


“Butcher those who mock Islam,” “Europe you will pay, your 9/11 is on the way,” and “Free speech go to hell.”

Al-Ghurabaa has now been banned under new legislation outlawing the glorification of terrorism, but as Voltaire wrote as long ago as 1764: “the law is impotent against these attacks of rage; it is like reading a court decree to a raving maniac. What can we say to a man who tells you that he would rather obey God than men, and that therefore he is sure to go to heaven for butchering you?”

As the spiritual inheritors of the Enlightenment, Europeans usually sneer at American creationists with their quirky ideas about intelligent design and consider fundamentalists of every creed to be religious weirdoes. While Islamists might view European society as a decadent cesspit plagued by binge drinking and sexual promiscuity, in Western minds, honor killings and the persecution of homosexuals are far more appalling.


We’re told that Muslims have been radicalized by Israel’s occupation of Palestine and America’s invasion of Iraq. It’s a tidy argument that appeals to many Europeans’ guilt about Western imperialism. But fearing angry mobs and further reprisals, freedom of expression — the central doctrine of democracy — is at risk as a new spirit of self-censorship takes root. In this most accommodating of societies, how can we tolerate the intolerant? It’s a paradox that has sent into a tailspin our fragile system of values.

I long to apply my instinctively liberal sentiments to Muslim women’s right to wear *hijab*, but walking down nearby Edgware Road, swamped in summer months by visitors from the Gulf taking refuge from the heat, the sea of black *burkas* fills me with dread. After battling so hard for equal rights, it turns out that women’s emancipation from male domination still can’t be taken for granted; neither can equality for homosexuals.

It was in the Netherlands — famed for its liberal social policies — that in 2004, a Muslim assassin killed Theo Van Gogh for making a film about the abuse of Muslim women by Muslim men. Now Dutch authorities have produced their own film to prepare potential Muslim immigrants for the realities of life in Europe, with images of two men kissing, naked breasts, and bad weather. Muslim fundamentalists have been warned: Europe is fighting back. 

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Notwithstanding the sages’ account that even he had difficulty giving up his post, the Torah makes it clear that Moses succeeded in setting aside his personal needs for power for the long-term good of the people. So committed was he, for example, to the development of new leaders that he tolerated, indeed encouraged, the unconventional and untested leadership aspirations of Eldad and Medad (Numbers 11:24-29). Further, the biblical narrative makes clear that it was Moses himself who pushed God to name his successor (Numbers 27:15-17). And, according to Rashi and others, in the end Moses not only acknowledged Joshua’s selection, he embraced it wholeheartedly (Rashi and *Sifre* to Numbers 27:23). Thus, despite the great sense of loss experienced by many at the end of their service, Moses’ example serves as a dramatic reminder that an uncompromising focus on the future needs of the enterprise must always trump one’s quest for personal glory.

A variety of contemporary best practices from industry and academe confirm the wisdom of these ancient insights. Even in the best of circumstances, leadership development is a difficult, protracted process. It succeeds only with the imprimatur of the incumbent leadership who must 1) create an ongoing organizational culture in which future leaders are constantly identified, nurtured, and trained, and 2) when appropriate, personally embody that principle by recognizing that the boldest act of effective leadership is often the decision to pass the torch to the next generation. 

Discussion Guide

Bringing together myriad voices and experiences provides Sh’ma readers with an opportunity in a few very full pages to explore a topic of Jewish interest from a variety of perspectives. To facilitate a fuller discussion of the ideas, we offer the following questions:

1. Does modernity collide with an ultra-religious life? How do we integrate tradition with freedom?
2. How does the concept of “Divine sparks” explain the outreach efforts of Chabad?
3. Does religious-state separation preclude the wearing of religious garb in the military?

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February 2007
Adar 5767

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