

## A Jew is a Jew - one can't be more Jewish than any other<sup>1</sup>

THE APPALLING BEHAVIOR AT THE KOTEL IS BIGOTED AND BASED ON ENTIRELY WRONG-HEADED THINKING

By Misha Mansoor

How dismaying to read unedifying reports about CHAREDIM disrupting the bat mitzvah of a girl at the Wailing Wall last week. This was the latest in a recent spate of ugly, aggressive and hateful behavior by some CHAREDIM deliberately targeting the prayers and celebrations at the Kotel of those people they do not consider to be proper Jews.



It was, to me, not merely dismaying but not terribly surprising - which, of course, makes it even more disheartening.

Just who do they think the Wall belongs to?

To me, it seems obvious that the answer to that is **'Everyone'**. Any person who feels the desire, calling, curiosity, duty, love, interest, whatever to go to the Wall, whether to contemplate, reflect, pray or celebrate, should be welcomed, so long as they follow the basic rules of modesty to which you would generally be expected to adhere in any religion's more sacred and holy areas.

The tension, the conflict, is - on the face of it - a disagreement about what constitutes MODEST AND APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR. It would seem that to some CHAREDIM, secular Jews and, heaven forbid, *goyim!* should be neither seen nor heard anywhere near the Old City itself. And, given that for many strictly-Orthodox Jewish men it is forbidden to hear the female

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thejc.com/lets-talk/all/a-jew-is-a-jew-one-cant-be-more-jewish-than-any-other-4tX0m7uqsbXrDMt5qZstqf>

voice raised in song, it is especially contentious and provocative for singing secular Jews to be at the Wall if they happen to be female.

I've long known that many orthodox Jews do not regard secular Jews like me as really being Jewish. I remember being at my Jewish primary school in north London. Very close by was an orthodox Jewish boys' school and occasionally we would, during playtime, stand at the fence looking out onto the street and some of the boys from the orthodox school would taunt us and tell us we weren't real Jews.

This greatly surprised me as it never occurred to me that other Jews might question and deride the very authenticity of my Jewishness. My dad prayed at the *Adeni* synagogue. My own brother had his bar mitzvah at the Wailing Wall. My siblings and I had all gone to the same Jewish primary school, where we sang *HaTikva* every day and had Shabbat school assembly every week, and, to trump it all, my mum's family, though not particularly religious, lived in the actual land of the Jews because they were Jews. Israeli Jews living in the Holy Land itself, speaking Hebrew and eating hummus and falafel. Beat that, north London yeshiva boy!

I have encountered less than polite attitudes many times in my life. Sometimes it's derision, other times it's condescension or dismissiveness. The vast majority of CHAREDIM and orthodox Jews with whom I have had interactions and acquaintanceships have been genuinely lovely and kind. But sadly, in every religion there are zealots and, sorry to say it, Judaism is no exception.

The trouble is that **intolerance is on the increase**. Ever more restrictions and more controls. The world at large is frenetic and boundless, full of sin and temptation. There's a lot for a zealot to fear and hate. Girls have joyous, ebullient bat mitzvahs, unapologetically. There are - shock - women who want to sing and dance at the Wall, unashamedly. And there are countless denominations of Jewry, some with women rabbis, some with unsegregated sexes, some where even the girls wear *kippot* and *tzizit* or *tallit*, unabashedly.

**Why do Jews who are of a different hue present such a threat and elicit such hatred and aggression?**

A Jew is a Jew.

You can't out-Jew a Jew by being more religious, more kosher, more pious, more observant, more conservative, more modest. You just can't. You can learn more, know more, do more, act more, behave more, but you cannot be more. **You are either Jewish or you're not.**

The aggressive disrupters at the Wailing Wall no doubt believe they are in the right. That they have divine approval to destroy the celebrations of Jews they consider to be not-good-enough-Jews and that it is only they who have claim to the Kotel and who live the only acceptable way. They are the chosen of the chosen.

A couple of weeks ago I bumped into my beloved old teacher from primary school, Mr Morris. When we were at primary school we would demand of him, "Who was better? Us (modern orthodox and secular Jews) or *Frummers*?" Mr Morris, himself quite orthodox, would smile and say, "**No one is better, we're just different and every Jewish person is just as important.**" I wish those at the Wailing Wall had such common sense wisdom. I wish I could believe they might one day take it on board and display the attributes of charity, kindness and holiness they spend so long learning about.