

Torment of women must cease    Torment of women must cease



The story is by now familiar enough to make grown men gag in disgust. In Israel, the *haredi*, the ultra-Orthodox (as opposed to the merely “Orthodox” who are called

*dati*

) have raised their voices and thrown their excrement. One

*dati*

woman dared to sit in the front section of a public bus and was abused by

*haredi*

passengers. Students who attend an all-girls school set up by

*dati*

parents near a

*haredi*

neighborhood in Beit Shemesh have to run a gauntlet to get to class. Little girls are called whores and have had eggs and bags of feces thrown at them. Apparently the shirt-sleeves and skirts the girls don are not long enough for

*haredi*

standards of modesty even though they cover the arms and legs entirely. Oh, wait; in examining a photo, I think I can see the stocking-covered ankles of Na’ama Margolis, age 8, the little girl whose torment finally made the national and international news.

*Burkas*

anyone?

Two weeks ago when city workers tried to remove illegally erected signs mandating the separation of the sexes on city streets (this is so familiar isn’t it – think 1938 after *Kristallnacht*), new signs went up in defiance of the law. When police showed up to remove those, about 300

*haredi*

men threw stones at them and burned trash cans creating a foul stench and polluting the air with smoke as a supplement to their verbal outrage at little girls whose ankles were visible.

Television reporters were attacked when they attempted to film these events.

Not surprisingly, President Shimon Peres is on the side of the girls. Urging Israelis to attend a rally on their behalf, he said, "Today is a test for the nation, not just for the police. All of us, religious, secular, traditional, must as one man defend the character of the State of Israel against a minority which breaks our national solidarity."

Tzipi Livni, formerly foreign minister and now head of the Kadima Party which holds the largest number of seats in the Knesset, lent her support to the forces of sanity: "We are struggling over Israel's character not only in Beit Shemesh and not only over the exclusion of women but against all the extremists who have come out of the woodwork to try and impose their worldview on us."

Even right-wingers, religious and secular, oppose what the *haredi* in their arrogance, their "my way or the highway" do. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has called on the police to act aggressively against violence aimed at women and urged Attorney General Yehuda Weinstein to make certain that laws prohibiting the exclusion of women from public spaces are fully enforced.

Moshe Abutbul, mayor of Beit Shemesh and himself *haredi*, decried the violence against young girls. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) reported that he said, "Beit Shemesh denounces such behavior. Violent men belong behind bars," he continued. "I urge the Israel police to act with a firm hand against all the rioters," adding that reporters should not make assumptions about all *haredi* Orthodox Israelis.

The mayor, however, seems not to speak for the *haredi* he claims to represent. Shlomo Fuchs, for one, seems not to have gotten the memo. He was arrested for calling a female soldier, Doron Matalon, who dared to sit in the "men's section" of a public bus a whore and a *shiksa*

. As she is 19 years old and not a young girl of 8, as is Na'ama Margolis, she at least knows what that insult means. Fuchs was joined in his insults by other

*haredi*

passengers. The same day that Fuchs was indicted, female members of the Knesset's Committee on the Status of Women rode in the front of a bus

*haredi*

demanding to be segregated. They were insulted by male passengers who complained that the women were acting in a provocative fashion by sitting with men. The members of the Knesset were accompanied by television crews. When brave

*haredi*

spotted the crews, they opted not to get on the bus.

Our Father in Heaven, Rock and Redeemer of the People of Israel, bless the State of Israel, dawn of our redemption. Shield it with Your love, spread over it the shelter of Your peace. The rabbis of old believed that the Second Temple was destroyed because of senseless hatred. That was Jerusalem of old. We thought we were over that. Welcome to Jerusalem, 5772.

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*Editor's Note: See related story on page 13.*