

Think again - No room for extremists

As an orthodox and Chassidic Rabbi I feel that I must unequivocally repudiate and reject the despicable actions of the Charedim (ultra orthodox) in Jerusalem this past week. Not that I can be mistaken for sharing their views but for the moral outrage that must be publicized by our religious Jewish leaders as I note my friend Rabbi Shmuley Boteach did in a Jerusalem Post article. .

There was extensive media coverage on the Charedi protest in Jerusalem when a Charedi man spit on an orthodox eight-year-old girl for immodest dress and another Charedi man arrested for calling a female Jewish soldier a 'whore' for refusing to move to the back of a bus, and a Charedi activists donned holocaust prison garb with yellow 'Jude' stars in a vulgar attempt to allege Nazi-like persecution at the hands of Israeli society when in truth all they accomplished was to trivialize the gassing of six million Jews. The finishing touch to their deplorable acts was placing their own children in concentration camp garb.

These fanatical Charedim, purport to be representative of Torah, Chassidism and religious Spirituality, they dress like religious Jews they look like Chasidic Jews and live in religious neighborhoods like religious Jews but they are anything but that. Those Charedim do not represent Torah ideals and Jewish values. They do not represent the Chassidic ethos of the Baal Shem Tov with whom they claim to be connected. Moses, Ezra and Rabbi Akiva of Biblical and Talmudic eras would have completely rejected them. They would have been considered a fanatical sect not within the parameters of true Judaism. I could imagine Ezra the scribe the founder of the Sanhedrin (ancient High Court) placing the group in excommunication outside of Judaism. They represent repressive ideas that have no base in Israel and in Jerusalem . The only place I can think of where their actions may be acceptable are in Taliban controlled Afghanistan where the burqa and Chador are mandatory. Perhaps they should go and live amongst the Taliban.

Separation of the sexes in ancient Israel during the Temple times occurred during the service and the prayers; at every other social activity there was a complete mingling of the sexes in and around the Temple mount especially during the festivals of Pesach and Sukkoth. Both men and woman walked freely on the temple mount and were able to participate in the service. It is an abomination to faith for men to treat women abusively. A black coat will never redeem a dark heart and a long beard is poor compensation for a shriveled soul.

Their defenders pointed out that these heinous acts are perpetrated by only a small number of Haredim. True. But in the face of Islamic terror outrages we in the West rightly demand that mainstream Islamic leaders condemn the extremists, lest their silence make them complicit in the violence. The Jewish community must be judged by the same standard and Rabbis of every stripe must condemn this abuse as sickening and contrary to the core of Judaism.

If we are to have acts of extremism then make an extreme effort to be tolerant kind and charitable. Make an extreme effort to express Jewish values and spirituality. Make an extreme effort, even during the summer months to come to shule where you will be treated with an extremely superior service and extreme moments of reflection and deliberation; where you will be given every window of opportunity for time out and to meditate in the extreme.

We had an extremely excellent time at Billie and Jonathan Glass's place to view the extremely enlivening New Years fire works display from their extremely brilliant vantage point.

As always see you in shule

Good Shabbos

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