

This Is My Beloved, This Is My Friend: A Rabbinic Letter on Intimate Relations

By Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff on behalf of the Rabbinical Assembly

The Rabbinical Assembly's Commission on Human Sexuality recently issued a pastoral letter on all aspects of human sexuality, to give instruction to the laity of the movement. On the issue of homosexuality, it recommends that Conservative synagogues take one or more of the following steps. The following is excerpted from " This Is My Beloved, This Is My Friend: A Rabbinic Letter on Intimate Relations" by Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff on behalf of the RA.

1. Synagogue groups might meet with gay and lesbian Jews to put a face to this issue and to learn how the synagogue can be more welcoming. The goal would be to sensitize synagogue members to the fact that Jewish gays, lesbians and their families are not an outside group but are part of our own community and should be treated as such.
2. In those instances where synagogues have programs for special constituencies within the congregation, such programs might be created for gay and lesbian Jews and their families as well. So, for example, information about support groups such as Parents and Friends of Lesbians and gays (PFLAG) can be disseminated through the synagogue media, and the synagogue might host such a group. Gays and lesbians, though, should generally be integrated into the ongoing activities of the congregation.
3. Synagogue and school educators might include, as part of the curriculum, a section on sexuality, and within this, some material on homosexuality. Where the students are teenagers or adults, this might well take the form of a study of this rabbinic letter, including its citation of the resolutions of the Rabbinical Assembly and United Synagogue. In such courses it should be made clear that sexual activity, while an important part of everyone's life, is not the whole of it. One consequence of this is that Jewish homosexuals, like Jewish heterosexuals, should not be seen narrowly as people who engage in certain kinds of sexual practices, but rather as people and Jews, with the full range of interactions that people and Jews have with each other.
4. Conservative synagogues, individually, regionally and nationally, might organize social action programs to advance the civil protections of gays and lesbians.