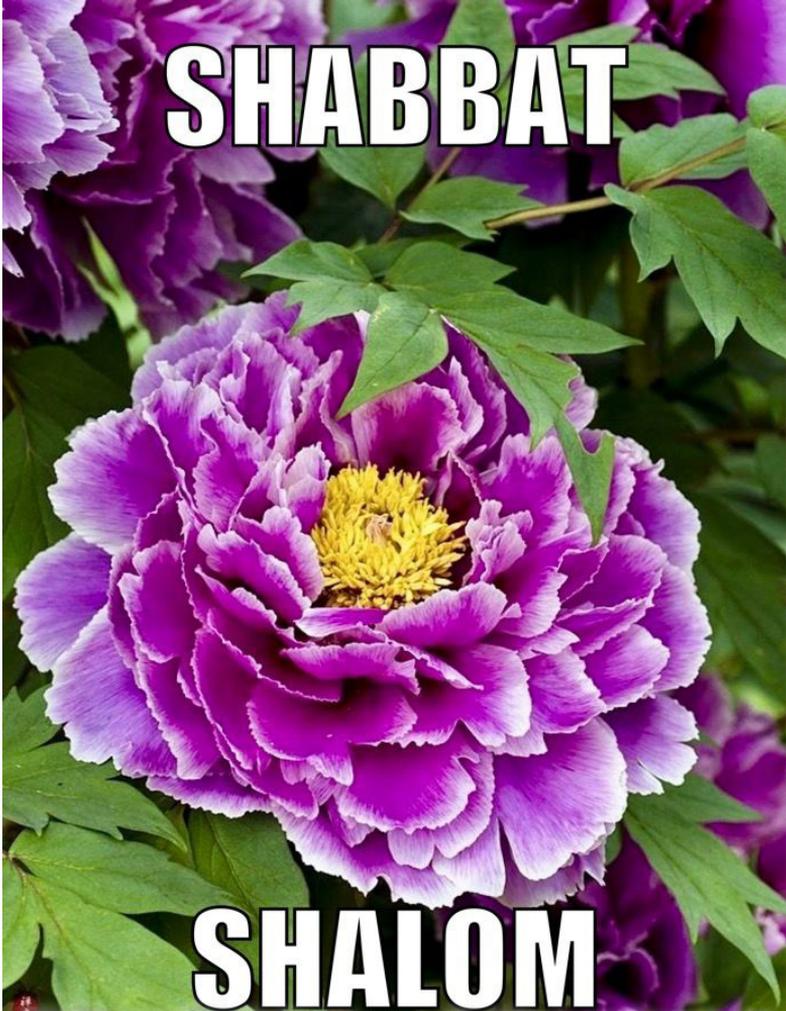




# Carnegie Shul Chatter

April 21, 2021



# SHABBAT

# SHALOM

Light candles 7:49pm

Shabbat services 10am

## Welcome Back

In person services resume this Shabbas,  
April 24 at the Carnegie Shul.

Kiddush will follow!

### It's Not Easy Being a Jew

Being a Jew is not always easy.

Knowing what God is asking of us as Jews is also not always easy.

We can read things in the Torah, but there is often more than what we see on the written page. There is also the Oral law, and the Mishna, and the Talmud, and Kabballah, and what our own individual rabbi may tell us.

And sometimes all of these sources may not necessarily be in agreement.

And the Reform movement may say one thing, and the Conservative movement may say another thing, and Modern Orthodoxy may not agree with Chasidism, so who are we to believe and what are we to do.

— Continued on next page

# Acharei Mot - Kidoshim in a Nutshell

## Leviticus 16:1–18:30

Following the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, G-d warns against unauthorized entry “into the holy.”

Only one person, the kohen gadol (“high priest”), may, but once a year, on Yom Kippur, enter the innermost chamber in the Sanctuary to offer the sacred ketoret to G-d.



Another feature of the Day of Atonement service is the casting of lots over two goats, to determine which should be offered to G-d and which should be dispatched to carry off the sins of Israel to the wilderness.

The Parshah of Acharei also warns against bringing korbanot (animal or meal offerings) anywhere but in the Holy Temple, forbids the consumption of blood, and details the laws prohibiting incest and other deviant sexual relations.

The Parshah of Kedoshim begins with the statement: “You shall be holy, for I, the L-rd your G-d, am holy.” This is followed by dozens of mitzvot (divine commandments) through which the Jew sanctifies him- or herself and relates to the holiness of G-d.

These include: the prohibition against idolatry, the mitzvah of charity, the principle of equality before the law, Shabbat, sexual morality, honesty in business, honor and awe of one’s parents, and the sacredness of life.

Also in Kedoshim is the dictum which the great sage Rabbi Akiva called a cardinal principle of Torah, and of which Hillel said, “This is the entire Torah, the rest is commentary”— “Love your fellow as yourself.”

— From previous page

As the song in the King and I says:

When I was a boy, world  
was better spot  
What was so was so, what  
was not was not  
Now, I am a man, world  
have changed a lot  
Some things nearly so, oth-  
ers nearly not

There are times I almost  
think

I am not sure of what I  
absolutely know  
Very often find confusion  
In conclusion, I concluded  
long ago

In my head are many facts  
That, as a student, I have  
studied to procure

In my head are many facts  
Of which I wish I was more  
certain, I was sure

Is a puzzlement

So what should you do?  
Study, learn, follow your  
conscience, and pray that  
God will lead you in the  
right direction. And per-  
haps find comfort in the  
fact that even the greatest  
minds often disagree. And  
what you have in common  
with all of them is that you  
are, after all, only human.  
And no human is expected  
by God to be perfect.

# LGBTQ and the Torah

Gay rights, lesbian rights, transgender rights — Issues we read about every day in our modern world. But what does Judaism say about homosexuality?

In this week's parshah, Chapter XVIII, Verse 22, says, "Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind; it is abomination."

It sounds pretty clear, doesn't it?

But the Reform and Conservative movements now permit both gay rabbis and gay marriages. So, is it really completely clear? And what does the Orthodox movement have to say about the matter?

Here are three articles dealing with the issue. The first is from *myjewishlearning.com*, the second — and perhaps more controversial — is from the *Canadian Jewish News*, *cjnnews.com*, and the third is from *jewishweek.timesofisrael.com*.

## Orthodox Judaism and LGBTQ Issues

*from myjewishlearning.com*

### Efforts to make the community more compassionate have stopped short of sanctioning gay relationships.

The liberal Jewish movements have undergone dramatic shifts in their approach to gay, lesbian and transgender Jews in the past two decades, but among the Orthodox the changes have been far less dramatic — and in many quarters, virtually nonexistent.

Two seemingly clear biblical denunciations of homosexual sex, as well as the corpus of rabbinic commentaries and legal codes based on those verses, limit how far Orthodox Judaism, marked by its fidelity to traditional understandings of Jewish law, or halacha, can move on this subject.

Though several efforts have emerged in recent years to lend more support to Orthodox Jews experiencing homosexual desires and make the community more compassionate and welcoming toward them, all these efforts stop short of sanctioning gay relationships.



# Theological and Legal Limitations

Across the spectrum of Orthodox practice, the consensus view is that gay sex and marriage are inconsistent with Jewish tradition. The objection is rooted in two verses in Leviticus that expressly prohibit a man from lying with another man “as one lies with a woman,” an act described as an “abomination” that is punishable by death. Though the prohibition is understood to refer to a specific sexual act, later rabbinic authorities expanded the prohibition to include lesbian sex and sexual activities other than intercourse.

Moreover, sacred texts hold up heterosexuality as the foundational ideal. The creation story in Genesis describes the complementarity of male and female, of man’s loneliness rectified by his partnership with woman. The very first commandment God gives to Adam and Eve in the Bible is to be fruitful and multiply — that is, to have children. Considered in its totality, Orthodox Jewish tradition comes down firmly in favor of heterosexuality as God’s intention for humanity, which has in turn severely limited the acceptance of homosexuality within the Orthodox community.

# Diversity in Orthodox Approaches

While virtually no Orthodox rabbi explicitly sanctions homosexual relationships, there is some diversity of opinion in how the Orthodox community ought to respond to gay Jews. The two poles of this debate are fairly well delineated by two competing statements on the subject.

The first, entitled “Statement of Principles on the Place of Jews with a Homosexual Orientation in Our Community,” was drafted by a faculty member at the liberal Orthodox

rabbinical school Yeshivat Chovevei Torah and released in 2010. While acknowledging the halachic (Jewish legal) ban on homosexual sex and rejecting any acceptance of same-sex marriage, the statement nevertheless asserted that gays should be welcomed as full and equal members of Orthodox communities and should, in most cases, not be encouraged to marry someone of the opposite gender. The Statement of Principles declined to weigh in on the question of whether homosexual orientation is genetic and unchangeable, or if it is a choice, as some people contend.

In 2016, the Israeli Modern Orthodox rabbinical group Beit Hillel issued a similar statement, urging that gays be allowed to serve in “any communal capacity.”

In 2011, a group of mostly ultra-Orthodox rabbis, along with some Modern Orthodox ones and a number of mental health professionals, released “The Declaration On The Torah Approach to Homosexuality.” This statement called for a compassionate approach to those struggling with



gay desires. However, it rejected the notion that homosexuality is an essentially unchangeable orientation as a theological impossibility and insisted that “healing” gay urges is the only religiously acceptable approach.

“The concept that G-d created a human being who is unable to find happiness in a loving relationship unless he violates a biblical prohibition is neither plausible nor acceptable,” the statement says. “G-d is loving and merciful. Struggles, and yes, difficult struggles, along with healing and personal growth are part and parcel of this world. Impossible, lifelong, Torah-prohibited situations with no achievable solutions are not.”

## Orthodoxy and Transgender Jews



*Transmarch in San Francisco, June 2016.*

The question of transgender Jews entails issues of gender identity and body rather than sex and relationships and so presents a different set of challenges for Orthodoxy. Many of the hallmarks of transgender identity — cross-dressing, hormonal treatments, sex reassignment surgery — run afoul of halachic prohibitions. Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg, who died in 2006, famously ruled that, for ritual purposes, a person’s gender is determined by his or her anatomy. Others have suggested that the intense psychic pain that can accompany gender dysphoria may

override traditional prohibitions on castration and cross-dressing.

But most Orthodox rabbis believe gender is unchangeable as a matter of Jewish law and is fixed at birth. A number of Orthodox synagogues permit transgender Jews to sit in the gendered section of the synagogue of their choosing.

## Conversion Therapy

Conversion therapy — sometimes also called reparative or change therapy — refers to the effort to “cure” gays of same-sex attraction and enable them to lead heterosexual lives. It is regarded as ineffective and potentially harmful by the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association and many others.

Some in the Orthodox community, who for theological reasons find it impossible to accept that a homosexual orientation is unchangeable, continue to advocate for such therapies. The ultra-Orthodox declaration on homosexuality insists that homosexual impulses can be modified and that therapy can help with “healing” the “emotional wounds” that lead to homosexual desires. The declaration is featured on a website that includes extensive resources aimed at countering the “misinformation” that homosexuality is biologically determined and attesting to the possibility of change.

Other Orthodox rabbis have come to renounce their support for conversion therapy. In 2012,

the largest Orthodox rabbinical group in North America, the Rabbinical Council of America, publicly withdrew its endorsement of JONAH, a group that had been the leading proponent of reparative therapy in the Orthodox community. In 2015, the group was found guilty of consumer fraud for using scientifically questionable methods and claiming a success rate it could not substantiate. Later that year, a New Jersey judge ordered it to cease operations. The RCA had previously endorsed JONAH's work, but in withdrawing its endorsement the council cited evidence that the therapy was ineffective and had potentially negative consequences.

The 2010 Statement of Principles asserting that gays should be welcomed affirmed "the religious right of those with a homosexual orientation to reject therapeutic approaches they reasonably see as useless or dangerous."

## Inclusion and Orthodoxy

A number of organizations have sprung up in the United States and Israel in an effort to promote acceptance and inclusivity for gays and lesbians within Orthodox communities. Eshel, established in 2010 in New York, aims to foster more acceptance for LGBTQ Jews and their families within Orthodox communities. Havruta, established in 2007, aims to do the same thing in Israel. Jewish Queer Youth, or JQY, was founded in 2001 and acts as a support group and advocacy group for LGBTQ Jews, with a particular emphasis on Orthodox youth.



In 2015, JQY helped organize a conference that brought together Orthodox rabbis and mental health professionals to talk about homosexuality in what is believed to have been the first public discussion of its kind.

## The Trembling Before G-d Effect

The progress of gays and lesbians in gaining acceptance within Orthodoxy, limited though it may be, is often credited to the 2001 documentary *Trembling Before G-d*, which thrust the struggles of Orthodox gays and lesbians into the public consciousness as never before. The film's sympathetic portrayal of individuals trying to reconcile their sexuality with their religious commitments earned high praise, but some in the Orthodox community saw it as a shallow attempt to legitimize deviant sexual impulses.

The film prominently featured Steven Greenberg, widely known as the first openly gay Orthodox rabbi. In 2004, Greenberg published *Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition*, which sought to recast the traditional biblical prohibition on gay sex as a ban on exploitative sex that aims to exercise power or to demean. The book won critical acclaim, but its arguments have not gained much traction in the wider Orthodox community.

# It's time to shift the tone on LGBT issues

By Andrew Dale

*Canadian Jewish News, cjnnews.com*

January 19, 2018

Jewish tradition tells us that the Torah has 70 faces. Debate is encouraged in Judaism – it is how our sages brought consensus to the masses. That's why Barbara Kay's Jan. 18 op-ed, in which she outlined the apparent Jewish consensus on abortion, homosexuality, and transgender rights, is both naïve and irresponsible.

I come from a place of experience: I'm an openly gay, religious Jew, and I'm also a baal teshuvah – meaning, one who deepens their observance after being secular. I became observant long after I came out as gay about 10 years ago.



The Torah's opening chapters teach us that all humans are created B'tzelem Elohim – in God's image. Yet Ms. Kay dismisses any attempt at reconciling one's gay identity with Torah as "fake-Jewish." But when I speak to Orthodox rabbis – and yes, those conversations are still mostly being conducted behind closed doors – it's clear to me that current Jewish law prohibits one specific act only: male anal sex. Attraction, dating, having children, and showing other forms of intimacy are not prohibited by Torah.

Moreover, a growing minority of Orthodox rabbis are rightly recognizing the traditionally prescribed alternative for a gay person who wants to remain Jewishly observant – celibacy – as ridiculous. These include Rabbi Chaim Rapoport, the renowned ultra-Orthodox Lubavitcher and former adviser to Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, who has characterized "the proposition of a lifelong celibacy to be near impossible." If one must make the choice between violating a current law and staying in the tradition, the choice should always be the latter.

After all, virtually no one keeps all 613 commandments. We don't ask women whether they lit Shabbat candles on Friday night before allowing them to enter the synagogue the next morning, so why should we question what sexual position men practise? Could you imagine? "Was it anal? Then no aliyah for you!"

Kay also argues that "non-binary is non-Jewish." The truth is that transgender Jews have even stronger text-based arguments supporting them. The Talmud speaks of no less than six genders. The Mishnah states that "androgynous" is a gender category of its own, and goes into detail about Jews who have genitals resembling those of males and females. Black-hat New

York Rabbi Mike Moskowitz wears tzitzit coloured blue, white and pink to advocate for the acceptance of marginalized trans Jews.

Kay also makes another mistake: assuming that Jewish law never changes. History proves this to be false. The rabbis explained away the need to stone the rebellious son in the public square, developed a system for the sale of hametz in time for Passover even if it sits in one's cupboard, and narrowed agricultural laws of the Torah because they were too onerous for farmers. But somehow, when it comes matters of sexuality and gender, there's a double standard.

Orthodoxy has begun to shift its tone on LGBT issues in part because the rabbinate, in promoting the simplistic face of Torah Kay uses, has blood on its hands. Rabbis have sent countless LGBT Jews to torturous conversion therapy, broken up their families, and ruined their yeshiva educations. According to Jewish Queer Youth, which supports religious LGBT youth in New York, a shocking 70 per cent of its drop-in participants have attempted or contemplated suicide. One particularly humble Orthodox rabbi told me that of all Jewish denominations, Orthodoxy must work the hardest to repent for how it has destroyed the lives of LGBT members.

The truth is, Kay's oversimplification of nuanced concepts, her naïve views which she takes as fact, and perpetuating of dangerous myths that have direct implications on human well-being are in stark contrast to Judaism. After all, the most crucial "Jewish ideal" – to use another Kay term – is saving a life. With virtually no exceptions, Jewish laws go out the window when it comes to saving another human being. It's really as simple as that.

There are 70 faces of Torah. I would encourage Kay to explore them more deeply.

*Andrew Dale is a frequent speaker on LGBT issues in Orthodoxy, and a volunteer with Eshel, which creates inclusive spaces for LGBT Orthodox-affiliated Jews.*

## Two Cheers For Orthodox Statement On Homosexuality

*By Moses L. Pava*

*September 15, 2010, 12:00 am*

*[jewishweek.timesofisrael.com](http://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com)*

A deep Jewish ethical value is not like the piercing, intermittent light of a laser, cutting through hard metals, but it is like the diffuse, continuous light of the sun, warming our planet, a source of energy and life. "God created humankind in His own image, in the image of God he created them..." (Genesis 1:27). In the Jewish tradition, one of the main human values understood to be inherent in this verse is the aspiration of kavod habriyot, variously translated as individual honor or human dignity. According to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in his book, "To Heal a Fractured World," "Judaism represents a highly distinctive approach to the idea of equality. ... A society must ensure equal dignity ... to each of its members."

It follows from this that those members of society who are at its margins have an ethical



right to invoke kavod habriyot in order to awaken their society to ensure that they are treated with equal dignity and honor. In turn, Jewish leaders, and the community at large, possess a corresponding obligation to respond to such a request. In many cases, perhaps even most, leaders and others may choose to simply ignore the marginalized group. The felt power of a deep Jewish value like kavod habriyot, however, makes this

strategy unlikely to work over the long run. Like the light of the sun, kavod habriyot energizes those on the periphery, as they struggle to gain a degree of respect to which by virtue of their humanity alone they are already entitled.

A timely example of the power of Jewish ethics is the recent give and take between Orthodox Jewish gays and a group of Modern Orthodox rabbis and educators. Last December a panel discussion on the experiences of being gay in the Orthodox community took place at Yeshiva University, attended by about 700 people. Openly gay students and alumni from Yeshiva University took part in the conversation, which was moderated by YU administrators. The focus of the evening was on personal stories and not on Jewish legal issues. It marked the first time that an Orthodox Jewish institution was willing to listen to the unique difficulties faced by gay Orthodox Jews in a public forum.

A little more than a half a year later, a group of about 60 Modern Orthodox rabbis and educators have issued a "Statement of Principles on the Place of Jews with a Homosexual Orientation in Our Community." This statement is one of the most tolerant documents towards gays ever published in the Orthodox world. While reiterating the prohibition of homosexual acts, the principles state that Jewish law "does not prohibit orientation or feelings of same-sex attraction, and nothing in the Torah devalues the human beings who struggle with them." Further, the principles also note that "various homosexual acts" are categorized in Jewish law "with different degrees of severity and opprobrium."

The principles leave the decision to be open about one's sexual orientation to the individual and see no prohibition in publicly acknowledging one's homosexuality. Importantly, the document specifies in clear and unambiguous language that: "Jews with homosexual orientations or same sex-attractions should be welcomed as full members of the synagogue and school community ... they should participate and count ritually, be eligible for ritual synagogue honors, and generally be treated in the same fashion ... as any other member of the synagogue they join."

In addition, it is up to each synagogue, together with its rabbi, to determine whether or not "openly practicing homosexuals" should be accepted as members. Synagogue standards must be applied fairly and objectively to all "open violators of halacha." This last phrase clearly implies that if a synagogue has non-Sabbath observant members it must allow for the possibility of openly practicing homosexuals to become members.

Tellingly, the first paragraph of the document states, "All human beings are created in the

image of God and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect (kavod habriyot).” What emerges from this process is a new understanding of what toleration implies in the Modern Orthodox world. And, while it is clearly something new, it is, in the end, merely a specific application of a piece of ancient wisdom, deeply grounded in the Jewish tradition.



Do these principles go far enough? Or, are the principles themselves subject to additional interpretation? In light of the Jewish call for universal human dignity, it is impossible to answer these kinds of questions with certainty. Nevertheless, I believe that it is the case that kavod habriyot represents even more than a demand for mere toleration.

A society must insure equal dignity to each of its members. With this document, are we there yet? Let us use our moral imagination to feel what it might be like to be taught over and over again that your sexuality is deeply flawed through no fault of your own. Let us imagine what it is like to be told that your community will not recognize or accept the one personal relationship in your life that most defines who you are as a person. Imagine being told that you can be a member of a synagogue as long as there are already members of the synagogue who violate the Torah. Beyond toleration is a pluralism that recognizes that everyone possesses part of a larger truth. Beyond toleration is an acknowledgement by the majority that what it takes as self-evidently true may in fact be wrong.

The last paragraph of the statement of principles introduces three additional Jewish “qualities of being: mercy, modesty and acts of loving-kindness,” qualities that prod us on beyond toleration. This is not meant as a criticism of the statement of principles but rather to see the document not as a still life but as a dynamic set of principles to guide us along on a new path towards new relational modes.

*Moses L. Pava is a professor of business ethics at Yeshiva University.*