

Moral Behavior

What makes up moral behavior? Rabbi Baruch Frydman-Kohl, Rabbi Emeritus at Beth Tzedec congregation in Toronto and a friend of Rabbi Moses', states that "moral behavior doesn't start with having the right beliefs. Moral behavior starts with an act — the act of seeing the full humanity of other people. Moral behavior is not about having the right intellectual concepts in your head. It's about seeing other people with the eyes of the heart, seeing them in their full experience, suffering with their full suffering, walking with them on their path. Morality starts with the quality of attention we cast upon another."¹

In Judaism, there is a principal *תכו כברו*, which I like to translate as "one's exterior persona must match his/her interior character." David Brooks, who wrote *The Road to Character*, also wrote an article entitled *The Moral Meltdown of the Southern Baptist Convention*. He asserted, "They dedicated their lives to a gospel that says that every human being

¹ Rabbi Baruch Frydman-Kohl, Ravnet post

is made in the image of God. They dedicated their lives to a creed that commands one to look out for the marginalized, the vulnerable. The last shall be first. The meek shall inherit the Earth.”

“Yet when allegations of sexual abuse came, the leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention betrayed it all. Those men — and they seem to have all been men — must have listened to hundreds of hours of pious sermons, read hundreds of high-minded theological books, recited thousands of hours of prayer, and yet all those true teachings and good beliefs had **no effect** on their actual behavior. Instead, according to an independently produced report released by the convention, those leaders covered up widespread abuse in their denomination and often intimidated and belittled victims.” In other words, “Leaders’ stated beliefs and sacred creeds had zero effect on their actual behavior.”² Unfortunately I also know many in the Jewish community who have been convicted of abuse, so this is not only a Christian problem.

² David Brooks “The Southern Baptist Moral Meltdown,” *New York Times*, May 2, 2022.

It is my hope that we view Yom Kippur not only as a clean slate, a *tabula rasa*, but as an opportunity for **serious introspection**. Where have we fallen short? Where are we failing to practice what we preach? We might think we have fooled others but not only does the truth often come out, but we also don't fool people as easily as we might think—especially children. If we are truly going to stand for something moral and ethical, becoming the best version of ourselves, we must be prudent at all times not to be hypocritical; saying one thing while doing another. That is a message I hope each of us will take with us not only today on Yom Kippur but more importantly on the day after Yom Kippur and in the days to come.