

“Stars of David” come out

Front page

I COMMENT your placement of the photographs of the Jewish contribution to the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras on your front page, as well as your positive reporting of this event (A/JN 10/3/00). I regard the Mardi Gras as a great celebration of tolerance and acceptance of people with different ways of being in the world.

Gays, Jews and gypsies have all been victims of senseless violence and prejudice over the centuries. All these groups were victims of the murderous Nazi regimes in the Holocaust. People who are Jewish and gay or lesbian have been victims of a double oppression and have often felt just as victimised by their own Jewish communities for their sexual preferences as by the greater non-Jewish one for being Jewish.

Surely we Jews know what's it like to suffer such hatred due to senseless prejudice. Is it not time to move on in this Year of the Culture of Peace to being more compassionate and understanding about our differences?

Ben-Zion Weiss
Bondi, NSW

Disgusted

I AM not unhappy, I'm disgusted. That a newspaper which has the word “Jewish” in its title should, after “careful thought”, come to the conclusion that it is acceptable for the paper to use its front page to promote activities which are absolutely forbidden by Jewish law, defies reason.

The Torah forbids stealing, murder, adultery. And it uses far stronger language to forbid sexual acts between males. However, there are, *Chass v'Challila*, Jewish murderers, thieves, adulterers and homosexuals.

As a Jew who cares unconditionally for all my fellow-Jews, I am ashamed and embarrassed by those who would advertise to the world their open defiance of God's law, the very basis on which Judaism stands. Perhaps we can soon expect the *Jewish News* to be justifying photos and articles supporting a Jewish kleptomaniac group.

Binyamin Alexander
Sydney, NSW

Decent people

I AGREE with Rabbi Moshe Gutnick — the Torah prohibits homosexuality.

However, he stops short of calling for stonings, slavery and the taking of an eye for an eye. This is because when he says the word of God is unchangeable, he is playing down the continual process of interpretation in the tradition of the Oral Law by which, over the ages, original teachings have been expunged or reinterpreted where appropriate, in keeping with the more enlightened spirit of contemporary times. This is why even those who adhere to the Scriptures no longer call for the stoning of adulterers or the removal of eyes as retribution.

Arguments condemning homosexuality are often based on issues of family values and procreation. I am wholeheartedly in favour of close and loving families, and I have observed that the closest families and communities are those in which individuals are both encouraged to respect others and are respected for who they are — regardless of sexual preference. As regards procreation, many gay couples raise children — some, no doubt, in happier and healthier environments than straight parents.

Rabbi Gutnick might be surprised to learn that the gay people I know are moral, decent people. They value fidelity in relationships, just like straight

people. They are no more or less promiscuous than others. Contrary to the stereotype, many display modest behaviour, and some do not — just like straight people.

There are just as many other social problems in the Jewish community, like drug addiction, sexual abuse and domestic violence, as there are in the wider community. In the same way, I would suggest that there is as much “promiscuity and immorality” in the straight community as there may be in the gay community. It is easier to find other groups to look down on as being immoral and inferior in some way than it is to address issues closer to home.

Jonathan Armstrong
Bondi, NSW

Touching gesture

THANKS to Dawn Cohen and the organisers of the “Stars of David” float at the Mardi Gras. We were overwhelmed by the feeling of fellowship.

I am gay and not Jewish. I have worked with the Jewish community for 20 years; many are lifelong friends. I understand the incarceration of gay people by the Nazis from 1933 until after liberation only too well, and feel strongly about the incarceration of Jews.

On Mardi Gras day, I received a call from an old Jewish friend. She is nearly 80. I had told her of my intention to march, and she asked if I would drop by. She presented me with her husband's *yarmulka* — he was murdered in 1947 — and his prayer shawl. I cried and she said “I want you to keep them for I am old and you are doing something important for the Jewish community”. So I wore his *kippa* in the parade. It was one of the most touching gestures I have ever had.

Robert Wilkinson
Newtown, NSW

Jewish paper

HAVE you ever heard of Torah? Are you a Jewish newspaper?

Rella Oser
Bondi, NSW

Laws of nature

WHILE I respect the beliefs of the rabbinic and understand their feelings about homosexuality, they do not accept that the laws of nature are often very different from the laws of the Bible. If God created all people, then God created homosexual people. If God created humankind in His own image, then God's image reflects all kinds. There are very many homosexuals who live modest and non-promiscuous lives. If, to gain recognition — let alone acceptance — a few have to be bolder so others can feel comfortable in their everyday lives, this is the way it sometimes needs to be done.

Helen Bersten
Roseville, NSW

Respect others

IT is a red herring to equate the existence of gay or lesbian people with being anti-family, anti-fidelity or antimodest. Many gay people have long, faithful, monogamous relationships — often longer and more faithful than heterosexual ones.

People are born gay and lesbian; they do not just wake up one day and say “I think I'll be gay”. A dear married friend of mine was beaten savagely because a group of thugs thought he

“looked gay”. He ended up with brain damage.

It is the duty of the teachers and rabbis in any community to preach respect for others and acceptance of those different from oneself. You do not “catch” homosexuality. If only respect for others was taught in every school in this country, there wouldn't be the “gay bashing” and the high rate of suicide among young people afraid to be open about their sexual preference. Perhaps then the fear of people who are the same as everyone else except in their sexual preference — which is private and no-one else's business — would dissipate.

The Shabbat dinner for the gay and lesbian community was a wonderful gesture of solidarity. What must it be like for a child to be rejected because of their sexual preference — never again to know what it is like to go “home” for Friday night dinner with the family. This happens all too frequently. Imagine crying at a communal dinner because at last you feel part of a community. Shame on anyone who does not respect others, no matter what their differences.

Penelope Toltz
Mosman, NSW

A friend

I WALKED with pride in the Mardi Gras to show support for my daughter and all the Jewish gays and lesbians who have come out and for all those who are too scared to come out. I believe more time should be devoted to dealing with the eradication of child abuse, dishonesty and poverty than harping on homosexuals who don't harm anyone.

“Thou shalt not commit adultery” and “Thou shalt not steal” — I do not hear the religious uproar when these commandments are broken. *Hashem*, as far as my knowledge goes, created everyone in *Hashem's* image and has given everyone a soul. We should accept people as we find them — homosexual and heterosexual alike — without discrimination.

The “Stars of David Come Out” float was in excellent taste. I would not have participated otherwise.

Barbara Glover
Rose Bay, NSW

Tolerance

I MARCHED at Mardi Gras and was delighted to see so many Jewish gays and lesbians come out, many for the first time. Not long ago, they never would have risked being found out. I grew up in a liberal family in Perth and enjoyed the tolerance that other Jewish friends in Melbourne and Sydney only wished for. Seeing the many (straight) parents, family and friends march with us was incredible. I am aware of many friends who were terrified of their family finding out, and those whose families estranged themselves when they found out.

I find it distressing that in last week's *Australian Jewish News* (10/3/00), the rabbi of a mainstream Orthodox synagogue still expressed such archaic views of intolerance. It would be a dream if we could establish a community such as the Sha'ar Zahav in the US. Judging from the float participation this year, that might not be far off.

Goldie Gold
Newtown, NSW

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