

The Beth Din

AS much as I respect and admire Rabbi Raymond Apple, I must take issue with his OzTorah comments (A/JN 21/4/00). If the Beth Din was concerned with press responsibility, it could have written to the A/JN's editor.

The fact that comments regarding press responsibility and rabbinically-acceptable issues have been made by the Beth Din, without the matter having been heard, reflects on its impartiality.

Moses was not a rabbi, and no rabbi is a Moses; the rabbinate came into existence after the destruction of the Second Temple. In any case, the "chain of tradition" extends to Reform rabbis as much as it does to Orthodox rabbis, and they take a more compassionate stance to homosexuals. If the majority of the community accepts homosexuals, rabbis need to re-interpret Torah on this issue, as was done long ago with disobedient sons and wives suspected of adultery.

Paul Winter
Darlinghurst

Grave mistake

IT is interesting to note that the Torah Portion read after Pesach this year was *Acharei*. It is here where the prohibition against homosexual relations occurs.

The verse prohibiting homosexual relations is directly preceded by a warning against sending children to the idol of Molech (where they were burnt alive), and is directly followed by the prohibition of bestiality. In this context, it is clear that the Torah precedes these three prohibitions by warning the Jewish people not to follow the practices of the Egyptians and Canaanites.

The Torah itself recognised that homosexuality was common among the Egyptians and Canaanites and was part of the "human condition".

The Torah does not prohibit impossibilities, it prohibits all sorts of human passions and urges.

The job of a Jew is to transcend these natural urges, weak or strong. It is through transcending these urges that true spirituality occurs. It is a mistake to think that *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) may be achieved by transgressing Torah, no matter how well intentioned.

It may be tempting to label the Torah homophobic if this *Parsha* is read in isolation. However, in the next Torah Portion, *Kedoshim*, we find the fundamental rule of Torah, *Veahavta Lereacha Kamocha* — Love your fellow as yourself. Our Sages teach that this means always treat others with respect, join in others' pain (empathy), greeting others with friendliness and not considering yourself better than others, etc.

The Torah commands against actions which are part of the human condition, and at the same time commands us to respect others, irrespective of their actions, good or bad. There is a separation between each precious person and what they do. However, the Torah has prohibited homosexual relations from Mount Sinai to this day. The Torah does not change because of the popular opinions of the day.

Reporting of the Mardi Gras clearly implied that homosexual relations are a lifestyle option that a Jew may take with a clear conscience. This is a grave mistake.

Dr Jocelyn Lowinger
Bondi, NSW

Prejudice

I COMMEND your firm stance regarding coverage of the gay float in the Sydney Mardi Gras.

I find it deeply disturbing that still today, there is such intolerance for differences among people and among ways of life. Living here in Israel as an American non-Jew, and

therefore as a relative outsider, I find the intolerance here among Jews (not to mention the prejudice against Arabs) despicable. If we humans are to survive, there must be openness and flexibility, and an acceptance of the countless ways of life we humans have created.

Specifically in this case, as your response to the criticisms so clearly states, it is not up to anyone to judge another's way, to be sole authority on Jewish law. There are countless interpretations of the Torah, each perhaps equally valid. Nor is it up to anyone, religious "authority" or not, to define what is appropriate for Jewish families, or to define what constitutes a family.

It shocks me that a question of journalistic ethics was raised. It is critical that publications such as yours expose their readers to what's out there, as opposed to saying what is right or wrong by severely limiting the content.

Thank-you for your good work and clear and informed thinking. I very much hope that your paper continues to publish in this manner.

Shantih Bisland-Becktel
Beit Yanai, Israel

Many obligations

I REFER to Anna Berger's Viewpoint "How a community got hijacked", (A/JN 21/4/00), and want to support her call for a full-stop to "this sorry chapter".

Having just celebrated the Exodus from Egypt, let us add another *dayenu* directed at the numerous correspondents who have occupied your pages concerning Jewish gays in recent weeks.

This week, we remember, as a community, the greatest tragedy which has ever befallen our people — the Shoah. And, as a community, we rejoice in celebrating Yom Ha'atzmaut, the creation of the State of Israel. After these two important events, we still have many obligations as a community — to work for and support our seniors, our frail, our sick and our disadvantaged. Again, as a community, let us continue our support for those organisations involved in saving Jewish lives and the many important projects in Israel.

Let us emphasise and concentrate on the positive things which unite us and hence strengthen our community.

Gerry Levy
Darling Point, NSW

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