

Religio Fascism

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

I have often expressed my frustration with politics – in particular, Israeli politics. I dislike dogma and extremes on both sides. This week, I am turning on the Right in Israel. They are a very broad camp. They include economic conservatives, laissez faire economists, secular idealists, religious fanatics and, yes, religious fascists. Specifically, I am focusing on someone I consider to be a very dangerous man and has done untold damage to traditional Judaism and Israel's case abroad.

Yitzchak Ginsburgh is an American born Chabad Rabbi who heads a movement called *Derech Chaim* – The Way of Life. But the question is – whose life? His movement ought to be called The Way of Death.

He is certainly knowledgeable, prolific and, some say, charismatic. His *Gal Einai* institute publishes his self-help and other books – over a hundred in all apparently. *Gal Einai* means Open Your Eyes. I fear he is the perfect example of “none so blind as he who will not see.” And he is the darling of the Nationalist Religious Right Wing because he has excused the 1994 massacre of 29 Muslims praying at the Hebron Tomb of the Patriarchs by Baruch Goldstein.

He wrote a book, *Barukh Ha-Gever*, devoted to the proposition that the massacre was justified as an expression of divine intimacy with terror as a mystical technique. Other works reiterate his views in favor of violence even if there are innocent victims. He has become the godfather of national religious fascism justifying violence against non-Jews and non-Jewish property. His views are heterodox and a distortion of the sources.

In 2009, two extreme students of his, Yitzhak Shapira and Yosef Elitzur, published a distorted tract (*Torat Hamelech*) justifying violence towards the Palestinians. It quoted sources claiming they permitted killing children “if there is a good chance that they will grow up to be like their evil parents.” Ginsburgh approved it and wrote an approbation for the book.

Ginsburgh has said that the commandment “Thou shalt not murder” does not necessarily apply to non-Jews. He has referred to Arabs as a “cancer” – a remark that led to him being charged, but never convicted, with incitement. Last year, a recording was released of Ginsburgh encouraging students to

carry out a “strong retaliatory act” two days after Palestinian gunmen killed Rabbi Raziel Shevach in the northern West Bank.

Ginsburgh and his students have responded to the controversy over his views by claiming that his concepts are taken from the Kabbalah and Chasidut. But the same could be said of both the False Messiah Shabtai Zvi and the morally corrupt Jacob Frank. A distorted mind can twist anything.

This past week, two Right Wing members of the current Israeli government (I pray they won't be in the next one), Education Minister Rafi Peretz and Transportation Minister Bezalel Smotrich, supported a gala held to honor Ginsburgh. In the event only Smotrich stayed for the award. This was much to the disgust of most Israelis from across the political and religious spectrum.

The Palestinian leadership also expressed horror. (Their hypocrisy is breathtaking as they glorify and reward those who kill Israeli women and children and name squares after them). The vast majority of Jewish organizations have condemned the event including the moderate Orthodox rabbis and scholars of Torat Chayim which issued a stinging condemnation.

In every society there are extremes – including our own. We get very worked up about Arabs and Muslims who call for the death of Jews and support jihad. We say how primitive and disgusting it is. But sadly, we have our own lunatics. And instead of enabling us to hold the high ground, our enemies love to find excuses for tarring us with the same brush.

I have a former pupil, an intrepid explorer, who travels widely around exotic places and blends in with locals. He once told me about his travels in Persia and how welcoming, hospitable and gentle his Mullah hosts were, in true Muslim style. After the meal they revealed another side and they invited him to see their public whippings and executions they thought their religion required. Some people jump to Ginsburgh's defense saying what a kind, sweet generous man he is in private". And, like the Mullahs, he may well be. But that does not detract from the danger in what he represents.

Ginsburgh also illustrates the Jekyll and Hyde nature of Chabad. They are the most devoted, dedicated and welcoming sector of the Jewish community worldwide. Yet, for all the good they do and all the warm, lovable people they produce, they also have their fair share of criminals and dangerous out of control crazies the late Rebbe would never have accepted.

Ginsburgh claimed that the late and great Lubavitcher Rebbe told him to be "melamed zechut," – to give the benefit of the doubt – to Goldstein. Of course, giving people the benefit of the doubt is a good thing unless it does even greater harm. Goldstein's massacre was on Purim 1994. The Rebbe died on the 3rd of Tamuz 1994 (about 3 ½ months after the massacre) after two years of paralysis and inability to speak during which the only communication he was capable of was via the movement of one arm. Making claims of what the Rebbe thought at that time is as ridiculous as the claim that, even today, the Rebbe sends personal messages to each bride and groom based on those he wrote 25 years ago. So, leaving aside that this "message" to Ginsburgh would go against the Rebbe's very character, greatness and positive stance on non-Jews, I have my doubts. Ginsburgh not only desecrates God's name but also that of their late great Rebbe.

Most Torah scholars agree with the **Tania d'be Eliyahu Raba 28**: "The Torah was given to sanctify God's Name...**one who sheds the blood of a gentile will in the end shed the blood of Jews**. The Torah was only given to sanctify God's Name...God will be honored among the non-Jews." And with R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843–1926) known as the **Meshech Chochmah**, when he says in **Mishpatim**: "When a Jew kills a gentile, there is, in addition to the sin of murder also the sin of profaning God's Name...and for this there is a [Divine] death penalty. And with Maimonides in his **Hilchot Teshuva** 1:4: "One who profanes God's Name, even though he repented and Yom Kippur comes and he is still repentant and has suffered, he does not achieve full atonement until he dies."

I guess, like all fanatics, Ginsburgh thinks he is right and everyone else is wrong.