

Outcasts, Masquerading as Rabbinical Authorities

By Phyllis Chesler

[Six rabbis have written and signed a letter](#) in favor of Zohran Mamdani's election. The letter is not unusual, certainly not illegal, and yet it is also one more tragic, pathetic, foolish, perhaps even dangerous expression of one's faith. Some might even say that such a letter is heretical. Yet another example of shameless self-promotion.

The use of one's knowledge of sacred texts and teachings in order to make popular politically correct points is, a rabbinate that is conducted "on the streets and in the classroom" (this is how one of the signatories' rabbinate is described)—well, some might argue, is a protest against those very teachings. Perhaps even a travesty.

I am not homophobic. My best friends...etc. However, my politics, my ideas, my allegiances, do not flow from my personal identities—I have so many. Don't you?

By training and inclination, I tend to look for patterns as a way of understanding alliances. Thus, we return to the the letter.

The signatories's out loud and proud support for a Muslim anti-Zionist—that's

Mamdani—at a time when attacks against Jews, mainly but not only by Muslims, is a rising, global phenomena—and to do so when young Israelis are dying in a just but terrible war, and are still being held hostage in Gaza—and remain wounded, certainly traumatized—well, that's is hardly principled or sane. Or kind.

What we may be looking at is a rebellion of outcasts. Those

who grew up “different,” who may have been or felt discriminated against for this reason, who who felt as if they’d been condemned very harshly as outsiders, those who actually were outsiders– could only find themselves by breaking away and creating their own versions of the kind of Judaism with which they can live, even flourish.

A revenge of sorts? Or rather, an expansion of understanding? Both, perhaps.

Some of the letter writers seem to have Brooklyn on their resumes, Park Slope in particular. (I once lived there and can say much more but for now, silence is the better part of valor). These signatories have led congregations or taught at two Park Slope congregations: Kolot Chayenu and Bet Elohim, and one synagogue in Cobble Hill, the Kane Street Synagogue. A very close-by synagogue in Park Slope, the Park Slope Jewish Center has also been led by a lesbian rabbi for many years. Thankfully, she is not a signatory.



One letter signer is a transgender woman, another is a “queer” gay male rabbi, and the remaining three are lesbian rabbis. The sixth signatory, was raised Catholic but converted to Judaism when she married her husband.) She is also connected

to Brooklyn.

The letter writers are also connected to Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, Tru'ah, and Rabbis for Human Rights; one is also connected to Tirdof, and one is connected to J Street. Two rabbis were ordained in the Reform movement, one in the Reconstructionist movement, one in the Conservative movement, and one, who grew up in an ultra-Orthodox hasidic community in Williamsburg may or may not have an Orthodox smicha. He/she is a descendant of generations of rabbis.

All—every last one of them—are Torah-learned. Their interpretation of Judaism has everything to do with social activism especially concerning anti-Black racism. All are anti-Israel activists.

They may have already experienced discrimination for their sexual or religious “differences;” they are not going to risk being discriminated against as Zionists. Thus, they all share the most profoundly negative views of Israel.

The transgender female rabbi has worked with anti-semitic faux feminists at the Women's March. One rabbi once invited a representative of the PLO to address her Brooklyn congregation on Yom Kippur.

What to do? Might a more sympathetic outreach bring them back to some semblance of sanity or must they be exiled from “the camp,” even from a camp that is already so diverse?

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