

# Izzy Posen: Exploring religious freedom episode 08

Video at: <https://youtu.be/nspDkjghgHo>

0:00:02.929,0:00:07.230  
Alastair Lichten (AL): Hello and welcome to the National Secular society podcast. You are

0:00:07.230,0:00:10.889  
listening to part eight in our series of interviews exploring religious freedom.

0:00:10.889,0:00:15.900  
I'm Alastair Lichten, Head of Education at the NSS and in this series I'm speaking

0:00:15.900,0:00:19.740  
to a variety of activists and experts about what religious freedom means to

0:00:19.740,0:00:24.810  
them, what are its limits and how might it be abused. Today I spoke with Izzy Posen,

0:00:24.810,0:00:30.090  
a speaker at our upcoming conference Secularism 2019: I'll let Izzy introduce himself

0:00:30.090,0:00:33.060  
and I will back at the end with a few closing thoughts. Enjoy.

0:00:33.060,0:00:42.660  
Izzy Posen - welcome to the NSS podcast. Izzy Posen (IP): Hi, Good Morning Alistair - very

0:00:42.660,0:00:48.480  
happy to be here. (AL): Cheers. Maybe you can start by introducing yourself and your story

0:00:48.480,0:00:53.130  
to the audience.

(IP): Sure. So, my name is Izzy Posen. I grew up in East London in an area called Stamford Hill which is in Hackney. People

0:00:58.469,0:01:03.719  
who have walked past the area or drove past the area would notice that it's an

0:01:03.719,0:01:09.690  
area heavily populated by a specific community of ultra-orthodox Jews known

0:01:09.690,0:01:14.610  
as Hasidic Jews. They're recognizable by, by distinctive dress and distinctive

0:01:14.610,0:01:21.840  
customs. They also largely speak Yiddish, not English. So I grew up there. I

0:01:21.840,0:01:25.710  
attended schools there until the age of 20.

0:01:25.710,0:01:30.060  
Most of the schools I attended were illegal schools and that's

0:01:30.060,0:01:34.439  
what I'm gonna be talking about at the conference and we didn't have any

0:01:34.439,0:01:39.900  
secular education - we didn't learn any English, we didn't learn any maths or any science - we

0:01:39.900,0:01:47.400  
just spent the whole day studying Jewish

Orthodox texts. We were also hit in school

0:01:47.400,0:01:54.570

and other unsavory and unpleasant things happened to us. Throughout my teens

0:01:54.570,0:01:59.460

I started questioning some of the religious dogma and I wanted to expand

0:01:59.460,0:02:03.869

my horizons so I, I taught myself English, I started reading a little bit of

0:02:03.869,0:02:09.840

science and maths and eventually by the time I was 20 through my, through my

0:02:09.840,0:02:13.319

getting to learn science and starting to have a more

0:02:13.319,0:02:20.579

critical view on the Jewish dogma I was taught, I came to lose my faith. I

0:02:20.579,0:02:25.560

left the community and started life outside of the community which was very

0:02:25.560,0:02:28.530

challenging and I'll be talking about that as well

0:02:28.530,0:02:35.310

and I eventually - well, when I left, I turned 20, I had to take my GCSEs and a-levels because

0:02:35.310,0:02:40.769

I had no qualifications and three years later I was in University where I'm currently

0:02:40.769,0:02:47.310

studying - I do physics and philosophy - I'm a second year. I also started the

0:02:47.310,0:02:52.430

Bristol Free Speech Society here at University so people can have rigorous

0:02:52.430,0:02:55.650

discussions about sensitive and difficult topics because I believe

0:02:55.650,0:03:00.269

ultimately that is the point of, of heresy - it's not only about questioning

0:03:00.269,0:03:05.370

religious dogma, its questioning all dogma. So this is where I am now. (AL): Well, and

0:03:05.370,0:03:10.109

thank you and I think that story will be inspiring to anyone who's faced

0:03:10.109,0:03:14.549

educational back, been pushed back and had to, you know, build up, build up

0:03:14.549,0:03:20.939

themselves and overcome difficulties. Given your experiences, what does

0:03:20.939,0:03:28.680

religious freedom mean to you?

(IP): Religious freedom means to me the idea

0:03:28.680,0:03:34.590

that people have the freedom to choose what they believe and how to express

0:03:34.590,0:03:39.810

their beliefs and it applies both to religion and to secular people - so, you

0:03:39.810,0:03:44.609

know, as we like to say in secular circles, freedom of

0:03:44.609,0:03:48.060

religion means also freedom from religion - so it's freedom of association,

0:03:48.060,0:03:53.609  
freedom of thought, and it's the idea  
that it shouldn't be, ugh, what we believe

0:03:53.609,0:03:58.859  
and what we think shouldn't be top down - it  
should be  
bottom up, so people should, should be

0:03:58.859,0:04:03.090  
able to go out there, explore, question  
things, come up with their own ideas and

0:04:03.090,0:04:07.379  
believe what they want. Well, of course, as  
long as it's not dangerous, not

0:04:07.379,0:04:13.680  
violent, believe what they want and, and  
come to design their own life based on

0:04:13.680,0:04:20.400  
their own ideas and their own worldviews.  
(AL): Hmm. Conversations about freedom of /

0:04:20.400,0:04:25.380  
from religion often overlook when  
religion is being imposed on members of

0:04:25.380,0:04:29.190  
the community  
by the wider community rather than, I

0:04:29.190,0:04:34.290  
think we all recognize the problem when  
one person's religion is being imposed

0:04:34.290,0:04:37.770  
on someone who doesn't share that  
religion, but when you have the religious

0:04:37.770,0:04:42.630  
community but there's that top-down  
imposition within the community

0:04:42.630,0:04:47.010  
of their religious ideas, that's often not seen as  
a freedom of and

0:04:47.010,0:04:52.320  
from religion issue. Why do you  
think that is? (IP): Well I think it's

0:04:52.320,0:04:58.440  
actually a quite  
complex issue. It's, it's not - people

0:04:58.440,0:05:02.730  
like to see it as a simple, you know  
freedom is freedom, but actually people's

0:05:02.730,0:05:07.170  
freedoms clash - philosophers have been  
grappling with this issue since times of

0:05:07.170,0:05:11.340  
antiquity. People's freedoms clash. My  
freedom to do something can often clash

0:05:11.340,0:05:15.240  
with yours, you know. Take a radical  
example which is almost absurd but it

0:05:15.240,0:05:18.300  
shows the problem. If I want to say I  
have the freedom to do anything,

0:05:18.300,0:05:21.720  
including slapping you,  
then I'm infringing on your freedom of not

0:05:21.720,0:05:25.500  
being slapped. Now the solution is, well  
use your freedom, but not to infringe on

0:05:25.500,0:05:31.020  
mine, on my freedoms or that the problem  
is how do you define my freedoms and

0:05:31.020,0:05:33.690  
your freedoms and what happens when  
they overlap. So a classic example,

0:05:33.690,0:05:39.240  
which we're seeing now in, in  
schools - it's a very topical issue at the

0:05:39.240,0:05:44.670  
moment - is religious communities will say  
that people coming into schools and you

0:05:44.670,0:05:49.890  
know and and teaching acceptance of  
minorities, of LGBT people, is infringing

0:05:49.890,0:05:53.700  
on their religious freedoms. Well the  
LGBT community will say actually kids

0:05:53.700,0:05:58.650  
growing up not knowing that LGBT people  
exist infringes well both on their

0:05:58.650,0:06:02.430  
freedoms as a community to you know  
to feel safe in this country and also on

0:06:02.430,0:06:06.630  
the potential freedoms of the kids  
growing up who, you know, by the law

0:06:06.630,0:06:10.290  
of large numbers and by percentages are,  
some of them are likely gay. So the

0:06:10.290,0:06:15.060  
question is, the question is not so  
much, you know, should we have religious

0:06:15.060,0:06:18.480  
freedom, which I think everyone agrees  
with, the question is where to draw the

0:06:18.480,0:06:23.520  
lines and it is a complex question.  
(AL): What can people who are not a part of

0:06:23.520,0:06:26.610  
specific religious communities and here  
I'm particularly thinking of

0:06:26.610,0:06:30.960  
ultra-conservative religious communities  
and, if you're not from that background,

0:06:30.960,0:06:36.960  
what can you do to support people in  
your position or your former position? (IP): So

0:06:36.960,0:06:40.150  
there are various charitable organizations set  
up to help

0:06:40.150,0:06:45.610  
people who leave communities. Now, I want  
to point out that these are absolutely

0:06:45.610,0:06:52.120  
vital - people who leave very restrictive  
communities like myself, they absolutely

0:06:52.120,0:06:57.220  
need outsiders' help - they,  
they're told all their life that, that

0:06:57.220,0:07:00.160  
there is no life outside of the  
community and they won't make it and they  
are

0:07:00.160,0:07:04.260  
not given the skills to  
make it outside the community and in my

0:07:04.260,0:07:08.860  
own case, if not for a charity called  
Mavar - so, it's a Jewish charity set up,

0:07:08.860,0:07:14.530  
set up to help ex Haredi, ex ultra-orthodox  
Jews - if not for them I would not have

0:07:14.530,0:07:18.850  
been able to make it out. So I think the  
first things that, the first thing that

0:07:18.850,0:07:23.260  
secular people can do is help and support  
this charity - these charities need money

0:07:23.260,0:07:29.199  
to help, to help people leave, they need

volunteers to, you know, basic things such as

0:07:29.199,0:07:33.460

teaching people English,  
teaching people about relationships - I

0:07:33.460,0:07:38.110

grew up in a community where since the  
age of 13 I wasn't allowed to speak with

0:07:38.110,0:07:42.669

any women and, you know, leaving that into  
the world we need mentorship, we

0:07:42.669,0:07:47.200

need, we need to be taught effectively  
how to make it in the secular world so these

0:07:47.200,0:07:52.660

charities rely a lot on volunteers  
and on donations. So that's I think a

0:07:52.660,0:07:56.950

really good way in which people can help  
these communities. There's another

0:07:56.950,0:08:00.099

charity that I know in the wider  
community called faith to faithless, I

0:08:00.099,0:08:04.720

know the director - he's a friend of mine  
and that's also a fantastic charity

0:08:04.720,0:08:11.800

that people can help. (AL): When someone has  
missed out on a basic education as a

0:08:11.800,0:08:16.810

result of, you know, being in a, in a  
specific very narrow community, does the

0:08:16.810,0:08:21.250

state have a responsibility to them  
to make sure that they do get that

0:08:21.250,0:08:28.449

right to education later in life? (IP): Oh, I wish

that was the case. I mean if only the

0:08:28.449,0:08:32.979

government would pay for my, for  
my education that I had to do later than

0:08:32.979,0:08:35.650

everyone  
that would be fantastic and I wouldn't be

0:08:35.650,0:08:42.599

in so much debt as I am now. I assume, I  
assume to make it come about would need,

0:08:42.599,0:08:46.959

would need significant lobbying  
and I don't think the community of ex

0:08:46.959,0:08:51.130

fundamentalist religious people is large  
enough to make that happen but I would

0:08:51.130,0:08:54.680

say yes, and I know a case in  
Canada - a friend of mine who grew

0:08:54.680,0:08:59.900

up in a Hasidic education system and he  
didn't get an education, he is suing the

0:08:59.900,0:09:04.430

state and he's effectively saying look  
you had a responsibility to protect my

0:09:04.430,0:09:07.880

rights as a kid. You didn't - I didn't get  
an education

0:09:07.880,0:09:11.510

now I'm suing you for the damage - first  
of all give me an education, secondly

0:09:11.510,0:09:14.480

I've gone many years without being able  
to find a job because I don't have

0:09:14.480,0:09:19.430

skills, compensate me for that. And

I think that's a decent argument. The  
0:09:19.430,0:09:24.590  
case is still going on and I'm very curious  
to see what the outcome is but I do think and  
0:09:24.590,0:09:29.480  
this is myself and fellow ex community  
members do feel let down by the local  
0:09:29.480,0:09:33.280  
authorities because the local  
authorities have known for decades that  
0:09:33.280,0:09:36.710  
thousands of little kids are  
missing from the radar - they're not  
0:09:36.710,0:09:40.460  
registered in any schools and they're  
not being home-schooled and they didn't  
0:09:40.460,0:09:45.320  
do anything to prevent that so it's not  
entirely their fault, it's the  
0:09:45.320,0:09:48.440  
community's fault as well but as local  
authorities who need to protect kids,  
0:09:48.440,0:09:53.210  
they should make sure that kids get an  
education, a basic education, and they  
0:09:53.210,0:09:58.850  
failed with regards to myself and my  
friends. So should the government make sure  
we get an  
0:09:58.850,0:10:02.810  
education late in life? I'd love to see  
that happen - I don't think it's realistically  
0:10:02.810,0:10:08.240  
going to happen. (AL): Hmm, because I've seen  
local authorities that say just because  
0:10:08.240,0:10:12.680

a child is going to an illegal, unregistered  
school doesn't mean that  
0:10:12.680,0:10:19.310  
they're not receiving a suitable  
education and I, I suspect one aspect  
0:10:19.310,0:10:23.750  
this may be that if you have thousands  
of children and potentially tens of  
0:10:23.750,0:10:27.170  
thousands in, spread over local  
authorities who are attending illegal  
0:10:27.170,0:10:31.910  
unregistered schools, if the local  
authority were to take strong action on  
0:10:31.910,0:10:36.050  
that then they suddenly have the  
responsibility and they don't have  
0:10:36.050,0:10:39.350  
the school capacity to take on the  
numbers of the children who have  
0:10:39.350,0:10:44.150  
previously just been slipping through  
the net. (IP): Well, that's well, that's why we  
0:10:44.150,0:10:46.790  
have local authorities and that's why we  
have governments and that's why  
0:10:46.790,0:10:50.690  
governments have money to do the things  
they are obliged to do by law. I don't  
0:10:50.690,0:10:54.890  
think it's an excuse that it would be  
difficult for them. Yes it would be  
0:10:54.890,0:10:58.130  
difficult - that's why they're powerful  
that's why they're the government - to do  
0:10:58.130,0:11:02.860

difficult things.  
(AL): Is there a danger in tackling some of

0:11:02.860,0:11:06.280  
the problems we're seeing in very  
conservative independent faith schools,

0:11:06.280,0:11:12.070  
this is registered legal ones, that we  
might end up driving more people into

0:11:12.070,0:11:16.390  
the illegal unregistered sector or  
simply just not getting any education at

0:11:16.390,0:11:21.160  
all. (IP): Yes there is and this needs to  
be, this needs to be approached very

0:11:21.160,0:11:25.210  
carefully - I'm by no means an expert - all  
I know is my own experience of attending

0:11:25.210,0:11:28.540  
an illegal school and being a member  
of the community, so I know how the

0:11:28.540,0:11:34.390  
community thinks in this regard and  
it's important that governmental bodies

0:11:34.390,0:11:36.880  
and local authorities who deal with  
these issues are intimately familiar

0:11:36.880,0:11:41.860  
with the ways of thinking so they don't  
miss-step and for example one way in which

0:11:41.860,0:11:47.890  
the community thinks in this regard is  
they have, they have this vision which is

0:11:47.890,0:11:52.570  
rooted in ancient mythology going back  
thousands of years of their community of

0:11:52.570,0:11:57.160

you know that the god-fearing Jews as  
being a force of Good in the world,

0:11:57.160,0:12:01.450  
persecuted by the forces of evil and the  
forces of evil are anyone who interferes

0:12:01.450,0:12:06.730  
with their way of life and  
they have this, so for example, Hanukkah

0:12:06.730,0:12:10.750  
is a festival that well all Jews celebrate  
by ultra-orthodox Jews have a narrative

0:12:10.750,0:12:15.490  
around it. So, the narrative is that there  
were these evil Greeks contrived to

0:12:15.490,0:12:21.910  
Hellenise the Jews in Israel and  
their interpretation of Hellenizing is to

0:12:21.910,0:12:25.230  
make sure that Jews no longer serve  
their god in the way they see fit and

0:12:25.230,0:12:30.730  
the story of Hanukkah for them is that  
the Jews fought back and won and the way

0:12:30.730,0:12:36.090  
they fought back is by being  
uncompromising and by carrying on to -

0:12:36.090,0:12:42.670  
- in their way of life and their  
observances and fighting back against

0:12:42.670,0:12:46.480  
the mighty army and the message they  
take out from this story is that there's

0:12:46.480,0:12:51.600  
always people who wanna, who wanna  
interfere with our way of worshipping God and

0:12:51.600,0:12:56.470

we fight back and God helps us and we win. And this is exactly the narrative

0:12:56.470,0:12:59.380  
they have towards governmental bodies like Ofsted and the Department of

0:12:59.380,0:13:06.340  
Education - they see any interference by Ofsted as these evil forces trying to -

0:13:06.340,0:13:11.170  
to secularize the Jews, trying to make them no longer be observant

0:13:11.170,0:13:14.649  
in the way they see fit and they are very very stubborn in

0:13:14.649,0:13:21.189  
fighting back and nothing stops them and no tactics are out of bounds. They, you know,

0:13:21.189,0:13:24.550  
when it comes to these things usually they're law-abiding citizens but when it

0:13:24.550,0:13:27.910  
comes to these things, when they perceive threat to their religious

0:13:27.910,0:13:32.889  
observances, there is no law, there's there's nothing that's out of bounds and

0:13:32.889,0:13:37.720  
and yes, you're right, they will get, it can drive people to become more extremist, it

0:13:37.720,0:13:43.269  
can drive more schools underground but the question then is, this doesn't

0:13:43.269,0:13:46.029  
mean that government should give up, this doesn't mean that we should turn a blind

0:13:46.029,0:13:49.449

eye, all it does mean is that we should be very sensitive and very careful in

0:13:49.449,0:13:53.559  
how to address these issues and so the government needs to be clear that it

0:13:53.559,0:13:57.610  
does not want to interfere with, with their observances, with their ways of religious

0:13:57.610,0:14:02.350  
practice, it does not want to secularize them - all it wants is that kids get some

0:14:02.350,0:14:06.579  
some form of secular education. Now this is very difficult for two reasons. First

0:14:06.579,0:14:11.499  
of all that for many within the ultra-orthodox community even spending

0:14:11.499,0:14:15.999  
time in the day to get a secular education is in itself against the

0:14:15.999,0:14:20.079  
religious faith - so there's an idea within ultra Orthodox Judaism that boys need

0:14:20.079,0:14:23.800  
to dedicate every second of the day to the study of the Torah - the religious law

0:14:23.800,0:14:29.769  
and spending time on secular education is against the faith. Now, so, this means that

0:14:29.769,0:14:34.480  
inherently the second, the second the government asks for basic, basic secular

0:14:34.480,0:14:39.129  
education they're ready, the community's already up in arms. A second problem is

0:14:39.129,0:14:43.120

that of course we know that there are other things besides for basic secular

0:14:43.120,0:14:47.110  
education that we want kids to know - the so-called British values - we want kids

0:14:47.110,0:14:51.490  
who grow up in the country to not think that the rest of the country is

0:14:51.490,0:14:55.629  
evil, to be able to interact with people outside the community and to know that

0:14:55.629,0:14:57.939  
they're people different to them you know to get to know people from

0:14:57.939,0:15:02.970  
different faiths, from different sexual orientations and this is directly,

0:15:02.970,0:15:06.910  
well at least they perceive it that way, a direct affront to their ways of life,

0:15:06.910,0:15:11.559  
so for example the Haredi community is now, is now up in arms against the

0:15:11.559,0:15:16.990  
Department of Education for, for sorry, for, against Ofsted for requiring that they

0:15:16.990,0:15:24.160  
teach relationship and sexuality classes and we know, with this, the fights

0:15:24.160,0:15:25.880  
in Birmingham between the Muslim community and schools

0:15:25.880,0:15:31.730  
has made it into the news but the ultra-orthodox fights have not so much

0:15:31.730,0:15:35.329

made into news but they are going on at the very same time - at this very

0:15:35.329,0:15:40.550  
moment, there are big rabbinical councils being set up and discussing what can we

0:15:40.550,0:15:46.880  
do? so I don't think there's a simple solution - this is a conflict

0:15:46.880,0:15:50.149  
that's always gonna be there. I unfortunately, I have nothing to offer in

0:15:50.149,0:15:54.110  
terms of a solution, all I can say is that we can't ignore it - it's a problem

0:15:54.110,0:15:59.779  
and we need to think, I mean, when I say we, I mean the government or the

0:15:59.779,0:16:03.980  
governmental bodies need to sit and think and consult the community and

0:16:03.980,0:16:08.300  
consult people who have left the community, who know the community and figure out the

0:16:08.300,0:16:12.769  
best strategy forwards, but as I said I don't think there's a simple solution. (AL):  
Hmm. In

0:16:12.769,0:16:17.000  
a blog of mine I call this weaponized unreasonableness and you know if you

0:16:17.000,0:16:23.509  
start by making yourself deliberately unreasonable, then if you start from the

0:16:23.509,0:16:28.130  
point of view that anything is an infringement on your religion then it's

0:16:28.130,0:16:32.630  
very difficult to find some sort of  
compromise. (IP): Yeah, yeah. Exactly, so

0:16:32.630,0:16:36.230  
the thing you you spoke about earlier  
about you know freedom of religion/

0:16:36.230,0:16:40.370  
freedom from religion and I said that  
you know if freedoms overlap

0:16:40.370,0:16:45.680  
freedoms clash, this is a perfect  
example because on the one hand part of

0:16:45.680,0:16:50.810  
being a liberal democracy is the idea  
that people can practice their

0:16:50.810,0:16:54.529  
religions freely but in order for  
that to function we also need people to

0:16:54.529,0:16:59.569  
agree that others can practice their  
religion freely and and to buy into the

0:16:59.569,0:17:02.410  
basic premise of liberal democracy so  
what do you do when you have communities

0:17:02.410,0:17:08.150  
for whom their idea of religion is the  
negation of liberal democracy? you know

0:17:08.150,0:17:11.630  
this is Karl Popper, the 20th  
century philosophy called this the

0:17:11.630,0:17:15.799  
paradox of tolerance - you know, how do you  
tolerate those who don't tolerate you?

0:17:15.799,0:17:18.530  
You want to be tolerant, you want to  
tolerate everyone but then there are

0:17:18.530,0:17:24.770  
people who, who don't want to tolerate  
you, so do you tolerate them to allow

0:17:24.770,0:17:27.679  
them to not tolerate you? and I think  
this is what's happening. So there are

0:17:27.679,0:17:32.870  
religious communities whose  
basic premise is anti-liberal and

0:17:32.870,0:17:38.420  
anti-democratic  
and they expect a liberal democracy to

0:17:38.420,0:17:43.970  
protect their rights to be anti-democratic  
and anti-liberal and at some point

0:17:43.970,0:17:47.240  
there's gonna be a clash here and the  
difficult question we need to figure out

0:17:47.240,0:17:52.040  
as a society is where we draw the lines,  
where do we, where do we say well, we're

0:17:52.040,0:17:55.490  
no longer, we can no longer tolerate  
that - that's against our basic values ? and

0:17:55.490,0:17:59.240  
where do we, and where do we say, you know  
what, yes, go ahead, we don't like it, but

0:17:59.240,0:18:03.080  
you know it's your right? (AL): Yeah and that  
is I think the crisis of liberalism and

0:18:03.080,0:18:07.670  
the constant back and  
forth and trying to find that correct

0:18:07.670,0:18:13.130  
balance. I mean take, take parental rights -  
I don't think it'd be possible to have

0:18:13.130,0:18:18.080  
any sort of liberal pluralistic secular  
democracy that didn't respect parents'

0:18:18.080,0:18:22.490  
rights to raise their children in  
accordance with their beliefs in a broad

0:18:22.490,0:18:28.580  
sense but if you look at one end of the  
sort of scale between, you know, raising your

0:18:28.580,0:18:33.430  
children in a faith tradition and  
complete 100 percent indoctrination,

0:18:33.430,0:18:39.980  
there's got to be somewhere along that  
line where the balance of rights tips

0:18:39.980,0:18:46.400  
too far one way or the other. You know,  
a parent taking their child to synagogue -

0:18:46.400,0:18:51.230  
that, I think you, it'd be  
almost impossible to argue that that was

0:18:51.230,0:18:56.840  
infringing on the child's rights, the  
child's independent rights and to prevent that

0:18:56.840,0:19:01.610  
would be definitely infringing on the  
parents' rights. If you lock them in a

0:19:01.610,0:19:07.100  
cupboard under the stairs all day and only  
let them read, only let them read the

0:19:07.100,0:19:10.910  
Torah for 24 hours a day, that, we'd all  
agree, that's too far

0:19:10.910,0:19:15.680  
but there's needs to be sort of  
somewhere along between those two points

0:19:15.680,0:19:19.790  
where the balance begins to tip. Is it  
possible to draw a definitive line or is

0:19:19.790,0:19:25.280  
it just a constant spectrum. (IP): Right. Yeah  
and I absolutely agree and I'm skeptical

0:19:25.280,0:19:29.060  
about the possibility of drawing a clear  
line. It might be a very wiggly line, you

0:19:29.060,0:19:35.000  
know, drawn around arbitrary cases  
but, I mean, I was, I was

0:19:35.000,0:19:38.900  
brought up to believe that, you know, if  
you deviate from the commandments, you go

0:19:38.900,0:19:43.520  
to hell right, and hell is literal  
Hellfire and it's pain and and kids are

0:19:43.520,0:19:49.430  
taught, taught about Hell in the most, in  
the gory details, right. Now I would argue

0:19:49.430,0:19:53.890  
that that is child abuse - that is psychological  
child abuse. You're telling a child, a

0:19:53.890,0:19:59.380  
young child that if they don't follow  
exactly what the adults tell them then

0:19:59.380,0:20:04.210  
they're gonna be tortured. How is that  
not child abuse? On the other hand, how

0:20:04.210,0:20:08.680  
can you possibly enforce that? how can  
you, how can you tell, how can you make

0:20:08.680,0:20:13.330  
sure? you know, let's assume it was  
illegal to tell children that, you know,

0:20:13.330,0:20:17.440  
they're gonna be tortured in Hell - I think it should be - but how, how are you

0:20:17.440,0:20:21.430  
possibly gonna enforce that ? how can you make sure that the parent doesn't, in the

0:20:21.430,0:20:25.660  
privacy of their own home, teach that to kids? But yeah, there are many many other

0:20:25.660,0:20:29.920  
examples. (AL): And if you were to enforce that, you would be imposing potentially a

0:20:29.920,0:20:35.860  
greater, a far greater illiberalism through that. (IP): I don't know. I don't know - I, I

0:20:35.860,0:20:39.730  
definitely think there should be some things that should be illegal to tell

0:20:39.730,0:20:44.710  
your kids, I mean, you know, we know for example parents can't tell their kids

0:20:44.710,0:20:48.250  
that they have a duty to kill unbelievers, right - that would be against

0:20:48.250,0:20:52.570  
the law and I think, as you said, it is a spectrum but I think that some forms

0:20:52.570,0:20:57.280  
of harmful indoctrination should be, well I don't know if it should be illegal

0:20:57.280,0:21:00.760  
because you can't enforce it but it we should be very suspicious of them and I

0:21:00.760,0:21:06.070  
don't think parents should have the

right to to to bring up their kids that

0:21:06.070,0:21:12.160  
way. (AL): Well I guess it's partly that we're changing - there was a time that we viewed

0:21:12.160,0:21:15.910  
parents as a property of their - I was going to say property of their parents but

0:21:15.910,0:21:20.890  
really the property of their fathers and we've, you know, we've evolved and changed

0:21:20.890,0:21:25.820  
that view and we're moving towards a view of children as independent right-

0:21:25.820,0:21:31.120  
holders but that does mean that you are going to get a clash of rights and

0:21:31.120,0:21:35.680  
you're gonna get, you know, sort of, messy issues and where do we draw and where

0:21:35.680,0:21:39.040  
and not just one where do we draw the line question but thousands of where we draw

0:21:39.040,0:21:43.330  
the line questions. (IP): Absolutely and and I think society figures this out as it

0:21:43.330,0:21:47.440  
goes along and society evolves. I mean at one point we used to think that slaves

0:21:47.440,0:21:52.480  
are property of their owners, right, and and then this, a big shock

0:21:52.480,0:21:56.140  
came when government told people you can't do with your slaves whatever you want,

0:21:56.140,0:21:58.000  
in fact he can't even have slaves to

0:21:58.000,0:22:02.620  
begin with and I assume, I don't know,  
but I assume people must have thought of

0:22:02.620,0:22:04.650  
that in the same shock as people  
might,

0:22:04.650,0:22:09.510  
might think nowadays when they are told that  
the  
kids are not their property, people may

0:22:09.510,0:22:14.190  
have said what do you mean? this family  
of slaves have been, have been in my

0:22:14.190,0:22:18.120  
family for generations - of course they are  
ours, right, and I think when

0:22:18.120,0:22:22.230  
we move to a perception of viewing  
kids not as property but as people with

0:22:22.230,0:22:25.080  
independent rights I assume there's  
gonna be the same shock but at the end

0:22:25.080,0:22:27.980  
of the day we're gonna have to, if we  
evolve as a society in that direction,

0:22:27.980,0:22:32.220  
that's what we're gonna have to say, that  
yes, kids do not belong to them, I mean

0:22:32.220,0:22:35.520  
parents have a right to educate  
their kids but kids are not property of

0:22:35.520,0:22:41.300  
their parents. (AL): Mm-hmm. Can there be  
any  
sort of reconciliation between

0:22:41.300,0:22:46.680

ultra-conservative religious communities  
and secularists or genuine advocates of

0:22:46.680,0:22:51.990  
religious freedom? (IP): No. No there can't.  
The very inherent idea behind

0:22:51.990,0:22:59.850  
ultra conservatism is that, is that  
people don't have a right to live the

0:22:59.850,0:23:06.060  
way they want and to choose their own  
beliefs. Ultra conservatives are very

0:23:06.060,0:23:11.250  
dogmatic in their beliefs - they believe  
with absolute certainty in in in

0:23:11.250,0:23:14.040  
whatever they believe, in whatever God  
they believe, whatever faith they believe

0:23:14.040,0:23:18.720  
in and they don't believe in in in that  
kind of choice. They believe that, you

0:23:18.720,0:23:21.900  
know, God created you, you have to follow  
God and if we don't follow God you're

0:23:21.900,0:23:26.040  
a heretic and and there's a spectrum - what  
do you do with a heretic? so in some

0:23:26.040,0:23:31.100  
Islamist communities they believe you  
you literally have to kill a heretic.

0:23:31.100,0:23:35.340  
Fortunately, in my community, they didn't  
believe that they should kill heretics,

0:23:35.340,0:23:39.420  
they believe God will will do the work  
for them but they do believe that, they

0:23:39.420,0:23:43.170

don't believe in choice. When I left my community nobody said, well, you know what,

0:23:43.170,0:23:47.130  
just leave, it's your choice. They said you can't, you're going to Hell, you're a

0:23:47.130,0:23:52.020  
sinner, you're an apostate and I think that clash is always gonna be there with

0:23:52.020,0:23:55.680  
secularism because the very idea behind secularism, and by the way I use

0:23:55.680,0:24:00.210  
secularism broadly, secularism - you can be a religious secularist, right,

0:24:00.210,0:24:04.440  
secularism is the idea that, it's this very idea that people choose their beliefs

0:24:04.440,0:24:08.970  
and that people live the way they want to live and most religious people I would

0:24:08.970,0:24:13.620  
argue are secularists in that sense, most religious people, um, well at least

0:24:13.620,0:24:16.740  
liberal religious people would would say that the government should be secular,

0:24:16.740,0:24:18.570  
there should be separation between church and state and

0:24:18.570,0:24:23.340  
so on but when you come to ultra-conservatives' religion they reject

0:24:23.340,0:24:27.720  
the very premise of secularism and I don't see how there can be

0:24:27.720,0:24:34.889

reconciliation there. (AL): Is there no way to sort of just crack that barrier, begin to

0:24:34.889,0:24:39.779  
open that conversation through the route of say, well you don't want other

0:24:39.779,0:24:45.000  
people's religion imposed on you, so in return for not having other's religion

0:24:45.000,0:24:50.100  
imposed on you, we're going to take away your ability to impose yours on other

0:24:50.100,0:24:56.399  
people and certain ultra-orthodox religious communities, to be fair, have no

0:24:56.399,0:25:01.289  
interest in imposing their religion on outsiders - they've, and you know

0:25:01.289,0:25:05.490  
would even say that of course it'd be wrong to impose say ultra Orthodox

0:25:05.490,0:25:11.059  
Judaism on people who are non-Jews but it should be imposed on people who are.

0:25:11.059,0:25:16.799  
(IP): Right, so that's, that's not so much a matter of them being, you know, more open

0:25:16.799,0:25:20.370  
and more secularist and and you know and more more liberal and progressive -

0:25:20.370,0:25:24.000  
they don't want to impose their religion on others - it's a question of dogma,

0:25:24.000,0:25:28.320  
so Jews don't believe - this is quite different, this is where Judaism

0:25:28.320,0:25:31.980

differs quite a bit from Christianity and Islam - Judaism doesn't believe that

0:25:31.980,0:25:35.639  
everyone should be Jewish, right, where Christianity, from what I understand,

0:25:35.639,0:25:38.610  
does believe that everyone should be Christian and believe in Christ and I

0:25:38.610,0:25:42.929  
think to some extent Islam also believes in in proselytizing in that, in that way,

0:25:42.929,0:25:47.009  
maybe to a lesser extent, but Judaism doesn't believe in proselytizing. Judaism doesn't

0:25:47.009,0:25:51.210  
believe that everyone should be Jewish. Judaism, well at least when I say Judaism,

0:25:51.210,0:25:56.789  
I mean Orthodox Judaism, believes that every Jew has to be observant so

0:25:56.789,0:26:00.330  
when it comes to imposing beliefs, ultra-orthodox Jews definitely and

0:26:00.330,0:26:05.190  
absolutely want to impose their beliefs on other Jews so for example Israel - the

0:26:05.190,0:26:10.379  
current state of Israel is a secular state - it was founded by atheist Jews but

0:26:10.379,0:26:13.470  
there's a growing ultra-orthodox community and they absolutely want to

0:26:13.470,0:26:16.529  
impose their religion on others, they Lobby the government to make sure that

0:26:16.529,0:26:22.230

highways, motorways are closed on the Sabbath, on the rest day, and they lobby

0:26:22.230,0:26:25.860  
the government to make sure that restaurants have to be kosher and that

0:26:25.860,0:26:31.350  
marriage is done through the rabbinate, the rabbinical council, so they absolutely

0:26:31.350,0:26:35.800  
want to impose their beliefs on others - it's just a matter of dogma, an accidental

0:26:35.800,0:26:38.300  
matter of dogma that they don't believe that

0:26:38.310,0:26:47.310  
non-Jews ought to be Jews but in general, the view is not secularist, the view

0:26:47.310,0:26:53.070  
is one of imposing views on others and the argument you made which sounds, you

0:26:53.070,0:26:56.730  
know, reasonable to to most of us, the argument that , you know, look you don't

0:26:56.730,0:27:00.960  
want others to impose their views on you then don't impose yours on others, this

0:27:00.960,0:27:06.930  
argument makes sense from our perspective as secularists because we

0:27:06.930,0:27:11.850  
don't believe that the dogma in question is true to begin but imagine

0:27:11.850,0:27:15.360  
me being, and this isn't imagined, I've had these discussions with people and this

0:27:15.360,0:27:18.930

is what they say, they say well I don't want others to impose their views on me

0:27:18.930,0:27:24.420

because those said views are false, right, so I don't want false views imposed on

0:27:24.420,0:27:28.860

me but I do wanna impose my views on others because my views are the truth. So,

0:27:28.860,0:27:33.300

when you deal with dogmatic sets of beliefs and by dogma I mean people who

0:27:33.300,0:27:39.060

think that their views and their views only of the truth then they, for them,

0:27:39.060,0:27:43.170

there's an asymmetry here - other views are false therefore I don't want

0:27:43.170,0:27:47.340

them imposed so Jews will tell you I don't want Christianity imposed on me

0:27:47.340,0:27:51.300

because Christianity is false but I absolutely do want my brand of Judaism

0:27:51.300,0:27:54.810

imposed on other Jews because my my brand of Judaism is truth - so this

0:27:54.810,0:27:58.370

argument follows for dogmatic minds.

0:27:58.370,0:28:02.820

(AL): Well Izzy, thanks very much for your time and before you go, we always like to

0:28:02.820,0:28:06.930

ask our guests, are there any books or films that do a good job of exploring

0:28:06.930,0:28:12.810

religious freedom that you'd like to recommend? (IP): So, there's one book that comes

0:28:12.810,0:28:17.580

to mind immediately - it's a book written by a fellow ex-Hasidic Jew called Shulem

0:28:17.580,0:28:22.860

Deen - it's called 'All Who Go Do Not Return'. It chronicles his, his

0:28:22.860,0:28:26.400

upbringing in a Hasidic community in Brooklyn New York and how he left - it's

0:28:26.400,0:28:32.340

fascinating, absolutely fascinating and he's a really good writer as well. In

0:28:32.340,0:28:40.320

terms of films, there is a good series but unfortunately it's in Hebrew - it's on

0:28:40.320,0:28:43.560

Netflix now with English subtitles actually so if people want to watch that

0:28:43.560,0:28:48.270

they can watch that - it's called 'Shtisel' - it's not about people leaving the faith

0:28:48.270,0:28:53.250

per se but it's about ultra-orthodox Jews in Israel and it's very

0:28:53.250,0:28:56.039

enlightening on the culture if people want to watch that it's very it's very

0:28:56.039,0:29:01.380

accurate and it only gets the nuances right which is, which is quite rare

0:29:01.380,0:29:06.720

on TV. There's also an amazing Netflix show called 'One of Us' which chronicles

0:29:06.720,0:29:11.340  
the journey of three young Hasidic Jews  
leaving their community. It unfortunately

0:29:11.340,0:29:15.210  
has quite a tragic ending where all  
three end up in quite difficult

0:29:15.210,0:29:19.500  
circumstances due to the community  
shunning them, so I just point out that

0:29:19.500,0:29:23.100  
caution is needed, that some people make  
the journey successfully and are very happy

0:29:23.100,0:29:29.730  
but that is a case, more sadder case, an  
unfortunate case. (AL): Okay, well we'll have  
links

0:29:29.730,0:29:32.820  
to all of those in the show notes.  
Izzy thanks very much and we look forward

0:29:32.820,0:29:41.970  
seeing you at the conference. (IP): Looking  
forwards as well. (AL): Well listeners, hope

0:29:41.970,0:29:45.899  
you found that interesting. People like  
Izzy who have made a journey from one

0:29:45.899,0:29:50.820  
religious community to another or in or  
out of such a community often have these

0:29:50.820,0:29:55.350  
unique insights. There will be links to the  
organizations and films Izzy mentioned

0:29:55.350,0:29:59.250  
in the show notes and we'll also have  
links to our work challenging illegal

0:29:59.250,0:30:03.330  
unregistered faith schools and abuses  
within registered independent faith

0:30:03.330,0:30:09.360  
schools - some of the investigations make  
for shocking reading. Before we go, I want

0:30:09.360,0:30:14.549  
to give Secularism 2019: a last plug -  
this is our major upcoming conference at

0:30:14.549,0:30:19.770  
the Tower hotel in central London on Saturday  
18th of May. If you haven't booked your

0:30:19.770,0:30:25.020  
ticket yet or are undecided, let me give you  
a few reasons to come. First, you can hear

0:30:25.020,0:30:28.559  
more from Izzy and our internationally  
esteemed lineup of speakers including

0:30:28.559,0:30:33.149  
our keynote address from Rachel Laser  
CEO of Americans United for Separation

0:30:33.149,0:30:38.039  
of Church and State and my guest on  
episode 2 of the podcast. For a full-day

0:30:38.039,0:30:42.390  
conference with lunch, refreshments and  
awards ceremony all in a premier venue,

0:30:42.390,0:30:46.679  
you'd be hard-pressed to find better  
value for money. Student tickets are 10

0:30:46.679,0:30:51.029  
pounds, NSS members can get a ticket for  
just 25 pounds and even non-member

0:30:51.029,0:30:55.409  
tickets are great value at 50 pounds. We  
will start to run out of tickets soon so

0:30:55.409,0:30:59.879  
please visit [secularism.org.uk/2019](http://secularism.org.uk/2019)

0:30:59.879,0:31:03.779

and I hope we'll see you there. If you enjoyed this episode, please share it with

0:31:03.779,0:31:07.559

a friend. If you hated it, please share it with an enemy and if

0:31:07.559,0:31:11.519

you're in between, maybe listen again. Seriously though, if you want to support

0:31:11.519,0:31:16.139

the NSS, our campaigns' work and future podcasts, please consider joining or

0:31:16.139,0:31:23.369

donating today at [secularism.org.uk/join](http://secularism.org.uk/join). Until next time, I'm Alastair Lichten,

0:31:23.369,0:31:27.799

thanking you for listening. Goodbye.

0:31:29.660,0:31:31.720