An amazing thing about this is that consciously Eric saw himself as an "enlightened" individual "free of any religious beliefs." Later, he said, "*Just the notion of religion itself smacks of superstition and ignorant piety.*" When he said he was not religious, he probably really believed it! But after the discussion with his girlfriend, Eric remembered something he hadn't thought about since he was a child attending a Hebrew school -- *a story about Abraham smashing idols in his father's idol making shop.*

Terah, Abraham's father, inherited an idol shop from his father, who had inherited it from his father before him. Patterns for making idols had been passed down from father to son and along the way new designs were added. It was a family business and everyone had to help. Abraham's job was delivering idols to their customers.

Terah would help Abraham load idols on a sturdy wooden cart and then Abraham pulled it to the homes of buyers. When he arrived, families would eagerly meet him and carry the idol to the special place they had selected – *showing it the kind of respect and devotion deserving of a god.* Abraham would just shake his head and leave without uttering a word.

He could not understand why people purchased idols and was dumbfounded by the reverence they demonstrated towards them. For Abraham, idols were simply "*stones with eyes that could not see, ears that could not hear, mouths that could not speak, feet that could not move.*"

Because of Abraham's disdain for idols and the customers, Terah didn't like to leave Abraham alone in the shop. But, one day he had no choice because of pressing business on the other side of town. As Terah returned to the store, a sudden sense of dread came over him. He felt something was very wrong. When Terah entered the shop he could not believe his eyes -- *displays were overturned, walls had holes in them, counters were on their sides, and all of the idols were shattered pieces of stones scattered on the floor.*

As he stood there, Abraham came in from the back room. Terah shouted, "*Who did this horrible thing? Who hated me and my family so much they that would destroy our shop and thus our livelihood?*" Abraham hesitated before answering, but he finally said, "*The largest idol did it – he took a hammer and destroyed the others before I could stop and destroy him.*"

Terah replied, "*Son, do you take me for a fool? These are nothing but stone creations – you destroyed our shop – you destroyed our family's future!*" "*If you know that they are but stone,*" asked Abraham, "*why do you sell them – why do you allow people to believe that they are more than just sculpted rock?*"

“It is not my place to take from people that which they hold dear,” answered Terah, “I am here to give them what they ask for even though I myself do not believe that what they want is of value.”

“That is a sham,” declared Abraham, “that is deceitful and dishonest – I will not be a part of such a charade. I will leave this place – I will not return.” With that said, Abraham left his home, his family, and his past. He began his journey – *vowing never to allow the idols of the past to be his security for the future.*

Eric had been taught that symbols of other religions are like the idols Abraham smashed, and that like Abraham, he should never allow idols to be part of his life. This was a very powerful experience in his young life. A Christmas tree was a religious symbol – *and that a Belief Model deeply embedded in Eric’s mind made it an idol.*

“Life experiences,” from the brain’s perspective, are like constellations in a night sky. *In the brain life experiences are constellations of synaptic firings of neurons in neural networks during the experience.* *When we remember something, the same neural constellations of the original experience all fire together again.*

Remembering is literally “a re-firing” – a re-experiencing!

When Eric’s brain “*processed information about the Christmas tree,*” it connected the info to the story about Abraham -- *“he literally re-experienced the childhood life experience” along with its feelings and emotions!* Today we know that sensory organs – *eyes, ears, tongue, nose and skin* – do not just “live stream” what’s going on outside the skull. The sensory information flows into the brain’s neural networks where it is matched up with **Belief Models** from previous experiences. These belief models interpret the information and give meanings to it. *It is the information flowing out of belief models, which includes feelings and emotions that we experience as life.*

Developing Exploring Realities Skills

Memories do not go away. They just become weaker as they are pushed deeper in neural networks when they are no longer recalled -- *along with their Belief Models.* In order to understand this biological process you need to know about the two levels the brain functions – **subconscious** and **conscious**.

- The *subconscious level* processes over **40 million** nerve impulses per second.
- The *conscious level* processes about 40 nerve impulses per second.

- As an information processor the *subconscious level* is *one million times more powerful* than the *conscious level* and the *subconscious contributes 95% of all cognitive activity*.

Processing incoming information and channeling it through Belief Models takes place at the *subconscious level*. Racing through neural networks at *40 million nerve impulses per second* makes it possible to find deeply embedded memories like Eric had consciously forgotten. *The potential of reactivating deeply embedded Belief Models always exists, so knowing how to deal with situations like Eric experienced is very important.*

Exploring Realities Skills expose the unseen Belief Models that are generating our *Individual Realities*. Discovering *Belief Models* is a “*team activity*,” which requires at least two people. In order to create a team, each member must agree to follow the *Guideline for Exploring Realities*.

*My Reality will be large enough to include all of the facts,
open enough to be examined, and flexible enough to change
if errors are found in Belief Models or new facts are discovered.*

Our educational emails -- *Exploring Our Biblical Heritages* and *Living Lives 1st Lives* – provide opportunities for teams to practice using this guideline. Our information often activates all kinds of Belief Models and sometimes produce feelings like Eric experienced. Realities Explorers learn to view those feelings like alarms going off in a security system. They know they can’t consciously compete with the subconscious level on a speed level – *40 million vs. 40 nerve impulses per second*. They learn to feed the subconscious new facts-based information and let the biological process take over from there. If Eric and girlfriend had been working as a team using the *Guideline for Exploring Realities*, things would have been very different and their Jewish and Christian Biblical Heritages would have been assets instead of liabilities.

Another very important *Exploring Realities Skill* is “*learning how to identify the stories from which Belief Models are created*.” Humans are genetically hardwired to tell and listen to stories. The next time you are in a group setting (small or large) say these words, “*I want to tell you a story*” -- and watch what happens. *Heads turn your way, people stop talking and they wait for you to tell them the story.*

- *Belief Models are created from parts of stories.*
- *Stories transport Belief Models to other brains.*
- *Stories are created in cultural contexts by people living at specific times and places.*

When it comes to “*religious stories*,” *gods* or other *supernatural creatures* are usually part of the story. Therefore, it is from those types of stories *Belief Models* about gods emerge. Discovering

the names of the original authors of ancient stories can be a very difficult task that is often impossible task -- *so we then anchor them to times and places they appear in history.*

Another *Exploring Realities Skill* is always being aware that “conceptions of a god” are actually “Belief Models of a god” -- *not the god (himself or herself).* Viewing Belief Models like they are the god is like viewing “the map of a territory as if it was the territory itself.”

Now let’s apply the skills above to the stories connected to Eric and girlfriend.

- The story of Abraham smashing idols first appears in *Genesis Rabbah* chapter 38, a religious text from Judaism's classical period, probably written between 300 and 500 CE.
- Germany is credited with starting the Christmas tree tradition as we now know it in the **16th century CE** when devout Christians brought decorated trees into their homes. It is a widely held belief that Martin Luther, the 16th-century Protestant reformer, first added lighted candles to a tree. The first record of a Christmas tree being on display in homes in in America is in the 1830s. They were in homes of German settlers in Pennsylvania. But there are records of Pennsylvania German settlements having “community Christmas trees” as early as **1747.** Interestingly, as late as the **1840s** Christmas trees were seen as pagan symbols by most Christians in America.

Now let’s explore two more very important stories. When we examined stories about the history of Christianity and Judaism, we discovered some things that are rarely discussed in churches and synagogues. It has long been a given among scholars that modern Christianity was born in the Roman Empire when Roman Emperor Constantine the Great “settled” the Arian Controversy by declaring that “*God and Jesus are creatures of the same substance.*” That led the way for the Roman Catholic Church to become the state religion of the empire in the 4th century CE. With the power of the emperor backing Roman Church, members of the most powerful classes in the empire rushed to become members of the Roman Catholic Church. That changed the path of Western Christianity!

But the story about the Roman influence on the development of Rabbinic Judaism – *the Judaism that is practiced around the world today* – is not known. Rabbi Burton L. Visotzky, in his book *Aphrodite and the Rabbis: How the Jews Adapted Roman Culture as We Know It*, tells that story.

The form of Judaism, so overwhelmingly prevalent today, did not become the normative flavor of Judaism until a mere eight hundred or so years ago. . . . In the face of the loss of the sacrificial cult and exile from Jerusalem in 70 CE, this small

group of sages and their disciples in each generation built Judaism — *a Roman religion that fit comfortably in the broader culture and so was able to survive for the ages. . . .*

In short, what is now called “Judaism” was invented in the matrix of Roman culture. Even as some rabbinic texts depicted Rome as the enemy, there is overwhelming evidence that Judaism took root in Roman soil, imbibed its nourishment, and grafted the good and pruned the bad from the Roman Empire, until a vibrant new religion — Rabbinic Judaism — arose from the wreckage of Israelite religion and the Temple cult, nurtured by the very empire that had destroyed it.

What does this all mean for modern American Judaism? If the evidence has been weighed and I can conclude with reasonable assurance that Greco-Roman culture played a large hand in the invention of what we now call Judaism, does it make a difference? Should it matter to us? I think it does, if for no other reason than to validate modern Judaism itself I have quoted so many texts and included illustrations not only from rabbinic literature but also from the other Jewish communities of the Roman Empire. I wanted to allow the testimony of antiquity its own voice to the extent possible. It is true that all of the evidence has been interpreted by me in support of the theory that Greco-Roman culture served as the midwife for the birth of Judaism as we know it. But still, the evidence is here to be read one way or another.

The bottom line is that the religions of Eric and his girlfriend share links to the Roman culture and they didn't know the origins of the stories from which their *Belief Models* emerged. They also knew nothing about the *biology of beliefs – the way the brain creates Belief Models uses them to generate Realities*. If they had developed *Exploring Realities Skills* the Christmas tree experience would have strengthen their relationship and their realities.

- *Consciously knowing the origins of your Belief Models is very different from subconsciously being controlled by the feelings and emotions unexplored Belief Models produce.*
- *Fact-Based Belief Models are very different from Authority-Based Belief Models. It is very important to be able to make distinctions between them.*

Today, approximately one-third of the world population has Christian or Jewish Belief Models embedded in the neural networks of their brains. For the past 2,000 years there have been many conflicts between them that are similar to the experience Eric and girlfriend – *and many conflicts that were much worse*. We believe that helping people develop *Exploring Realities Skills* could dramatically change relationships in ways that could benefit billions of people.

Learning the story behind the stories of Belief Models has the power to change global realities!

February Memorials

In Loving Memory

**PHYLLIS
WYRE**

d. February 8, 1998

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**ALBERTA
HARLESS
MYERS**

b. August 18, 1887
d. February 5, 1979

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**GLORY ANN
HODGES
ROSS**

b. January 25, 1978
d. February 19, 2008

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Their Remembrance

*May their memories inspire us to
seek those qualities of mind and
heart which they shared when we
walked life's journey together.*

*May we help to bring closer to
fulfillment their highest ideals and
noblest strivings.*

*May their memories deepen our
loyalty to those things which we
valued and shared --
faith, love, peace and devotion.*

*As long as we live, they too will
live; for they are now a part of us,
as we remember them.*

(Inspired from prayers found in Yitzhor
Reflections - The New Mahzor - The
Prayer Book Press)

Remembering those who came before us is a very important part of the Biblical Heritage Center's mission. It is our privilege to honor them by the BHC Memorial Garden and Memorials. The Memorial Garden is on the website at <http://www.biblicalheritage.org>. Please visit it the next time you are on the Internet. If you would like to add your loved one to this section, send their information to us. There is no charge, but donations are accepted. Remember those who have meant so much to you in the BHC Memorial Garden.

In Loving Memory

**MARIA
ESTELLA
RUIZ**

February 22, 1996

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**JAMES
HENRY
MYERS**

b. September 6, 1881
d. February 13, 1953

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**REED
DUNCAN
HAMILTON**

b. October 13, 1945
d. February 5, 2016

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

May You Have Good Exploring!