

Paranoia

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

The furor over the mosque in New York is very healthy. It has illustrated paranoia. Screams of the dreaded Islamophobia are heard daily on the "liberal" media. America lacerates itself over its intolerance. Its leadership is fearful that now Muslims around the world will no longer love the USA as much as they used to.

I am all in favor of pandering to neurotics of all sorts. I am one myself, seeing reds under beds and anti-Semites under every keffiyeh. I am also schizophrenic and inconsistent. I know it. The only thing I require of other paranoids is that they recognize their disease and do not pretend otherwise. I have always claimed that two thousand years of being hated by most of the world is a pretty good justification for a chip on one's shoulder.

Not all paranoia is baseless. As Henry Kissinger once said, "I may be paranoid but that does not mean they are not out to get me." We were right to be paranoid about Christian anti-Semitism because of the evil it produced. We were right to think that Hitler was not an honorable German gentleman who really loved humanity. And we are right that currently most Muslims do not feel warm and cuddly towards Jews. But I hope no one will suggest that in today's Europe the Nuremberg Laws could possibly be reinstated. We are right to worry about the amount of anti-Semitism, whether it is Muslim, left-wing, right-wing, neo-Nazi thuggish, glitterati, literati, or the declining European trashocracy.

Our paranoia is alive and well. We argue amongst ourselves. There is open, if angry, debate in Israel, even more than in the Diaspora, about rights and wrongs, Zionism, anything and everything to do with Jews of any persuasion. We are not uniform or united; yet we wonder why a few million of us are so hated by billions of other humans and why so many people think we should not have a homeland of our own when everyone else is allowed to. The usual argument trotted out is that the hatred of Jews nowadays is all because of Israel. As if the whole of the Arab world loved us before Zionism and 1948. We know Israel makes mistakes and we are right to excoriate errors of action and policy. Yet we are also right to wonder why there are no boycotts of Sudan and Burma, no peace convoys to Congo or Chechnya, no human rights condemnations of Arab atrocities. Is this paranoia? Anthony Lerman says "yes". Anthony Julius says "no".

Either way, we Jews can still move reasonably freely around even the "new reality" of Europe, and there have been no paramilitary processions through Golders Green (though recently a gang of mentally deficient simians did wreak brief havoc there). Jews have not yet been hounded out of political parties or had their assets confiscated. And if France bans wearing a kippa in State institutions as it has for many years, we accept it as the price of living in France and don't feel too sorry if Muslims are expected to knuckle under too over female dress codes.

We do have something to be worried about. It's not JUST paranoia. There are ten times as many attacks against Jews throughout the Western world than there are against Muslims, even though Muslims outnumber Jews by at least 10 to 1. For evidence I refer you to two sources:

[Pew Forum report on anti-Jewish incidents](#)

[Hate Crimes Against Muslims Rare, FBI Data Shows](#)

And if you doubt the amount of non-Muslim hatred of Jews in the USA, look at one of the most popular anti-Semitic websites, such as [Jew Watch](#), the [Ku Klux Klan](#), David Duke, or the [Westboro Baptists](#). So there is no room for complacency. On the other hand, in the immortal words of [Harold MacMillan](#), I suggest that "we have never had it so good."

As Woody Allen suggests, paranoia, insecurity, is the Jewish condition. We are too easily upset by anti-Jewish jokes, by casual remarks born out of ignorance or stupidity. We are too ready to jump in when a little reserve might more often win arguments. And I suggest we have too little faith in the rule of constitutional law. The wonder of our modern free world is its protection of freedoms. I completely approve of the freedom to speak one's mind, however full of sewage it might be. I fear we have gone too far in allowing academic thugs to try to silence speech, but that is only because academic authorities are too weak and naïve.

I completely approve of the freedom to practice religion and to build one's own houses of worship. But the current outcry at how Muslims are persecuted in the USA is a joke. One Pakistani taxi driver in New York was attacked by a raving lunatic. Odd Neanderthals throw stones at mosques. Fewer mosques encounter opposition than synagogues. Of the thousands of Halal food carts manned by Muslims in New York, not one has been vandalized. Muslims occupy many top positions in investments and industry. It is indeed the boy crying wolf.

It is good for Jews to see Muslim paranoia. It is reassuring that we are not the only ones. It might even make us a little more understanding. But the fact is that we learned to live with our paranoia through humor, through being able to laugh at ourselves, being able to laugh at our religion and culture and make fun of it. I wish Muslims understood Jewish paranoia, and I wish more of them could laugh at themselves and their religion. I suspect a Muslim comic who made fun of himself (there are some) and his own religion (there are none) would do far more for American Muslim relations than any centers or mosques. Sadly, he'd have to be mad. Remember what happened to Salman Rushdie when he tried?